

Waiting out the disaster with a drink

By **CAMPBELL ROBERTSON**
THE NEW YORK TIMES

EAGLE LAKE, Mississippi — On the lakefront sits a low metal building, Strick's. It is the only business still open in Eagle Lake. And starting at 2 o'clock every afternoon and running into the evening, every person in town can be found here. All 15 of them.

While the population of Eagle Lake normally numbers in the hundreds, these few, these happy few, are all that remain. They are the holdouts after a townwide exodus, prompted by concerns over the fat and ferocious Mississippi River nearby.

Every night they sit in this bar, drinking beer and eating a communal dinner of hamburgers or crawfish or whatever was brought in by the last person to visit a grocery store.

They tell stories, watch television and talk about any number of things, but usually about the latest measurements of the river, the state of the levees on which they depend for survival and their disappointment in the

less hardy souls who took off at the first hint of danger.

"A bunch of people are real sorry they left," said Tim Stennett, 52, a building contractor who took over the bar when Strick himself — Mike Strickland, formally — handed off the keys.

Mr. Stennett's wife, Sheryl, became the bartender, though the Stennetts leave the keys with anyone who wants to drink late. Drinks are paid for on the honor system.

The Eagle Lake community sits between cornfields and Eagle Lake itself. It is a popular spot for fish camps and weekend homes, but more and more people have decided to live here full time, making the 56-kilometer commute into Vicksburg for work.

With floodwaters closing roads and highways, that trip has now stretched to 225 kilometers. Eagle Lake itself is higher by about four meters, increased by the Corps of Engineers to equalize pressure on the Buck Chute levee along the Mississippi. This elevation swallowed up piers and boathouses.



JAMES PATTERSON FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

At Strick's bar, the only business still open in Eagle Lake, the 15 regulars stayed behind as floodwaters rose.

But the predicted deluge that sent nearly everyone running for higher ground has not come to pass, not yet anyway.

A levee breach remains a possibility. If it were to happen, Eagle Lake would simply disappear.

The only vestige of authority remaining is a four-day rotation of two officers from the

Warren County Sheriff's Department. Driving around, they saw a man walking down the street with a shotgun once. They went to Strick's and asked about it.

"That was me," one of the patrons said.

Those at Strick's acknowledge that some think they are a little crazy for staying. But for nearly all of them, their life is the lake.

Most of Mr. Stennett's work is on lake houses. Cindy Roberson is the sole remaining Eagle Lake representative of Godfrey & Ivy Realty, and all of her properties are along the lake as well. She checks in on them every day.

"It's not rocket science," she said of the calculus behind staying. "This is home."

In Brazil, revenge of the nannies

By **ALEXEI BARRIONUEVO**
THE NEW YORK TIMES

SÃO PAULO, Brazil — In a decade working as a nanny, Andreia Soares finally joined Brazil's middle class.

With the money she saved, she bought a two-bedroom apartment with granite kitchen countertops and a small veranda, a house for her mother, land for her brother and a Louis Vuitton purse.

Later this year, with her monthly salary of \$3,100, which she earns caring for a toddler in an upscale neighborhood, she plans to buy a \$39,000 car — in cash.

While she has done better than many of her counterparts, Ms. Soares, 39, is part of a nanny revolution that is shattering the colonial stereotype of inexpensive but dedicated domestic help in Latin America. As their expectations for a better quality of life rise, nannies are increasingly seeking to work for the very wealthy and becoming less affordable for many middle-class families.

Fading fast are the days when white-frocked nannies worked for a menial salary,



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Andreia Soares's training has enabled her to earn a bigger salary. She played with her client's child in São Paulo.

Michelle Tchernobilsky, 29, has changed nannies about 10 times in the past year, searching for someone affordable yet qualified. Cutting the nanny from her budget is not an option for Ms. Tchernobilsky, a public relations manager, but neither is paying a salary that she considers exorbitant. "We are hostages," she said.

Rodrigo Constantino, an economist at Graphus Capital, said a lack of investment in education in Brazil would prevent many domestic workers from finding better-paying work, and salary demands could stoke inflation.

Still, nannies like Ms. Soares are investing in themselves. It began nine years ago when she took a nursing course. She followed

up two years later with specialized nanny courses. Next year she plans to take English lessons.

After two years working in New York, she found her way to the home of Fernanda Parodi, a lawyer married to an executive in São Paulo. Ms. Parodi says she has no complaints about Ms. Soares's salary, though she is counseling her to buy a cheaper car.

"I don't ever want her to leave," said Ms. Parodi, 38.

Where some mothers see a debilitating revolution, she sees social progress. "If Brazil wants to move beyond a third-world country, then it needs to allow everyone to participate in the growth," Ms. Parodi said. "It's the price you pay for progress."

Gaga: Music with an undertone of darkness

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ga made "Born This Way" while on the road. An extra tour bus held a recording studio; her engineer, Dave Russell, and two producers traveled with her. "Basically after the shows, I would go on the bus, and I would work all night," she explained. "Then we would pull the buses over, and then I would get back on my bus and go to sleep on my bed, and then we would just keep driving."

