

Drawing Power from Community — Houston Strong

By Eva Maria Bernal

Although Hurricane Harvey devastated Houston, residents' spirits rose above it all, symbolized by the phrase: Houston Strong. The expression became a rallying cry that symbolized the city's resilience, hope, and optimism as residents worked to rebuild. But it also meant different things to different people, from helping a neighbor to unifying the city around a World Series run. We asked participants in the Resilient Houston: Documenting Hurricane Harvey project what Houston Strong meant to them.

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"[Houston Strong] was so widespread in Harvey ... I love how Houston is so diverse. ... Different ethnicities, different religions, and this crossed that. This was not a Jewish issue. This was not a Christian issue. This was a

Houston issue, and it continues to be. ... We can all come together and support each other, even if we don't have an answer for it."¹ Nomi Solomon, Meyerland resident.

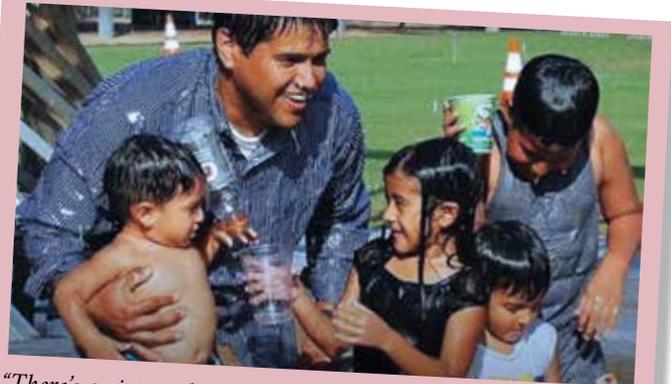
Photo courtesy of Joan Gonzalez, Pixabay.

"[Houston Strong is] a heightened sense of community ... people wanting to get their familiar restaurants open and their familiar grocery store open, the school back up and running ... And to see people being willing to help each other out — whether it was a sandwich or a cooler of water or stopping by and saying, 'How you doing?'"² Tom Slagle, retired fire chief, Kingwood.



"[Houston Strong] was so evident by the support of the community. ... We all worked together. I had an army of friends come that first day I was able to come back [home]. Literally, 40 to 50 people ... I felt so loved because, at the time, I wasn't able to make those decisions for myself. ... Friends become your family."³ Ana Vazao, Cypress resident.

Photo courtesy of Ana Vazao.



"There's a picture that comes into my mind about what [Houston Strong] is ... It is going to work early, because you know you want ... to come home and work on the house. And after that, go to your family and try to be the dad and make everything normal ... spend a couple of hours late with your wife and maybe ten minutes with your kids, because they're about to go to bed, and then getting up early and doing it again. ... That's Houston Strong. ... You didn't let it break you. You just confronted it, and you did what you could to make it better."⁴ José Manuel Méndez, Spring resident.

Photo courtesy of the Méndez family.



"Houston Strong winds up meaning the Astros more than anything else ... [They] helped lift our spirits ... but I think we need more than baseball to make this city survive."⁵ David Lowy, Meyerland resident.

Photo courtesy of Diana J. Rodriguez.

"Whoever came up with [Houston Strong] really nailed it ... [At the Memorial City Mall command center] the food court restaurants were coming out, providing food for all the volunteers. ... There were just makeshift donation drop-offs. ... It's just amazing how many different families from different parts of the world [were] ... dropping off cases of water to pillowcases to deodorant."⁶ Michael de Leon, Houston Fire Department Station 49