

Our Ike Story

By Renia and Melvin Brooks

We are giving thanks and grace to the Episcopal Disaster Relief effort. Our ordeal began when Hurricane Ike struck Galveston damaging our home. We first filed claims with TWIA for repairs. We were told to find licensed, bonded construction contractors to do the repairs. We retained the services of Trojan Construction on Ninth Street in Texas City, Texas. The construction company told us we would have to vacate the property while repairs were being made.

We got some cleaning products and were able to clean the mold in our house well enough to live there until repairs began. We applied to FEMA for living expenses but they could not help us because we had insurance on our property. TWIA gave us living expenses to cover one month. The construction company kept telling us there was more damage to our home and we needed to file another claim. Two months had gone by and we were still waiting to see progress on our repairs. In the meantime the mortgage company tried to verify the license and bonding of the construction company and found it to be an absentee company. The mortgage company did issue a check in the amount of \$24,000 and the construction company came in and gutted the house.

The construction company kept requesting more infusions of money from the mortgage company but no more repairs were in progress. We went to Texas City to confront them in person. The employees would not speak to us. We were still staying in a hotel and trying to pay our mortgage and other bills. We then discovered that our construction company had closed down and reopened as a tire/trucking business. They told us it would be years before we saw them in court.

We then tried to get help from legal aide. They said they were short-staffed and they couldn't locate the construction company who had taken the \$24,000 from our mortgage company. Next we went to the district attorney for help. Their office asked for an endorsed copy of the check and the bank where the

construction company cashed it. We furnished this information but have had no news from the D.A.

We then applied for city grant .We were in the 4th category with a long wait time because people living in mobile homes were first priority. Because of our low income we tried to get assistance to pay utilities, mortgage, rent and living necessities. The stress of all of this was too much for Melvin to bear and he lost his job after 27 years. Now I am working two jobs seven days a week. We didn't want to lose our home. Even with our efforts to stay afloat we fell behind on our mortgage payments.

I believe when there is a will there is a way, with faith hope, love and God. My co-worker said to me, "Let me call Fr. Paul to ask him about the grants the Episcopal Church is funding to repair damaged homes." As a result of that I got a call from Maggie Immler who works with the Disaster Relief Program for the Episcopal Church. She said, "Mrs. Brooks we want to fix your house." It was then I really began to believe we had a chance to keep our home.

The first thing we had to do was more paperwork with the mortgage company. All they really wanted to know was when we could come up with the money for a payment. We told them about all the hardships. They asked if we had a family member who would loan us the money. We told them that the Episcopal Church was willing to repair our home so we could move back in. We asked them if there were any options for us. We kept sending faxes and they kept saying they didn't receive the paperwork. My employer spoke to the mortgage company on my behalf. After her intervention they finally started to listen to us. After more paperwork the foreclosure proceedings stopped and repairs began in earnest.

We did not give up faith and were blessed by God. When Maggie told me that the Episcopal bishop, the Reverend Katharine Jefferts Schori, had chosen our home to be blessed our hearts filled with joy, peace and faith. The Brooks family would like to thank the Reverend Katharine Jefferts Schori for blessing our home and all the volunteers who spent countless hours restoring our home. My husband and I are very grateful to be back home in Galveston after nearly two

years of being dislocated due to Hurricane Ike. We pray that God will be with you Maggie and all your volunteers as you journey through life.

We know we have a few more hours of work to get all packed up to get our belongings back home. We pray that God will give us strength to wake up each morning with the faith needed to complete our tasks. We will still need to find a way to get appliances and furnishings to complete our home. There is healing in the will of God a pulling together of all the pieces of our lives. It doesn't mean that we will always understand what is happening to us, but we bring our torn edges to Him who holds us together.

Thank you! Father Paul, Maggie, volunteers, co-workers, family and friends. May God be with you. Amen!