

# Life slowly returning to normal at PRCC

By ERIC LEATHERWOOD  
Special to Dixie Drawl

When I began teaching at Pearl River Community College in the fall of 1995, I met a distinguished gentleman by the name of Walter Lowe who taught History.

Mr. Lowe loved to tell stories, and one of my favorites that he told not infrequently was about Hurricane Camille which hit the Gulf Coast on Aug. 17, 1969. Mr. Lowe's eyes would twinkle as he reminisced about the aftermath of Camille.

Living on faculty row with no electricity and little food, surviving by pooling resources and forging deeper, more familial bonds with colleagues outside of a traditional classroom setting seemed, to me, a magnificent yarn.

Whenever Mr. Lowe told stories about Camille, I would feel a secret twinge of envy. Never before had I witnessed first hand Mother Nature's ability to flex her muscles and bring civilization to a collective pause. A pause that, if only for a brief moment, caused folks to remember the idea of community and the important things in life.

But on Aug. 29, 2005 I got my chance. In the spirit of Joseph Muir, Allison (my pregnant wife) and I rode out Hurricane Katrina from our front porch in Hattiesburg.

We were awed by the sight of uprooted trees crashing down all around us. Some fell on and crushed neighbors' houses. Others demolished cars or took out power lines. We watched squirrels scramble wildly for shelter and every now and again a disoriented bird would land on the porch near us, fuzzy and ruffled, walking in circles before flying who knows where.

As the days after Katrina piled into weeks, I began to feel a bit like some of those squirrels and birds.

Initially we all scrambled for gas, food, water, tarps, and chainsaws. A dazed silence filled the gap left by the absence of cable television, the internet, and cell phones.

Five o'clock shadows became scruffy beginnings of beards. We cut and chopped trails through the roads and piled the lumber high. Nightmarishly large brush piles began to resemble a landscape born from the imagination of Tim Burton or Salvador Dali. At night we stank, our backs ached, and the roar of chainsaws and generators, in our ears wouldn't seem to stop.

Eventually, power and water were restored. Going to Wal-Mart became a new adventure involving at least three hours, and the sight of completely empty shelves is still a bit disconcerting.

At work, administrators, faculty, and staff spent sweaty days sweeping debris, salvaging office materials, chainsawing, and breathing through paper masks.

The days Ginny Miller, Tom Thoms, Scott Kimble, and I spent trying to help restore some semblance of order to Seal Hall seem like a bizarre dream.

Even now, on our daily commute from Hattiesburg, Donna Matthews, Laura Berry, and I still marvel at the heavy machines, that like prehistoric beasts, lift and move storm timber from the freeways, devouring logs and spewing mounds of mulch in lots on the edges of towns.

Some of us still have no phone or internet service. My wife is on edge because the cable is still out, and we have been unable to view college football on Saturdays. But we know these indulgences are just that - dispensable luxuries that do make life comfortable.

Other folks have yet to meet with an adjuster or receive financial assistance. And those further south often still have a need for the basics - water and ice. The weeks pass, and still we work with the dili-



PRCC Instructors (from left) Scott Kimble, Tom Thoms and Eric Leatherwood joined other members of the faculty and staff in helping clean up the main campus in Poplarville.

gence of ants to return our lives back to some sense of normalcy. Slowly, but surely, the chaos wrought by Katrina is being tamed.

And the future looks bright. In my neighborhood folks are having their homes repaired and their vehicles replaced. The debris is, for the most part, cleared. Only the most massive of stumps have been left for the corps of engineers to deal with.

At work we have almost gotten back into a routine - although I must ask the forgiveness of my Tuesday/Thursday 11:15 class that I inevitably begin at 11:10. Plastic ducts no longer clutter the floors of Seal Hall and the drone of the dehumidifiers no longer make class discussions a challenge.

And now, like Walter Lowe, I too have a story to tell about a time when a hurricane temporarily disrupted our lives. And what means the most to me are not the

hardships of the storm's aftermath, but the narratives of progress that continue to spring forth during the recovery period.

Because of Katrina, we got to know our neighbors better as we helped each other on our streets. Katrina gave us the opportunity to work with our colleagues outside of our normal 9 to 5 routines.

Katrina has given us a chance to reflect on the past and realize that once upon a time Mississippi recovered from a hurricane named Camille. Katrina has also given us a chance to glimpse the future.

In the years ahead, like Walter Lowe, I'll have a twinkle in my eyes as I tell a story that begins something like this: "Well, I remember in August of 2005 when Hurricane Katrina hit the Gulf Coast . . ."

■ Eric Leatherwood is an English instructor on the Poplarville campus.

## Back to school ... Back to the Future

Ginny Warren Miller  
Special to the Dixie Drawl

Cold drinks, hot showers, clean water, full tanks of gas, McDonald's, cell phones, and going to class; oh what privileges we sometimes take for granted.

