

## Foundation Recipient

### *Melvin Bayham*



**Melvin and Etta Baham**

### *Melvin's Story*

Just saying the words “Hurricane Katrina” brings instant recognition and remembrance of tragic destruction in and around New Orleans. That storm in August 2005 was the costliest natural disaster in US history, with total property damage estimated at \$108 billion. Eleven years later, most people would expect that normalcy has returned and that the rebuilding has been completed. Unfortunately, that is not the case for one man, who ironically made his living in the construction business.

Melvin and his wife Etta have lived in New Orleans their whole life, raising 3 children. Melvin worked as a carpenter and contractor for over 50 years in all aspects of construction, including carpentry, mudding, drywall, flooring, electrical and plumbing. Meanwhile, Etta was employed as a phone technician for BellSouth for 30 years. In anticipation of Katrina, Etta and her daughter evacuated to Texas, while Melvin and his son chose to stay behind. They ended up being rescued by boat and were taken to the

Superdome. A week later the family reunited in Texas, and after a year they returned to New Orleans to face the task of rebuilding their home. The storm had ripped off the roof, leaving all their belongings exposed to the wind and rain. They hired a contractor to repair the roof and restore the interior, but like many following this horrific storm, they fell victim to contractor fraud. Melvin's background in the construction trades gave him skills to do some of the repairs on his home, but lack of funds and his declining health left the family with little progress to show. Then, if that wasn't enough, disaster of another type struck the couple.

***In 2013, Melvin had part of his leg amputated due to diabetes. If that wasn't enough, Etta developed a blood clot on her spine that same year which left her paralyzed from the waist down!***

After recovering, the Baham's hired yet another contractor to repair the home once and for all and to make it handicapped accessible. Etta used her retirement savings and they hired a contractor who presented himself as being licensed, but only later they found that not to be true. After demo and partial reconstruction, the contractor left the house in shocking condition. The story attracted the attention of WWL-TV in New Orleans as well as the St. Bernard Project, a well-known local 501©(3) that helps rebuild homes following hurricanes. This is a story you have to see to believe, and the link below will take you to the CBS Channel 4 newscast in New Orleans that first broadcast the plight of the Bayham family.

<http://www.wwltv.com/story/news/action/2016/01/07/botched-repairs-leave-disabled-couple-living-gutted-home/78425422/>

A caseworker for the St. Bernard Project found the Joseph Groh foundation through Internet research for disabilities, and they contacted us to request funding for an entry ramp into the home.

***Thanks to our loyal and generous supporters, the foundation was able to provide this funding!***

The pictures below tell the rest of the story. The first time they used the ramp, Melvin exclaimed how pleased and thankful he was with the craftsmanship of the ramp and pillars. Etta cried, trying to grasp the fact that their long nightmare was finally over.



*Work in process on the Baham's new ramp*



*Ribbon-cutting on the new ramp and home*