



MENACHEM KAHANA/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Christmas in New Orleans

By Fatima Shaik

PICTURE SANTA'S SLED with a rolling kitchenette attached and you have some idea about the size of a FEMA trailer. I came across a yard of them when I got lost on the highway near Baton Rouge, where most of my family evacuated out of New Orleans.

The trailers are not the double-wides I imagined—but some are festooned with lights and an artificial Christmas tree outside the door as in a Bobbie Ann Mason short story. A FEMA trailer is more like a camper that you'd attach with a hitch to your four-wheeler when you want to get out of the city for the weekend. Tiny, but nonetheless a gift.

As the rest of the country, children and adults alike, envision Christmas with piles of presents from their favorite electronic and clothing stores, the people of the Katrina diaspora are waking up daily with thoughts of clean underwear, one comfortable chair and not being home for the holidays. But they are trying to make it.

In the town of Baker, the trailers sit row after incalculable row on a dusty field isolated from the sleepy community. Baker is a town where Main Street sits along the railroad tracks and leads from the interstate past the chemical plant and the playground to the church and two roads named Magnolia. An estimated 1,700 people live on the Baker plain. It is a good mile from any shopping or familiar community life. The FEMA park is named Renaissance Village, for the RVs as much as the hopes of their occupants.

Other evacuees stay in temporary apartments and pile into houses around Baton Rouge. One of my

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