"They would argue with me, and say, 'Gaga, we can't do your vocals right now,' with the sound of the bus and the reverberation." She would say, "Turn the mike on and let's do this." She continued, "I get so inspired and ready to go, and I'm not the kind of person that can hold in my creativity."

Lady Gaga wasn't exactly an overnight sensation, and her early rejection still smarts. "There were a lot of people that didn't believe in me," she said.

"The Fame," her first album, ignored trends by using an uns subtle beat, four-on-the-floor — an update of the disco thump. This beat had long driven hits in Europe, but American radio stations resisted it. Mr. Iovine said it took six months to get Lady Gaga's first single, "Just Dance," on the air; it went on to No. 1. "The masses will accept something new," Mr. Iovine said. "It's the people in between who will fight you."

Lady Gaga has been in the pop charts ever since.

"Something that carries through all my songwriting is this undertone of grit and darkness and melancholy," she said. "The bitterness is hidden inside of these really soaring, joyful melodies."

The music, she said, "takes on a completely different life once it enters the universe. It's never finished. Pop culture is my religion, so to say pop culture is your religion you'd better believe your work is never finished."

For the rafter-raising power ballad "You and I," Lady Gaga turned to Mutt Lange, who produced for Def Leppard. (Mr. Lange, in turn, brought in Brian May, the guitarist in Queen, the band whose song "Radio Ga Ga" gave her a name.)

While she was on the road, Mr. Lange asked her to record a rough lead vocal for the song. "I had about 30 cigarettes and a couple

'You really beg her to stop, and she doesn't stop.'

of glasses of Jameson and just put on a click track and sang my face off, thinking we'd redo the vocals," she said. She never had to; Mr. Lange loved what she sent.

"I think it's wonderful to be confident about what you create," she said. "I think you have to be."

But it's not the kind of confidence that lets her relax or even slow down. "Every day, in the mirror, on the stage, in interviews, to go to sleep, to finish that chorus, I'm always in the boxing ring," she said.

"But I have a one-two punch: ambition and drive."

Mixed: Racial acceptance

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Brookings Institution, a public policy organization in Washington, D.C. Still, multiracial people are a tiny percentage of the state's population: 34,000, about 1.1 percent. And many here see enduring racial inequities.

Still, many also see progress.

Mr. Norwood and his wife, Patty Norwood, a photographer, are among them. "It's been really smooth here," said Mr. Norwood, 48, a Hattiesburg resident for 11 years.

And unlike in many states, Mississippi's population has not grown much over the last decade, suggesting that any change in culture is happening not primarily as a result of newcomers.

Much of the growth in the mixed-race group can be explained by recent births. But in Mississippi and in other states, some growth may also be a result of older Americans who once identified themselves as black or some other single race expanding how they think about their identity.

Mixed marriages are also part of Mississippi's coastal culture, which has historically been more liberal than the rest of the state.

Sonia Cherail Peeples, who is black, and her husband, Michael Peeples, who is white, met as students at the university in 2003. His

family was "old Mississippi." Sonia Peeples's ancestors were too, but they were sharecroppers.

"I really never thought twice about it," Mrs. Peeples, 29, said of dating Michael, 30. "Everyone was open to it." They have two boys: Riley, 3, and Gannon, 5, who Mrs. Peeples likes to say are "black, white and just right!"

Still, another parent asked if Gannon's allergies had something to do with "race mixing." And there was the hospital worker who treated Mrs. Peeples as though she were trying to snatch a white baby when she took the blond Riley out of his crib. But those few incidents seem insignificant in comparison to what previous generations endured.

"My 5-year-old asks, 'People who looked like you, why did they treat them so bad?'" Mrs. Peeples said. "It's hard to explain to a biracial child in 2011. In a perfect world, race wouldn't matter, but that day's a while off."

But it may be closer at their church, where the pastor is white, the assistant pastor is black, and the creative arts pastor is Latino.

Growing up in Texas, Mrs. Norwood, 39, said she was never quite sure what race to mark on forms.

"Our daughter's life will not be like that. She knows what she is," Mrs. Norwood said. "The times have certainly changed."

In São Paulo, low-cost domestic help grows rarer.

with only two days off every 15 days. Better-qualified nannies are refusing to sleep over or work weekends, and they are demanding salaries that are two to four times what they were paid just five years ago.

The income of domestic employees in Brazil, including nannies and maids, rose 34 percent from 2003 to 2009 — more than twice the average increase for all of Brazil's active workers — said Marcelo Neri, an economist at the Getúlio Vargas Foundation. At the same time, he said, the hours of domestic employees fell by 5 percent to 36.2 hours a week.

"Today, what I need from a nanny job is different than before," said Ieda Barreto, 32. Seven years ago, she was making about \$400 a month and had only 24 hours off every Thursday. Today she expects to make almost \$1,900 working Monday to Friday, and she charges \$250 on weekends.

Once isolated, nannies now trade information about the market and working conditions through e-mail, blogs and social networks.

"It's a mafia," said Jacqueline Szwarc, 44, a psychologist, adding that she has been lucky to hold onto the same nanny for 10 years.

Myrna Domit contributed reporting.