

THANK YOU KATRINA

By Devan P., Harvey, LA

I sat down carefully at the empty table in the lunchroom. Wrapping my arms around myself, I attempted to cope with my never-ending anxiety. I wanted to go home. I wanted to be back at Mount Carmel. Yes, I looked calm and collected on the outside, but deep inside, I was panicking. As I sat there not knowing a single person, I wondered, "How did I end up here? Why did this have to happen to me?" At that point I looked back on how my life was twisted inside-out in a few days.

It has been nine hours. We were supposed to be in Houston three hours ago. Oh, but not on this "special" vacation. We were trapped in the massive parking lot we called Interstate 10. I blared the music on my iPod as an attempt to filter out Mayor Nagin's mandatory evacuation order on the car radio. "...massive loss of life...no structures left standing...buildings will sway dangerously..." I had never evacuated from a hurricane before. We were the family that always "rode it out." As I sat there in the car with my parents, older sister, and my small dog, I had thought about everything I was leaving behind: my home, my memories, my friends, my everything.

When my family and I arrived at my relative's house in the small town of Cypress, Texas, we unloaded our luggage and our aches and pains. We quickly were made to feel at home, and once our foe Katrina lashed out at New Orleans, Texas was our home for an entire month. During this entire month, I enrolled at Concordia Lutheran High School, who opened their arms wide to people like me. An evacuee. That statement already set me apart from the rest of the student body. Not only was I a freshman, already sneered at by upperclassmen, but I was a "transfer student." I hated having the feeling of standing out, not belonging to a group. I had an extremely difficult time adjusting to this completely new world. I was no longer at my all-girls Catholic school, where we wore uniforms and did not even bother to dab on a smidgen of make-up. At Concordia, there were no uniforms and there were (gasp) boys! I actually had to brush my hair in the morning!

As I slumped lower in my seat, waiting for the first bell to ring at my new school, I thought of another problem I had to deal with: "I do not know anyone. I really wish Olivia and Jeanne-Marie were here to support me."

I knew that I was not the most outgoing person in the world. I was so timid and reluctant to step out of my comfort zone. Even eye contact with a total stranger felt like a blow to the head. So how in the world would I have anyone to help me through this nerve-racking crisis in my life? At that point, I decided that only I could change myself and my attitude to make my situation better.

One decision that I decided to put into action was to get involved at Concordia. I needed to do something to get my thoughts off of what was happening back home in New Orleans. I needed something to not only distract me, but to also release the tense feelings I had contained. Within a couple of days, I joined the junior varsity volleyball team, which was an automatic support system for me. Those girls immediately accepted me as their friend; I ate lunch with them, they walked with me to my classes, and I

even went to a sleepover with them. These girls taught me how to make new friends and to always know that most people are willing to make room for another friend. The longer I spent time with them, the more outgoing I became. As each of those days passed, I grew more and more into a different person. I was no longer the shy, self-conscious little girl anymore, but an outgoing and confident young woman.

Today, I still remember my last day at Concordia Lutheran High School. I remember not wanting to leave my new home. I said my goodbyes and farewells to the group of young women who had changed me forever. I knew that I would never see them again, but I knew that they made an impact on my life. As I walked out of the big, navy and white building, never to see its interior again, a small tear scribbled on the surface of my cheek. I remember that if it were not for something so horrible to happen to me, I would have never become an outgoing and friendly person. So I say today, thank you Katrina, because you have been so beneficial on my life, and I am pleased with the person I am today.