

Four generations reunited at San Antonio shelter

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Three of Lawrence Green's grandchildren and one of his great-grandchildren play table games at the Churchill Baptist Church shelter operated by Baptist Child & Family Services. (Photos by Craig Bird)

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By Craig Bird

Baptist Child & Family Services

SAN ANTONIO—When Hurricane Betsy hammered New Orleans 40 years ago, Marion Rosemary Green told her husband, Lawrence, she didn't think she could survive another experience like that. Sadly, her words proved prophetic.

She survived the winds but coping with the flooding that followed Hurricane Katrina overextended her weak heart. As her husband, one daughter and a granddaughter looked on helplessly, she died before a boat arrived to carry them to safety. When rescue did come, Green had to say goodbye and leave her behind.

“We were married for 53 years,” he explained. “But we courted for two years-so that makes 55 years we were together.”



Lawrence Green lost his wife when her heart gave out, and he lost touch with all but one daughter and one granddaughter of his family when Katrina's devastation scattered them to various shelters.

“And this is the result of all those years together,” one of his grandchildren added, sweeping her arm toward the three rows of cots that took up one end of the Baptist Child & Family Services shelter at Churchill Baptist Church in San Antonio.

Green's children, sons- and daughters-in-law, grandchildren and great-grandchildren were reunited at the special-needs shelter at Churchill Baptist Church from the numerous places to which they escaped when the storm and flood hit New Orleans.

“We kept telling her to calm down, but the excitement was just too much,” Green recalled.

“When the winds hit, it shook the house like everything, and I thought that was the end for all of us. But we survived.”

Then in the middle of the night, Green's car alarm went off.

“When I looked to see if someone was stealing it, it was floating away.”

The flood drove the Greens to the second floor of their daughter's house, where they had taken refuge, but Green refused to try to force his wife up the narrow, steep stairs to the attic.

“She physically couldn't do that, so we just prayed that the water would stop,” he said. It did, but so did his wife's heart.

Three days later, Green climbed out a window with his daughter and granddaughter, onto the roof and into a boat. The boat deposited them on top of a school, where a helicopter picked them up and flew them to a local airport.

“We slept on the ground all night and most of the next day before another helicopter took us to the international airport,” Green recalled. “It seemed like it would never end-then all at once we were landing in San Antonio.”

Green was declared a special-needs case because of his age. Baptist Child & Family Services' policy of keeping families together meant he and 27 of his clan were among the first to move into the Churchill shelter that opened Sept. 3. Later, relatives from other shelters in other states were transported to the same site as staff and volunteers helped trace missing relatives, make travel arrangements and provided for the health and physical needs of the large family.

“I don't know what we're going to do, but we sure are grateful for all that

everyone has done for us here,” he said. “And we'll survive somehow and move on.”

After a pause, he leaned toward his daughter Rose, named for her mother and the child she was carrying when Hurricane Betsy pounded New Orleans 40 years ago. Then he repeated: “She told us she could never survive another hurricane. She told us.”

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