

Katrina Evacuee Re-grows Roots

Earns degree and starts a new job

BY JAKE THOMAS
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

Celeste Calvin was attending school in New Orleans before her life was rearranged by Hurricane Katrina nearly four years ago.

After being displaced by the storm and flood, the Portland native accepted a scholarship at Concordia University that would send her back home.

She left behind scores of friends. She left behind a serious boyfriend. She left behind a church. She left behind a life.

But after making it through the ordeal, she has a degree and steady work at the Boys and Girls Club of Portland, and she wouldn't change anything.

She's grateful to Concordia for the scholarship and books they provided. She's grateful to the people who donated clothes to replace the entire wardrobe she lost in the disaster. She's also grateful for the new friendships formed and the new job.

Calvin left Portland for New Orleans to study premed at Xavier University. Her family's deep roots in the South drew her there. She liked seeing the regionally characteristic manners, humility, and hospitality on visits to see family there. She remembers her grandparents telling her stories about living in the South.

"To me that was a fantasy, but for them it was a reality," says Calvin. "I always wanted to go back and see that because that's what made them who they were, and who they are is who I am."

Calvin worked two jobs while in New Orleans. She had a car and her own apartment, and



PHOTO BY JAKE THOMAS/THE PORTLAND OBSERVER
Celeste Calvin stands outside Rosa Parks School in New Columbia where she is employed at the Boys and Girls Club.

was on the cusp of graduating.

The night before the storm she was working the graveyard shift as an auditor at the Hilton Hotel. Calvin had experienced hurricanes before, and used them as an opportunity to visit family in the region, but when she heard about this storm on the news at 2 a.m. she knew this

was different.

When Calvin's shift ended at 6 a.m. she went to her sister's house and they quickly left with her nephew, and brother-in-law so quickly she didn't even have time to pack any of her belongings as the city was evacuated.

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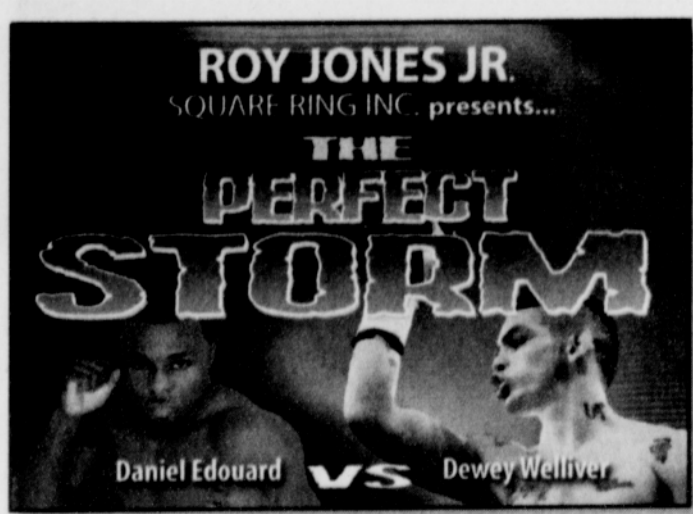
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