

THREE PIECES IN A BAG IN MY CLOSET

Setting is the Mother-in-Law Lounge. ANTOINETTE K-DOE sits alongside the statue of her late husband, Ernie K-Doe, holding a newspaper.

Yes, 3 pieces,... in a garbage bag,... in the closet....

Oh I read it alright and you all need to get your facts straight.

(emphatically)

Ernie K-Doe did not “drown in the storm;”

(poking her finger into the newspaper)

He was in a garbage bag in 3 pieces in my closet!....

(throws newspaper down)

Yes, that’s my correction and I expect you to run with it. Now, please... - How?... O.K., here are the facts so you do your best to get ‘em straight now:

(putting her arm around the statue)

Ernie and me stayed here in the Mother in Law Lounge. I had been through Betsy and others and also I was a Girl Scout *and* a Brownie and I lived in Plaquemines Parish for 15 years where we had a shrimp boat and you know what to take out on the boat with you so I know how to pack. That’s why I figured we’d get through this. I mean, my parents taught us to keep at least 3 days rations for each person in the house so we had food and water and plenty of batteries and cleaning supplies. These things just come back to you: your survivin’ skills. But, at some point, after the time when it was too late to get out, I had a feeling about the situation. Y’know how you have your 6th sense and if you ignore it you’re in trouble? That’s the reason I started bringin’ stuff upstairs: all the pictures and the little small things and the papers and licenses and stuff I’d need.

Well Katrina hit and lookin’ outside at the garbage cans and all the debris flying all around, you could tell it had made tornadoes. Then Monday came and the sun was shinin’ and we all went outside and we were sayin’: “We got through. Nothin’s gonna happen to us now,” but late that evening the water started comin in. I thought it was just rain water ‘cause the streets was fillin’ up but, see, the streets will get flooded from a plain old hard rain so that first half inch or so all around the building - at first - didn’t look like nothing more than a normal big rain when the pumps back up. Then a little while later Monday evening I go downstairs and see the water start coming in maybe about half an inch inside but still I don’t have any knowledge that the levee had breached. It was comin’ in the front door

(she points)

and I go behind the bar and *then* I notice it's coming in from that wall

(she points)

and *all* in the back - *seepin'* - y'know? Right then I knew this wasn't from no normal rain and right then's when I saw about the statue.

(touching the statue)

I broke it loose - into *3 pieces* - and took Ernie upstairs 'cause I could see the water rising. I get his statue up into the apartment then turn on the radio and the TV and they're announcing a breach in the Lower 9th Ward but my thought was: we had a breach 40 years ago in the Lower 9 and we got through it. Then they started talking about the 17th Street Canal and that London Avenue had breached and I said, "Oh my God, the city's gonna go under." And yes indeed sure enough next thing you know the water just keeps on rising up into the Mother-in-Law Lounge. The next time I go downstairs, the water had reached the top of my tables, which is about *4 feet high*, you understand?

I had come downstairs to get the canned food that I had sittin' on the top of those tables 'cause I had some people to feed:

- my mom's sister who's diabetic.

- a college girl about 23 years old from California who didn't have the first *clue* about a hurricane. She called me and said, "Mrs. K-Doe, all my friends are gone and I don't have anywhere to go," and I said, "Yes you do," so she came on over to the Lounge.

- and I have some neighbors in the back and her daughter was strapped over there so she climbed from her house to the top of my shed and through my window.

- and last but not least my granddaughter Raquelle who I like to call "special." My granddaughter stayed here with me because her mom's a nurse and she was called on duty. My daughter knew that I'd be worried if Raquelle wasn't here with me. You see, having a special kid, you do worry about them a little bit more. I *really* wanted Raquelle here with me so my daughter brought her on over to the Lounge and we all stayed upstairs in my apartment together. Raquelle and I ended up stayin' 7 and 1/2 days.

Now y'see I could have left on the 5th day. The National Guard came through and they wanted me to evacuate and I said "no" due to the fact that I have seniors living around me and I could hear people crying and screaming and babies and all like that and there were looters around here so I said, "No, I need to keep an eye on my neighborhood."

