

Even a flood can't wash away family ties to New Orleans

I was born and raised in New Orleans. N'awlins is my hometown. But the gold and black fleur-de-lis tattoo on my right hip may be the only part of my



TED UP IN KNOXES
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heritage that wasn't washed away by the biblical flood and hurricane that ravaged my city.

The fleur-de-lis means New Orleans. It is the French symbol for good luck. I think about the fleur-de-lis and "lucky" a lot

these days.

We can't tell for sure because of the barriers to re-entry, but my family may have lost three homes in Katrina. My brother's three-story beach condo in Pass Christian, Miss., is most likely demolished from the 135 mph winds

and 25-foot storm surge. The eye went over his home, like it was a bulls-eye. There is no logical reason to believe his home is still there, as he left it.

Seeing the aerial shot of my mother's neighborhood in West Lakeshore under water is a shock. I will never get over. I just stared and froze. I don't know how long I sat there, in disbelief and horror, as I watched my hometown drown while the rest of America drank its morning coffee. I counted the blocks that were now rivers and found our block. I saw green patches that were tree-tops, not grass, peeking through the water.

Weeks later, Mom's neighborhood is still not accessible. That may be a good thing, as whatever's left will be harder for the loathsome looters to get at if they have to swim for it.

My in-media to family evacuated and is safe. Thank God. But so many

people aren't safe. I have tracked down a few close friends who understand that their home is a wash, too. "We lost everything," is what they all say. There are few places where people can actually live, if and when they are able to return to New Orleans.

I occasionally glance at the 2005 New Orleans phonebook on my shelf. But I don't pick it up. It's a useless relic. No one lives there anymore.

In my mind, I trace familiar streets that I walked so many, many times. I keep wondering which neighbors are still trapped in their temporary tombs, otherwise known as attics. What a choice, to be stuck in your attic, waiting for either rescue or death.

I'm pissed off seeing news reports where journalists were able to take pictures, but bureaucrats couldn't manage to deliver bottled water to hungry, delicious people in despair.

I wonder if my father's grave is intact. I wonder if there are any birds to chirp in the morning. And I wonder when I will get to go back to New Orleans and what I will find with no television cameras to filter my view.

I'm not really sure about anything anymore.

My family may stay at my home in Florida for awhile as they re-adjust to having ... nothing. They fled with the clothes on their backs.

My family may not have much anymore, but we still have each other. That's all we really need and more than others have. I guess we're pretty damn lucky after all, fleur-de-lis or not.

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Ft. Lauderdale yards may win here, but don't beat Europe

I read your article about choosing yards with interest [From the Bridge, "In shipyards, captains choose what's familiar," page A1, September 2005].

I have come to Ft. Lauderdale for the first time to refit and have found a lot of good reasons to come back. Unfortunately, I have also found many reasons not to come back and the bad currently outweighs the good.

A Bridge captain commented on how anyone in Ft. Lauderdale can get work on a boat. That seems very true. I have found it very difficult to get the yacht quality that I expect from many companies here. I feel that with many of the companies I have used, they don't tend to use many qualified or experienced staff.

For example, I was having a large amount of electrical work carried out in the living accommodation on board and the company I contracted at one point had 12 people on the boat, only two of them had any electrical experience. This was not satisfactory, especially when I got the bill and saw they still wanted to charge the bill \$65 an hour for each of them. As you can imagine I pulled the plug with this company and had a different company finish the work in a satisfactory way.

Getting quotes here seems almost pointless as the contractors often ignore the quote when they submit the final bill. I even had one contractor who added the cost of taping up and removing masking tape, saying it wasn't included in the quote for the varnish work they carried out.

The majority of my refit experience is in Europe and the whole business ethic is very different and much better to work with than I have

experienced here in Florida. If they make a mistake, they are very keen to rectify the problem so as to ensure their reputation is kept intact. Here, they blame all and everyone to try and get away without any more expense to themselves.

In reality Ft. Lauderdale needs to stand back and look at itself, and consider that the yards are getting larger yet the Intracoastal and its rivers are not. If you want the work, start thinking that the yacht is doing you a favor giving you the business, not that you are doing the yacht a favor by working on it.

Watch the quality control. If you must use cheap labor (and I really can't blame people for doing so) make sure someone can check that the work is being completed to the yacht quality we expect.

Ft. Lauderdale is likely to be one of the best places to refit this side of the Atlantic, certainly taking the Caribbean into account. My yacht spent 10 months in Trinidad (where I became the captain) only to leave the yard in a worse state than it entered. To add insult to injury, the owner had large amounts charged to his credit card two months after the yacht had left the yard, using forged signatures on paperwork. Be careful if you head down there.

In conclusion I will be returning to Ft. Lauderdale but not to do major refit work. I will come here for parts and minor work mainly because we have a free dock, but unless things change I will be heading back to Europe for my yachting needs.

Capt. Chris Wallace
M/Y Neseah Z