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Louisiana Book News: Reliving Hurricane Katrina through Baum's eyes

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One of the finest books to be written about Hurricane Katrina and its effect on New Orleans waited the longest to come out, most likely because of the immense research involved.

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Even if you can't imagine reliving Katrina one more time, consider *Nine Lives: Death & Life in New Orleans* (Spiegel & Grau) by Dan Baum.

Baum is a former staff writer from *The New Yorker*, and his journalistic eye brings nine people to life between the time Hurricane Betsy flooded the Lower Ninth Ward to Katrina's wrath on the city. The nine personalities range from New Orleans coroner Frank Minyard to Ronald Lewis who found "a force of nature more powerful than his mom" when Betsy flooded his neighborhood.

Baum covered the aftermath of the storm, finding the news coverage, like his own, too focused on the damage and not enough on "the essentially weird nature of the place where it happened," he writes in the book's introduction. He then spent hours interviewing nine subjects who poured out their stories, and spoke with their friends, family and associates to supplement the interweaving stories that make up the book.

"The nine intertwined life stories offered here are an attempt to convey what is unique and worth saving in New Orleans," Baum writes. "Only one of these people is a public official, and he but a minor one. The rest toil pretty much in obscurity. Their lives, though, would be unimaginable anyplace else, and it's New Orleans itself - perpetually whistling past the graveyard - that is the real protagonist here."

Nine Lives is a colorful mélange of voices that only New Orleans could birth, its captivating narrative one not to miss.

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