See, I was in a good position to check on my neighbors: high and dry in the apartment upstairs with gas for *3 days* even while that water was up! Now *that* was a miracle because my gas meter was under water but I was able to cook and feed people passing by through the flooded streets. And you could smell barbecue. Everybody was barbecuing because their barbeque pits was the only way they had to cook. And that barbeque smelled *good*.

See, people were actually walking in the water goin' from house to house talkin'. Like one time one of my neighbors from around the corner came over and he didn't have soap but he wanted to take a bath and I say,

"How you gonna take a bath with all this water? Isn't your house flooded?" and he says,

"Yeah but I'm in a 2-story house and I have water upstairs," and I gave him soap and bath stuff and he brought me some batteries to make sure I had enough. People were helping each other.

But there was some things your neighbors just couldn't help you out with. Like when my mom's sister, the diabetic, realized she didn't have enough insulin, I had to get her out of there. So the police was all up on the I-10 overpass

(she points up)

and I had a white sheet and some red spray paint which I always would keep around since Betsy. So I sprayed "Diabetic - HELP!" on the sheet and my granddaughter and I held it up and the police saw it from the overpass so they got on the bullhorn and said,

(as if holding a bullhorn, in through-a-bullhorn-sounding voice)

"What's wrong Mrs K-Doe?"

and so I got onto the roof closer to the overpass and holler at 'em that we have a diabetic emergency and they send a boat and take my mom's sister. They didn't have room for no one else on that boat and the college girl started get real panicky, like she had cabin fever or something. So I go downstairs into the Lounge - thing is, you didn't want to go down there unless you absolutely had to; the water was up to my neck. I know I'm short but that's a lot of water because I don't know how to swim. But I knew what I needed from up above the bar and I go down through that water and get her a half gallon of Crown Royal and go back up and say, "Honey knock yourself out," and she did knock herself out; she took her some drinks.

So pretty soon another police boat was passing and I managed to get 'em to hear me and I say,

"I have somebody I need to get out to the hospital to safety,"

and they pick the girl up I gave her some numbers on my family to call and say that I'm O.K.

Now I still wasn't ready to go because I was waitin' till the National Guard showed up to stay 'cause I just didn't trust leavin' the Mother-in-Law to a city with no security and of course the National Guard took a hell of a long time. But I still had my granddaughter with me now and she was getting kind of panicky too so I said,

"Baby don't worry about nothin'. Y'know your dad's a truck driver and he can come through all this water. He's gonna come get us," and other stuff like that. Of course I was worried too but I couldn't really express it with her - she's special, you know?

So I kept her mind occupied to pass the time. I taught her how to take a bath with 1 bottle of water and stuff like that. Then she said, "Well grandmother, what we gonna do to flush the toilet?" and I say, "Well you know what? We're gonna tie a sheet on to a bucket and we gonna dip that down there into the water and we gonna pour it into the terlet tank." I showed her all kinds of stuff.

We played bingo and did a whole lot of things. Then she said to me, "Grandmother, I sure would like to have me those meatballs with spaghetti in a can but we don't have anywhere to heat it." Then she laid down and took a little nap 'cause it was awful *hot*. Then I quietly opened up that can of spaghetti and meat balls and put it on a plate and put it outside in the sun while she was sleeping. So when she got up I said,

"You ready to eat somethin'?" and she said,

"Yeah I guess I'll eat peanut butter and crackers," and I say,

"No you're having meatballs and spaghetti," and she said,

"Gramma they cold" and I say,

"No they warm," and I hand her the plate and she looked at me,

"Well how did you do that Gramma?!?"

"Just magic, I guess." And she sure did enjoy eating that warm spaghetti and meatballs.

We'd sit and do whatever we could for passing those days. At night we'd sit on the roof where it was cool and real real dark 'cause the only light you had was the stars or occassionally somebody coming through the water with big lanterns. And this one night we're up on the roof late that evening just sittin' out there listening to the radio and we hear a crowd of people start coming close so I say,

"Turn the radio down." Then we hear this guy say,

"Yeah, you know they got a lot of liquor at the Mother In Law Lounge so we're going in there later *tonight*..." My granddaughter takes a hold of me and I just sort of gently push her back, and... - and I take my sawed-off shotgun and I blast away. I tried to aim not too high because I didn't want to shoot people on the overpass and not too low because I really didn't want to hit the guys so I shoot right over their heads:

"BOOOOMMM!!!" and boy did they start to *runnin'* through that water! So I holler,

"I don't think you all want to come into *this* Mother in Law Lounge!!!"

