

## Recovering Charles

Contributed by Our Reviewer  
Saturday, 15 November 2008  
Last Updated Saturday, 15 November 2008

Recovering Charles: Loss In the Backdrop of Katrina Reviewed by Stuart Nachbar

I was intrigued to read Jason Wright's *Recovering Charles* because I have lost my mother as a teenager, and I worked in Newark, New Jersey, a very challenging urban center, in a public affairs role. At the time I worked there, I occasionally saw scenes through my camera and through my car window that were not unlike those seen by Katrina victims in New Orleans. Only Newark has never been hit by a Category 5 hurricane.

But while *Recovering Charles* takes place in post-Katrina New Orleans, it is not a story about New Orleans politics. It briefly covers the devastation and the evacuation, but it is more about a son's loss. Not only of his parents, but of who he is as a human being.

*Recovering Charles*'s main character Luke Millward is an up and coming photojournalist in a serious and loving relationship with Jordan, his girlfriend, who has moved from law into real estate. Luke has lived in New York for his college and adult life, while his father Charles had after he had moved to Texas. He did not know that his father had moved again, this time to New Orleans, became a musician, and was missing in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

Charles's friends in New Orleans call for Luke, and seek his help to find him. And Luke travels to New Orleans with considerable reluctance. Because he remembers his father only as a man who couldn't keep a family together, and became a drunk after his wife died. Charles's drunkenness also led Luke to forsake drinking. At first Luke has his doubts that his father might not be a man worth saving.

*Recovering Charles* is not a complicated story, nor is it difficult to read, but it is moving because Wright introduces characters from New Orleans who remind Luke that Charles was not only his father, but a better man than his son might have thought he was. Verses, the New Orleans juke joint in the story, has become Charles's home, not only a physical place, but a family place, and that family became a bond in place of his natural family. *Recovering Charles* ties both families together, and it has some twists and an ending that might surprise you.

While I do not come from what I would consider to be a dysfunctional family, Wright's thought of a second verse did ring true to me, and I wrote my first novel, *The Sex Ed Chronicles*, with some remembrances of loss. I lost my mother thirty years ago, but in some ways she isn't gone.

I wanted a sense of the woman my mother might have been, had she lived to see me graduate college and get my life started. It was not that my mother asked me to write anything before she died, or that I wanted to write something that she would be proud to read. It was because she would have wanted me to be myself, but remember the things, such as family, that are important. Just as Charles tries to do for Luke in this story.

Contact Stuart Nachbar at <http://www.EducatedQuest.com>, a blog on education politics, policy and technology or read about his first book, *The Sex Ed Chronicle*, a novel on education and politics in 1980 New Jersey, at <http://www.SexEdChronicles.com>.