In the disorienting days following Hurricane Katrina, we all became acutely aware of how accustomed we have become to these luxuries. Having served as an instructor of psychology at Pearl River Community College for the last 11 years, I was anxious to return to the classroom and to my students.

Ironically, prior to my tenure at PRCC, I was a counselor specializing in Critical Incident Stress Management, so I knew some of what to expect when I stepped into the classroom. I decided to use that first day back as an opportunity to allow the students to tell their stories as well as to educate about the symptoms of traumatic stress and coping strategies.

The first aspect I noticed was the sheer sense of relief in doing something so "normal!"

The predictable nature of a class schedule was very reassuring and comforting for all of us. One of the things I always tell my students is that we are our stories, and they are all important. Sharing our experiences demystifies and validates what we have been through and weaves a common thread among us all. We have been forever bound together by this common tragedy; we are not alone.

Upon sharing their experiences, I noticed the vast individuality and diversity in how human beings react and cope with life's curve balls. We discussed the physical, emotional, cognitive, behavioral, and spiritual reactions they experi-

enced before, during and after Hurricane Katrina.

Strategies they had been using to cope and the ways they could improve were also discussed. But what remained with me most the first day was the resiliency and the hope radiating from their spirits. We were down, but we were most certainly not out.

Since our return, I periodically check as to lingering symptoms and how well they are coping.

As of late, the chief complaints the students recall are: the inability to focus, lack of concentration, feeling overwhelmed, difficulty prioritizing and dealing with their children's reactions.

In addition, many report the inevitable frustrations of the reconstruction and recovery efforts such as insurance claims, etc.

But most students seem to echo sentiments that their lives are getting better each and every day.

And many students continue to report that school is an integral part of their recovery from the past and their striving toward the future.

Many acute stress-related symptoms following a significant trauma are normal and they will diminish in time; they are normal reactions to an extremely abnormal event. However, the aftermath of Katrina is proving to be a chronic, prolonged stressor for many people.

Therefore, it is important to manage these stress symptoms in order to mitigate the harmful effects of chronic stress.

Some suggestions include: exercising regularly, getting adequate rest, eating well-balanced and regular meals even if you don't feel like it, avoiding excess caffeine and nicotine, avoiding alcohol and



Hurricane Katrina did not stop construction work on two new dormitories on the Poplarville campus. The new dorms, one for the men and one for the women, are still on schedule to be completed in time for students to move into by August, 2006. The dormitories will have two stories. The total number of new rooms will be 282, in-

cluding 114 male rooms and 168 female rooms. Each room will be semi-private with its own bathroom. Cost of the project: \$10.6 million. The general contractor is Witherington Construction Corp. of Mobile, Ala. The dorms were designed by Hattiesburg architect Don McCleskey.

sleep aids (they actually interfere with the quality of sleep over time), making as many daily decisions as possible which will give you a feeling of control in your life, avoiding making hasty decisions, and consulting with others as needed, journaling, talking with others - talking is the best medicine, realizing those around you are under stress as well, knowing that recurring thoughts, flash-

backs and dreams will get better over time - not fighting them or dulling the pain with substances, breaking tasks down into realistic steps, believing in yourself, asking for what you need, laughing, volunteering, having some fun.

We all need diversions from the stress at times, taking time to reconnect with yourself, others and a higher power, giving yourself time to heal, give yourself permission to

feel rotten at times, maintaining as normal a schedule as possible, and, above all, trying to reframe the situation and finding personal meaning for your life.

We can all be thankful for the things that wind and water can never take away: the love we share for our family and friends.

Finally, have the courage to seek professional help if needed. It is also important to remember that

those who manage stress successfully tend to use multiple coping strategies.

Note: Children's reactions to stressors can be markedly different than those of adults, so it is important to become knowledgeable about what to expect. When you know better, you do better!

■ Ginny Warren Miller is a psychology instructor at PRCC's main campus in Poplarville.

## HEALTHWATCH: Survive flu, cold season

By SUSIE HALL, R.N.  
PRCC Nurse

Influenza, "the Flu," is a respiratory illness that is caused by a very contagious virus and can cause mild to severe symptoms and complications such as bacterial pneumonia. Approximately 36,000 people die yearly in the U.S. from the flu. Flu symptoms usually appear within 1 - 4 days after being infected with the virus and may last for several days. They appear suddenly and can include:

1. Fever of 101 - 103 degrees F.,
2. Severe body aches and pains,
3. Headaches,
4. Weakness,
5. Loss of appetite,
6. Coughing and chest discomfort,
7. Stuffy nose, sneezing, and sore throat.

