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11th Grade

“Six Things I Know About the Last Time I Evacuated”

Our Resume:

We were professional evacuees, my family. Every couple of years a familiar name rolled through, and every couple of years we found ourselves elsewhere. Ocean Springs for Ida, Baton Rouge for Isaac, San Francisco for Katrina. Holed up in offices and guest rooms and dens, armed with nonperishables, the little red radio, and the good flashlight, we used to wait out whatever tried to drown New Orleans for good. Nothing had worked, although everything seemed to come close.

The Car:

A nicely squared off trunk fit the kennels for my dogs. My mom said the Honda Pilot was like a truck, but the space was necessary. It was a huge boxy thing, duct taped around the side mirrors and scraped up in a mostly even distribution by the time we sold it. The kennels went in first, then the bags. Like a Tetris game or a jigsaw puzzle that was prone to collapse. When the trunk opened in our destination my mom and I hovered near the bumper, prepared to force the avalanche back into place. Knees bent; laughter hidden in our throats. The snack bag tried to fall out first, followed by the green paisley bag with the shampoo and conditioner and Band-Aids, then the extra pillows and the sleeping bag.

The Bags:

We packed like our luggage was going on vacation. The contents of it didn't match with all the food and batteries. I was in charge of bringing the toiletries. My bag had extra toothbrushes, toothpaste, and floss. My little sister brought all the entertainment. Memory, Candyland, Uno, and the stuffed animals for make-believe. We scrambled around the house for hours as the weather forecast played on the CRT TV we had in the corner of the kitchen. Whatever extra space in our bags turned into places for the electronics. Dad's pager, the family computer, the chargers, the CPAP machine, all stuffed into the crevices of our Toy Story suitcases. The canvas was flimsy, and we ran over each other's feet with the blue plastic wheels on our way from the car to the door of my grandparents' house.

The Drive:

I was dramatic about the drive. I didn't like the green neck pillow I got for flights, so I rested my cheek against the window and let my breath fog up the glass so I could draw smiley faces in it. It felt like we were driving for eons, stuck in traffic under the stodgy gray of the sky. I raced water droplets on the outside of the window, following my

chosen victor with my finger. I loved the way the brake lights in standstill traffic reflected electric red off of everything.

The Stay:

Often, we stayed in my grandparents' house. Baton Rouge is a little inland, a little higher. Mere and Granddad's house was full of antiques. I laid under the ornate wooden table on the beige carpet for hours, hiding from everyone so nobody could make me peel carrots or shuck corn. I always had one page of Granddad's Sunday newspaper, because of all the cartoons. He called them funnies, and my favorites were Sherman's Lagoon and Garfield. They don't have that table I hid under anymore, because in 2016 the Amite River flooded, and they lost the tables and the armchair and the couch and the good linens. For months the back staircase of my house was covered in newspaper, and the newspaper was covered in silverware, Granddad's marine pins, Mere's broaches, and the entire coin collection. I hid on that staircase too, and I buffed the tarnishes out of silver and looked at my grandparents' entire life laid out on a bunch of comic strips.

The Return:

I don't remember coming back to New Orleans. I just ended up back in my house, back in my bed. For our most recent hurricane we just dragged a mattress into the hall with no windows when the alert on our phones started blaring. My dogs were too old to make the trip, my parents trusted that they bought a house in the right flood zone. I sat on the porch in the green light of the eye with a day-old newspaper and smelled the rain circling around us.