

Chaos theory: A monologue by Terri Troncale

 nola.com/opinions/2010/03/chaos_theory_a_monologue_by_te.html

February 28,
2010

The Wednesday after Katrina our small band of journalists crossed the Crescent City Connection from Algiers and traveled the length of Tchoupitoulas without seeing anyone in authority. It was an omen for the day: Chaos reigned.

Danny Bourque / The Times-Picayune FBI agents seal off the Danziger Bridge in September 2009 as part of the bureau's investigation into the New Orleans police shootings at the bridge after Hurricane Katrina.

As the others spread out to gather intelligence, I stayed Uptown to write. Every time a reporter or photographer returned to the house, the reports got worse. Looters had broken into a sporting goods store nearby and stolen knives. Someone was trying to pull the metal doors off a drug store with a forklift.

Brian Thevenot and John McCusker brought the most heart-wrenching news. Hundreds of New Orleanians were roaming the expressway desperate for water, desperate for rescue. That was when I cried for the first time. All three of us cried.

We left the city before dark, exhausted and worried. But by the next morning, a soldier in camo was standing watch next to the bridge toll booths. That afternoon, a U.S. marshal was on guard at Loyola and Poydras streets. I thanked him for coming. "Yes, ma'am," he said. I started to feel better.

By the weekend, streets were swarming with troops, and stranded flood victims were leaving town on buses. It was that Sunday, after the city calmed down, that New Orleans police officers shot to death 19-year-old James Brissette and 40-year-old Ronald Madison and wounded four others on the Danziger Bridge. The official story was that the police were under attack, and their defenders argued that volatility in the city was further justification for the shootings.

Ex-Lt. Michael Lohman confessed otherwise last week. Only the police had guns, and he helped create an elaborate cover-up, Lohman said.

The scene on the bridge must have been horrific, but the chaos was set in motion by police.

Terri Troncale is editorial page editor.