The flu spreads in respiratory droplets caused by sneezing and coughing. These droplets may be inhaled directly or transferred by touching contaminated objects such as door handles, telephones, remote controls, etc., and then touching your mouth or nose. Infected persons can spread the virus one day before they exhibit symptoms and up to five days after they become sick. You can pass the flu to someone else and not even know that you

are sick.

Your best defense against catching the flu is the flu vaccine. There are two types of vaccine:

1. The FLU SHOT is given with a needle and contains an inactivated or killed virus. It is approved for use in people 6 months and older who are healthy or have chronic illnesses. You cannot get the flu from the vaccine.

2. The NASAL-SPRAY VACCINE is made with live, weakened flu viruses that do not cause the flu. This is used for healthy people 5 years to 49 years of age who are not pregnant.

October and November are the best times to be vaccinated, but you may still benefit from vaccines given in December and later. The flu season can begin in October and last as late as May.

The CDC recommends that persons in high-risk groups be vaccinated prior to October 24.

FLU and PNEUMONIA vaccines are available at the Pearl River County Health Department on Hwy 11 in Carriere on Mondays and Thursdays at 8 a.m. and 1 p.m. There will be 50 numbers given out at 8 a.m. each day and 50 numbers given out at 1 p.m. each day. Due to a shortage of nursing staff, only 100 vaccines will be given each day. The costs are:

- Children's Flu shot - \$10
- Adult flu shot - \$20

Pneumonia vaccination - \$30

High-risk individuals who have been displaced by Hurricane Katrina may be eligible for flu-shots at reduced cost.

The Family Clinic - a Division of Heart South - located at 302 Hwy 11 just south of the college is administering the flu and pneumonia vaccine Monday thru Fridays from 8 a.m. - 12 noon and 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. According to Betty Jo Kirkland and Jody Crain, office managers for Dr. Aaron and Dr. Long, you do not have to have an appointment or wait to see the doctor. You will have to fill out some paperwork and the office nurse will administer the vaccine. The Vaccines are covered 100% by most insurances and they will bill you for any uncovered amount.

According to the Mississippi Department of Health website, Mississippi has an ample supply of flu and pneumonia vaccine to administer this flu season.

Other ways to decrease your risk of catching the flu include:

- \*WASH YOUR HANDS frequently.
- \* Use a disposable tissue to cough or sneeze into and dispose of properly.
- \*Stay away from crowds,
- \*Do not share personal items such as glasses, straws, towels or washcloths, make-make-up, etc.

\*Get plenty of sleep.

\*Lead a healthy lifestyle. Eat and drink healthy foods, drink lots of fluids, (no Alcohol), don't smoke, exercise regularly, and try to reduce stress.

There is no cure for the flu. If you are one of the unfortunate ones to catch the flu, here are some things you can do to relieve the symptoms.

1. Stay home and in bed. Not only will this help you recover, it will decrease your chances of spreading the flu to others.

2. Drink plenty of fluids to prevent dehydration.

3. Use over the counter medications such as cough syrups to relieve symptoms.

4. Use a humidifier to loosen any secretions and ease coughing.

5. Avoid tobacco and alcohol.

6. Take over the counter pain relievers and fever reducers such as Tylenol. Do not give aspirin to a child or teenager.

7. See your doctor for severe symptoms or those lasting longer than 7 - 10 days.

■ The Health Services Clinic is located in Crosby Hall and is open Monday - Friday during the regular school year from 8 a.m. - 3 p.m. Over-the-counter medications are available at no charge to PRCC students with a valid PRCC ID.

### Teacher Profile

NAME: Scott Kimball

RESIDENCE: Poplarville

FAMILY: Married to Alicia Kimball, daughter Evelyn Lei

EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND: High School - Poplarville; Pearl River Community College AA; BA from USM in History; MA from USM in European History

PRESENTLY TEACHES:

World Geography; World Civilizations I & II

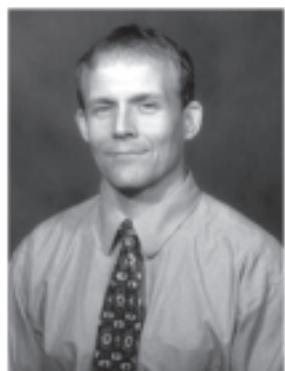
TEACHING EXPERIENCE: Ten years

FAVORITE BOOK: Dumas' *Count of Monte Christo*

FAVORITE FOOD: pattie sausage

POSITIVE ASPECTS OF TEACHING: I can positively impact more lives in one year than some people may do in a lifetime. Also, it is an occupation of "do overs." Just like when we were kids, if we didn't like the way something went, we simply called for a "do over." Things may not go as I had hoped sometimes, but at the start of each new semester I am able to call for a "do over" and then do it better.

ADVICE FOR STUDENTS: The effort that you put into your formal education today will follow you for the rest of your life. Give it all that you have got, and, in the words of Winston



Kimball