

# SHARONDA

**“Every clinic I go to they say  
we don’t do prenatal care.”**

Sharonda, pregnant mother living with family in a rented house in Baton Rouge, interviewed January 19, 2006

**“It was nice and quiet.”** Prior to Hurricane Katrina, Sharonda lived in New Orleans East with her 3 year-old son Jeb. With just the two of them living in an apartment, Sharonda reflected, “It was nice and quiet. There was no crime or anything.” She worked as a housekeeper at a hotel on Canal Street, earning enough to support a simple life for herself and her son. Sharonda’s mother also lived nearby in New Orleans, and Sharonda felt like she was part of the community there. At the time of the interview, Sharonda was pregnant and due to deliver in late March.

In her job as a housekeeper, Sharonda exposed her hands to harsh chemicals. She reported, “I’ve had problems with my hands because of me doing housekeeping. I get a cyst in it ... the chemicals were strong.” In addition, Sharonda suffers from asthma and occasionally must see a doctor for it. Her son Jeb is generally in good health.

**“I didn’t have a primary doctor. I just went to the free emergency hospital.”** When Sharonda needed to see a doctor, she went to Charity Hospital. Though she sometimes faced wait times over five hours, Sharonda was usually able to get treatment quickly when her asthma flared up. “They’ll see me quick for my asthma,” she explained. Sharonda did not have any health coverage before the hurricane, so she only saw the doctor when she was sick. Knowing the potential for

long waits, she tried to visit the hospital when she did not have to work at the hotel, saying, “Normally when I go, I’ll be off.” Sharonda was not taking any prescription medications. Sharonda did not learn she was pregnant until after Katrina, so she was not receiving any prenatal care in New Orleans before the storm.

Sharonda’s son, on the other hand, had Medicaid coverage and received health care from a private pediatrician. Sharonda reports, “He went to a primary doctor. He didn’t deal with Charity at all.” Sharonda liked Jeb’s pediatrician and never had any trouble with Medicaid paying for services. Because he was starting school in the fall, Jeb was up to date with his check-ups and immunizations shortly before the hurricane. “He got checked up in August because he needed it to start school.”

**“I and my baby were walking in the water on Canal Street. We walked to the New Orleans Superdome.”**

After Katrina hit and the city flooded, Sharonda and her son took refuge at the Superdome, “walking in the water on Canal Street” to get there. Sharonda remembers her time there as “horrible, horrible. No bath, no food.” She stayed there about four days before heading to the Astrodome in Houston on a school bus. The Astrodome was an improvement. Sharonda summarized, “It was good. Air—fresh, clean air—food, water.” After staying at the Astrodome in Houston for

some time, Sharonda and Jeb returned to the Baton Rouge area, traveling between Baton Rouge and Houston regularly. At first, Sharonda stayed with relatives in a dorm room at Southern University and then she moved into a house with her mother, aunt and grandmother. Sharonda reported that their current house, which is down the street from a FEMA trailer park, is “real nice. It’s beautiful.” Sharonda is hoping to work but has not yet found a job.

The disruption in Sharonda’s life following the hurricane has affected her. “I’m not home. I can’t function right. I can’t find a job or babysitter.” Though she was offered counseling services in the Astrodome, Sharonda did not use any. Thankfully, Sharonda reported that her son Jeb is handling life after Katrina well, noting, “He’s fine. He doesn’t really know what’s going on.”

**“He was well taken care of.”** In September, while they were staying at the Astrodome, Jeb got sick. “He was dehydrated, he had diarrhea and vomiting.” Sharonda took her ailing son to an area in the Astrodome designated for medical care where “there were a bunch of doctors.” The doctors told her it was a virus, and Sharonda said her son “was well taken care of.” Since then, Jeb has “been having a runny nose, but that’s off and on.” Sharonda has given Jeb over-the-counter cold medicine to help him feel better.

**“We don’t do prenatal care.”** While Jeb had no trouble getting treated at the Astrodome, Sharonda has had a much more difficult time finding a doctor, especially one for prenatal care. “Every clinic I go to they say we don’t do prenatal care and all this,” she explained.

When she was in Houston, Sharonda was able to make an appointment at a clinic for early December, but when she arrived they postponed the appointment until February. She eventually left Houston for Baton Rouge, where she had recently visited a mobile clinic treating patients at the FEMA trailer park near her current home. The doctors there gave her prenatal vitamins but referred her to the hospital emergency room for further care.

Sharonda has tried to get medical appointments, but her lack of health coverage has been an issue. “I’ve been calling since November to see a doctor. They said they couldn’t see me because I haven’t had Medicaid. So I’ve been waiting for a Medicaid card.” When she was in Houston, Sharonda applied for Texas Medicaid at a food stamps office. When no word of her Medicaid coverage came, Sharonda tried getting in touch with the Medicaid office. She said, “I called. They don’t answer the phone.” During her recent visit to the mobile health clinic in Baton Rouge, where she is now living, a staff person helped Sharonda apply for Louisiana Medicaid. Jeb’s Medicaid coverage has been consistent since the hurricane, and Sharonda said he did not have trouble using it in Texas.

**“I believe in God. I think I’ll be okay.”** Sharonda has a positive outlook for the future, trusting through her faith that she will regain normalcy in her life. Sharonda reported that her next goals are to try to find a job, get Medicaid, and get her son into preschool. She plans to put her son in pre-school in the Baton Rouge area and settle there for awhile, eventually returning to New Orleans once it rebuilds.