Then I shout,

"And I got more bullets!" and they start scattering like birds. I never knew somebody could run so fast through water! So my granddaughter says,

"Gramma, did you kill anybody?" And I say,

"I don't think so. I don't see anybody floating. Everybody *runnin'*."

So we started feelin' safer up on that roof and we put pillows and bedspreads out there and began laying down under the stars.

Y'see, most people's not lookin' for you on your roof after dark, and also, the word *was* out that we was shootin' first and askin'

(laughing)
questions later!

See, I didn't want anybody breakin' in here with my 15 year old granddaughter. People was doin' God-knows-what-all to other people out there and I just didn't want *nothin'* to happen to my granddaughter. And so we survived through that night. There were all kinds of people sleepin' up on the I -10 overpass; I guess they were puttin' em up there and lettin' 'em just walk to the Superdome. But, y'know, you get plucked up out of the water and put on the bridge and you're *tired*. I seen old people pushin' old people in wheelchairs. It was like the T.V. show "MASH" around here: helicopters, boats, army trucks and all the hurtin' people skit-scattered all over the interstate. The Coast Guard started picking the people up right over there.

(pointing)
They was lowerin' themselves down from the helicopters and strappin' the people and pullin' them up from the wheelchairs; it was sad, it was pitiful, you know?

Finally the National Guard did arrive and you could feel the city change. It was like people got happier. I remember one night there was a boat in the water and it was pedaling with these big boards in the water and it looked like a big monster comin' down the street through the water and they had the light on it, a bunch of people that were passing were singin' the "Mother in Law" song to my granddaughter and me - now that was something funny.

(she sings)

And food started arriving, finally, and water. It was very strange to see these huge helicopters land on the overpass and the back of it open up like the jaws of a big shark and start dropping bails of food and water and the people start rushin' for the food and water but on the bullhorns they yellin' at the people to "get back" because of the helicopter propellers. That was pretty sad to see.

So now that the National Guard was here with boots on the ground. I was looking for a way to get out and it took me a day or two to figure it out. One evening I spot the C.N.N. helicpoter and I tell my granddaughter,
"Quick, let's come to the door. That's C.N.N. News, baby! Let's wave at the helicopter. At least they'll film us and people will know we're O.K." Which is what they did: they went around the building to the right and stumbled upon my pink limosine sitting out there in the water and the murals on the walls and my building got on T.V. And people was happy to know we was O.K. - me and my granddaughter in the

apartment upstairs. So that was one thing good but I was watching them film my Mother in Law Lounge and the area around the Circle Food Store and that's when I saw the most frightening thing: the dead bodies floating - poppin' up all over.

I don't know if the tide pushed them in or what. Some of them were swollen. There were boats with Vietnamese who had these high long sticks and they were hookin' these bodies and they took 'em to the Circle Food store and tied them up. And the reason why I was able to know where they took 'em is because when we finally left out on this big truck we drove around to see if anybody else needed to get on and when we came around the Circle Food store they had all these bodies tied up there and I was trying to shield my granddaughter so she didn't see things like that y'know? I mean there was bodies all on the lot over here

(she points)

Every time I'd see one floating in, I'd always try to get my granddaughter inside or tell her to do something to turn her head away from those things. Talking to her afterwards she'd say, "Grandmother you was trying your best to keep me from seeing all those bodies but I seen 'em," so that was scary. I mean, across the street they had one hooked up in a tree over there.

(she points)

So now that the cavalry was here I felt alright about leavin' the statue behind. I put him back together propped him up high in his chair with my shotgun in his hands so if any looters came along to case the joint, they'd look through the window and see a guy holding a gun. When the soldiers came to check out our situation, I had a little talk with my granddaughter. You see, I had never in my life told my granddaughter she's "handicapped"

(air quotes)

but at that moment I had to use that word in front of her for the first time. I told her,

"You're gonna hear your grandmother use that word maybe several times like with the police and the National Guard. You know you're special to me but we're going to have to use the word to get through the system." So they come up on my roof and pick her up and lower her down into boat. Then they wanted to pick me up and I say, "No, you all got her down - I can get down myself! Just get my suitcase."

