

Louisiana Book News for Aug. 26, 2007

If it hasn't hit you already, it will very soon. The second anniversary of Hurricane Katrina on Wednesday will be covered extensively not only by national television but dozens of magazines and newspapers who have come down earlier this summer to pen massive cover stories.

Events scheduled in New Orleans are staggering. There will be marches, press conferences, legislative meetings, presidential appearances and conferences to discuss where we go from here.

If you'd rather note this anniversary in the comfort of your home, try reading Chris Rose's *I Dead in Attic: After Katrina* (Simon & Schuster, \$15). For something a bit more upbeat and encouraging, there is *Hurricane Season: A Coach, His Team, and Their Triumph in the Times of Katrina* by Neal Thompson (Free Press, \$26), an account of the John Curtis Christian School's miraculous 2005 season despite the tragedy.

Most of you probably know Rose's story. Before Katrina, he was a celebrity-humorous feature columnist for the Times-Picayune in New Orleans. He evacuated his family to relatives in Maryland but came back to help cover the worst disaster in American history. His columns turned dark and brooding as they described the bleak landscape of the devastated city but his feelings captured what lingered in the hearts and souls of New Orleanians.

Those columns written in the first year after Katrina became legendary. Residents clipped them and stored them away because words failed to adequately describe what they had seen. But Rose could do it. Ironically, his post-storm columns propelled *him* into celebrity status within the city. When I interviewed him after the self-publication of a collection of his columns, *I Dead in Attic*, he still hadn't come to grips with how he had become a hero of the city.

Later, Rose won a Pulitzer Prize for the essays and that little book started gathering big bucks on eBay. Now, Simon & Schuster has picked up the title, but this one includes columns published through New Year's Eve, 2006. If Rose's first essay in the book doesn't get you ("Dear, America"), then his later columns dealing with his struggles with clinical depression and divorce from his wife of 11 years, surely will. *I Dead in Attic* reminds us all that the mental health problems of New Orleans are afflicting its citizens just as much as the mold crawling up its walls. And no one explains it as well as Chris Rose.

John Curtis Christian School in Jefferson Parish owns a great football tradition. It's head coach, J.T. Curtis — also a part owner of the family-run school — was named 2006 Coach of the Year by *USA Today*, won more than 400 games and 21 state championships in 37 years, a state record, and had only one losing season, Curtis's first year as coach. But nothing prepared Curtis or his team for Hurricane Katrina.

Hurricane Season follows the team members and Curtis as they rise to the challenge of recovering after the storm, dealing with flooded and uninhabitable homes of the players but fighting to victory despite the storm's trauma and the limited resources available to them. The Patriots went on to the state championship for the 20th time in the fall of 2005.

Hurricane Season, called by Publishers Weekly as 'Friday Night Lights in crisis mode,' was spotlighted in *Sports Illustrated* and is being developed into an HBO film.