

# Alberta residents walk away from devastation

By Wayne Grayson  
Staff writer

As scores of her Alberta neighbors walked slowly in a mass exodus west along University Boulevard on Thursday morning, Brenda Gibson stood staring across the street at what was once her home.

Looking south, a small white house stood out among the waves of broken trees and splintered wood, standing but leaning over, its front porch broken in half.

“It’s demolished,” Gibson said. “I’m still in shock. I’m like ‘Pinch me. Wake me up.’ This just can’t be true.”

All that Gibson has left, like so many others in Alberta, are the clothes she salvaged from her home, along with a bottle of grape soda and some snacks she pulled from the rubble of a convenience store.

“We don’t have any food or water. After going through our house we were walking up to the Piggly Wiggly because the police were supposed to have water there when we saw the people here,” she said.

More than a dozen people had gathered atop the mound of rubble and were desperately digging through the debris, hoping to salvage drinks and food before getting back to their destroyed homes or continuing to walk west, away from the death and destruction.

“I was just trying to get my grandkids something to eat,” Gibson said. She has four grandchildren who live with her.

As she spoke, Gibson’s eyes remained on what was left of her home. She spoke quietly, her eyes glassy with tears as she recalled taking cover in the hallway of her house before emerging to see the sea of destruction around her.

“I pulled two dead bodies from a home after it happened,” Gibson said. “I found an elderly lady and a three-year-old baby. After that my body and mind have been in shock and to try and describe

what I’m feeling — I can’t.

“I thank God that I’m alive, but to see those two bodies was very painful.”

Further west down University Boulevard, Michelle Lancaster, 51, walked slowly under the weight of a large black trash bag containing all of her belongings.

A tree fell through and destroyed her home of five years while she took cover in its hallway. Lancaster was walking with family Thursday morning toward the West End, at least five miles away, where her daughter lives.

But while she stopped to gather her things together, she became separated from the rest of her group.

“All I can think about is what am I going to do? What is my next move?” she said. “It’s been hard.”

Linda Anderson, 46, walked a few hundred yards behind Lancaster. She and her two friends, Douglas Taylor, 56, and Dwight Woods, 53, each pulled a suitcase behind them containing what she could salvage from the home she has owned for 21 years on 23rd Avenue.

Anderson said she took cover in the house’s basement and saw the twister coming through a window before the storm blew the window out, filling the air with “nothing but noise.”

“I have a shell of a home; just four walls,” Anderson said.

And even with so little left, Anderson said it took her hours to leave her home and then the neighborhood.

“As long as we’re alive,” she said. “I don’t care about the material things. My heart is bleeding for the people that lost their lives here.”

“All I can think about is what am I going to do? What is my next move?”