



Rubble Fever

Robbi Pounds

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In *Rubble Fever*, Robbi Pounds artfully braids two stories--the coming and surviving of and the rebuilding after Hurricane Katrina, and the ways in which an only child in her late twenties copes with the illnesses and deaths, a few years earlier, of the parents she adores. Within those two stories are dozens of smaller tales, perfectly executed, involving scores of characters all vividly recreated, mostly in conversation in their own words. Pounds' wry, irreverent, frequently caustic and always loving voice holds the whole thing together in ways that defy easy analysis. She sees, comprehends, and relates the small stuff that adds up to the big stuff, staying firmly on the earth of the five senses; the odd thing is that without ever once resorting to abstraction or philosophizing, her narrative manages to convey a broad and deep sense of what it means to be human, to struggle, to lose and gain hope, and finally, of course, to survive. Readers familiar with Katrina will relive their own experiences within her evacuations, wary homecomings, her physical labors gutting and rebuilding the houses of friends and neighbors. Anyone who has lived through the loss of a loved one will also relive familiar and often heart-breaking moments. Pounds is foremost a writer. Reading *Rubble Fever* reminds us that while we all have experiences, profound and life-changing, the gift of making those experiences into stories that come to life within the words on the page is a rare one, and one in this case for which any reader ought to be grateful. Here are a few brief excerpts-- Of her parents: Thanks to the air force, they had crawled up to the underbelly of the middle class, where we clung like ticks. On entering a house following the flood: "This is like a sunken ship," I say, fighting the urge to whisper. "Like when they raise those old wrecks up from the bottom of the ocean." Reflecting on Katrina's effects: My normal voice is perfect for reading bedtime stories or putting a class to sleep, but since the storm, I chatter like a meth addict. Red Cross commercials are enough to make me tear up. My guts churn after every meal, and for some inexplicable reason, my teeth are ringing. On notes her mother made during her illness: ...the marks on the page are so faint, I have to hold the paper up to the light to read it. It looks like the handwriting of a ghost. Post Katrina: Living in New Orleans, it becomes obvious that the whole world is a graveyard, not just the walled cemetery at the edge of the neighborhood. Post Katrina, things not changed: At the corner of Broad and Canal, camped out on the neutral ground, is the same homeless woman, right where she's been for years, bundled up, as always, with her fleet of shopping carts heaped shoulder high with plastic bags. Talking with a friend during the rebuilding: "Did you find a roofer yet?" he asks. "I found someone to take my money. I think he just climbed up on my roof, ate a sandwich, came down and charged me a thousand dollars." Talking with a woman who is trying to find her house, obviously relocated by Katrina flooding: "Well, baby, I know where it's supposed to be," she says. "I lived here forty years. What I'm trying to find is where it got to now. It's a yellow double with navy blue shutters. You seen anything like that around here?" Emotions post-Katrina: This is the third time I've cried this week. I didn't cry when my dad died, I just felt his neck for a pulse, then went into the kitchen and called the hospice nurse. But a few days ago, I burst into tears over the fate of a fish. --Ralph Adamo, author of *Ever: Poems 2000-2004*, editor, *Xavier Review*.

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