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Stories of Disaster, Relief Efforts and Hope

I imagine that most of us have seen or heard stories about Hurricane Katrina. Some of us live in communities close to the Gulf Coast region that have taken in tens of thousands of hurricane victims, providing shelter, food, clothing and medical care. I live in such a community in San Antonio, Texas, and both the resilience of the hurricane victims and the generosity of the communities who are trying to help are nothing short of inspiring.

I saw this firsthand in that first week of September when I worked with the newly arrived busloads of Hurricane Katrina victims at a Red Cross medical clinic. There, I met an emergency room physician who had flown in from El Paso that morning to help, and a young surgery resident who came on his only day off (from an 80-hour work week) to volunteer.

I wish you all could have had the opportunity, as I did, to talk to some of the people displaced by this disaster. All of them had been through so much. Yet, everyone I talked to was patient with our inefficiencies, grateful for the help we were trying to provide and in remarkably good humor.

This experience made me think about the real meaning of the word “disaster.” Although Hurricane Katrina is a dramatic natural disaster, so too is the disruption of life as we know it by illness. And as many of the Katrina disaster victims have found a way to hold on to the hope that things can improve, so can we all.

In this issue, Leeza Gibbons talks about the disaster that Alzheimer’s disease created for her family — and her response, which was to establish Leeza’s Place, a community center offering resources to families affected by memory disorders.

Right now, a person with dementia due

to Alzheimer’s disease cannot be cured — and life for that person and their family will never be the same. But with the support of organizations like Leeza’s Place, life can resume with dignity, value and grace. And with the progress made through neurological research, there is hope that better treatments and even a cure will be found someday.

There are other stories of personal disaster, relief efforts and hope in this issue. We provide a glimpse into the world of autistic children and the unprecedented international collaboration that will help solve the genetic mystery that surrounds this disorder. We focus on traumatic brain injury and how athletes of all ages can protect themselves from devastating injuries. In our “Penney Wise” column, we present practical information about strategies for people who are “under-insured” to get the best care possible.

Whether it be disaster due to a hurricane or a neurological illness, there is always hope that life can be better. And there is always something that the rest of us can do to help.

Have a safe and healthy holiday season. See you in the New Year.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Robin Brey".

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We welcome your “Letters to the Editor,” questions for “Ask the Experts” and essays for “Speak Up.” E-mail them to neurologynow@lwwny.com or fax them to (646) 674-6500.