



Nine Lives: Death and Life in New Orleans

By Mary Tutwiler

Monday, March 02, 2009

Dan Baum dazzled us with his coverage of post-Katrina New Orleans. The former writer for the *New Yorker* moved to the Big Easy four months after the storm, and chronicled his trips, by bicycle, to every nook and cranny of the city. He was there for the first post-storm Mardi Gras, there as pioneering residents of the Ninth Ward returned to rebuild their homes, there to witness the resurgence of crime as gangs began to take over empty houses in Central City. Baum's [blog](#) was a must read while he was filing dispatches to the *New Yorker*.

Now [Baum](#), who lives in Bolder, Colorado, has just published a book telling the story of the city through the eyes of its determined residents. [Nine Lives](#) begins with stories that predate the 1965 hurricane, Betsy, the big one that knocked out power for over a week and flooded the Ninth Ward. Encompassing a cross section of lives over the course of 40 years, from Betsy up through Katrina, Baum examines what makes the people and the city of New Orleans the extraordinary place it has always been.

Baum's eye for detail, his ear for language, and his compassionate spirit allow the nine speakers to come to life in a way few writers ever achieve. Praise for *Nine Lives* comes from some of the state's most respected writers, who have themselves written about and experienced the trauma of Katrina.

"*Nine Lives* is stunning work. Dan Baum has immersed himself in New Orleans, the most fascinating city in the United States, and illuminated it in a way that is as innovative as Tom Wolfe on hot rods and Truman Capote on a pair of murderers. Full of stylistic brilliance and deep insight and an overriding compassion, *Nine Lives* is an instant classic of creative nonfiction."—Robert Olen Butler, Pulitzer Prize-winning author of *A Good Scent from a Strange Mountain*

"Dan Baum tests the power of a very haunting place to bring these beautifully crafted narratives into a coherent whole—and New Orleans comes through with soulful aplomb. *Nine Lives* is a masterful portrait of a fragile American outpost between two terrible storms." —Jed Horne, author of *Breach of Faith: Hurricane Katrina and the Near Death of a Great American City*

"*Nine Lives* reaches for, and grasps, an astonishing range of experience in New Orleans. In tracing the paths of these lives over decades, and across the lines of age, race, class, and gender, it gives an essential perspective on what was lost, and found, by the survivors of Hurricane Katrina. Dan Baum doesn't live in New Orleans, but New Orleans lives in him, and on every page of this harrowing, compassionate book."—Tom Piazza, author of *City of Refuge and Why New Orleans Matters*

Nine Lives: Death and Life in New Orleans is available at Barnes and Noble, for \$26, or from [Amazon.com](#) for \$17.

[Close Window](#)