



TWO STORIES OF ONE FLOOD

[Lolis Eric Elie](#)

Published: September 14, 1998

The headline that appeared on the front of Fridays Metro section, Blustery storms steady rain torments N.O. was consistent with those that often appear during hurricane season. But intrepid readers may have noticed something unusual and foreboding in the byline. The story was written by Bruce Nolan.

Bruce is an experienced writer, venerable and versatile, but in recent years his specialty has been writing about religion.

Knowing the newspaper business as I do, I realize that he was selected to write Fridays story simply because it needed to be done and he was available to do it. Still it gave me pause when I read his name beneath the story.

Whenever I think of religion and water, Noah and his ark come to mind. Were the gods trying to tell us something? Was the fact that Nolan wrote the story mere coincidence or a foreshadowing of untold terrors to come?

No longer naive after flood

Sheryl Tucker de Vazquez hasn't been in New Orleans long enough to pick up on such subtleties. She moved here a few weeks ago after accepting a teaching position in Tulane University's architecture department. Her husband, Jose, hasn't joined her yet. He still lives in Houston.

Unfortunately, they chose a basement apartment on Jefferson Avenue near Claiborne Avenue.

Even if she missed the hints of impending trouble in the paper, by late Friday morning it was becoming apparent to her that something unusual was happening. Water was seeping through her bathroom floor.

The water appeared to be coming literally out of the floor, she said, not out of the commode or anything like that. I pulled back the shower curtain and the tub was half-filled with water.

It got worse. By early afternoon there were 2 feet of water in the apartment.

She called the company that owns the apartment, but to little avail. They provided neither sympathy nor assistance.

I have 2 feet of water Im trying to pump out, Tucker de Vazquez told the real estate company. You and everyone else in the city, the company representative snapped back.

Tucker de Vazquez, who is eight months pregnant, realized that the situation was more than she could handle alone. By Friday night she had apprised her husband, sister and brother of the situation. Saturday morning they were all in New Orleans bailing water out of the apartment and sweeping up debris.

Saturday afternoon, broom in hand, clad in rubber boots and gloves, Tucker de Vazquez couldn't help but think of all the apartments she passed up in favor of this one.

Just another day

Across the street, the Ohlmeyers hadnt fared much better. They were busy piling wet Sheetrock, dripping carpet and ruined furniture on the sidewalk.

They're old hands at this. The family has lived in the neighborhood since 1982.

It floods an average of every other year, Raleigh Ohlmeyer III said. Every time it floods, we flood.

What else is there to do? Tear it out and start over, Raleigh Ohlmeyer II said. We'll be hanging Sheetrock by Friday. It'll be back to normal in a week and a half.

They've done this so often, they tell me, that they know exactly how much material they will need to repair the damage.

Fifty-one pieces of Sheetrock, three 5-gallon containers of mud, and 5 rolls of tape.