So they put us in a boat and take us to a bridge where they had already called and said that a "handicap" child is on the way so there was a wheelchair there waiting for her. And you know what? *That* actually made her actually feel special. Then she went on through and they put us in the helicopter and strapped us down. My granddaughter was scared. She said,

"Oh grandmother, what we going to do now? We going to fall!"
and I said,
"Oh baby, *now* we going to be O.K."

And you know what? I think she grew up because of Katrina. She was 15 at that time; she's 16 now, goin' on 17 and thinking she's 40 but she's what kept me strong 'cause she was here with me and I didn't have to worry about her.

So they took us to the Louis Armstrong Airport and they had food and stuff there for you. We was treated real good. Then we were taken to Athens, Georgia and from there to Charlotte, North Carolina and it was there at the Red Cross waiting to get checked out by a doctor where I had the first chance to sit back and be quiet and think about what had happened to us and that's when it hit me...

(she pauses)

.... what was going on, and I ... I almost fell over. Then this doctor came in and I snapped out of it. What snapped me out of my fog and exhaustion was when he looked at me and said, "Where are your teeth?" and I said, "Back in New Orleans, in a glass..."

(she bursts out laughing)

Then the New Orleans Musicians Clinic contacted me and asked me to travel around the country to help locate musicians which I did for a while but bouncing around to different cities and hotels I just wanted to get back home because even though I had left everything as safe sound and secure as I could, I had seen on T.V. that the soldiers were goin' from house to house checking and I'm thinkin', "Oh my God, they're gonna go in the Mother in Law and they're gonna think the statue's real and start shootin' when he doesn't put the gun down!"

So I started planning to rent a U-Haul to drive home 'cause I had a lot of stuff but then realized that if I do that I won't have transportation because all my cars was underwater. Now I knew my pink limosine was flooded and ruined so I needed new wheels and that the used cars around New Orleans would be ruined so I went online looking for a vehicle I could use as a truck and lo and behold I found me a hearse which came in real handy getting through the National Guard check points because they must have thought we was taking bodies out of the city. But they sure did look at us funny in that hearse, like they couldn't figure out if we were carrying dead bodies or goin' in to get some!

(laughing)

When I got back to the Mother in Law Lounge the first thing I did was take the statue apart and put him in my closet in three pieces in a bag to cut down on any confusion and then I got to work - didn't wait for no one to help me out - just got down to it. But I was lucky 'cause I did get some real great help - Hands On New Orleans and even the rap star Usher. Usher came to New Orleans looking to help someone under the music and my name came up from Tippitina's. And a young man came here representing Usher and said they'd help me with the walls and floors - he didn't tell me he was with Usher at first. But I realized who they were when Usher visited me. He said to me,

"Mrs K-Doe, you're not gonna have anything to worry about. We're gonna get this place back for you in memories of K-Doe," which they did. And when Usher was here I asked them could I take a picture with him, myself, and the statue, and he said, "No," and I'm like, "Oh God I asked him the wrong question," and Usher said, "No m'aam - I'll take a picture with you, myself, and *Ernie*. I won't call it a statue; I call *him* Ernie..."
(*smiling*)

And lemme tell you what: I would stay and do it all over again if it happened again. I wouldn't change a thing. I was in a 2 story building! Yeah, it was rough but I got no regrets about being able to protect my granddaughter and to know that the statue went unmolested.

So no, Ernie K-Doe did not "drown in the storm" - please get your facts straight.

(*she picks the newspaper up off the ground*)

You just print that he was in a garbage bag, in three pieces, in my closet. That's right,... thank you.

(*she stands*)

And be sure to send me a copy.

ANTOINETTE sits down with the statue. MUSIC: Usher's "Yeah." POWER POINT IMAGE of Antoinette with Usher at the Lounge.

LIGHTS FADE