

Katrina—she came and we didn't even know.

I was leading a women's trip to northern Minnesota from our church in Ankeny, Iowa. We were spending our days hiking, canoeing, and just having fun. No cell phones, no news, cut off from the rest of the world. Our first stop on the return drive was at Betty's Pie Shop on the northern coast of Lake Superior. We noticed a picture on the front page of the newspaper from Duluth of people walking in waist deep water carrying possessions, we walked on by thinking it was monsoon season in a far away place. Suddenly one of our group said "Oh my God, that is New Orleans." We were stopped dead in our tracks as the shock of what had happened began to sink in. Here we were near the Canadian border and the other end of the Mississippi had been demolished. It was then that my cell phone came to life and I was asked to consider leaving within two days to join other workers in the gulf area. As the full impact of the news hit our little group we were silenced, deep within our own thoughts, one of those early comments was how do we help.

Calling home we were made aware that our church had agreed to support 100 people coming to our area from the storm. Des Moines and surrounding areas were gearing up to assist. As I arrived home and was greeted by my husband, I could tell that something was very wrong with him. To make a long story short, I walked in the front door and within minutes called an ambulance. My husband was having a heart attack. We spend the next 10 days in the hospital and at various times the cell phone would bring me word of needs with NOVA, Salvation Army or Red Cross. Every part of me wanted to respond but my personal response would come months later when our church decided to send volunteers to Pearlinton. I had called the Pearlinton Recovery Center and asked the question, "When do you need help the most?" The response the end of July, it's too hot for most people of the north. "We'll come." I told them.

Our little troop of eight joined a much bigger group of over forty and set forth. I didn't know what to expect nearly a year after the event, I only knew how shocked I was to see how huge was the destruction and how great the need. The following is the report that I prepared for our congregation upon our return.

Katrina Kare-A-Van report

Our team worked in Pearlinton, Mississippi, an unincorporated city of 1700 pre-Katrina, approximately 750 residents have returned. The area is 40 miles east of New Orleans and 10 miles inland. The next city east of Pearlinton is Waveland where the eye of the hurricane came on land. Pearlinton was hit by a storm surge of 30 foot, winds of 170+ miles an hour and over 200 hundred tornadoes. It sounds like I am making this up, but trust me, I am not. Every home, business and church was damaged. Eleven months later when we visited, many trees still have clothes and junk hanging off the branches, piles of debris twice as tall as the church van line some roads, there are few street signs and only two businesses have reopened. The greatest need is to have volunteers who can help the people of Pearlinton help themselves.

Here are the families helped by the seven Methodist and three Lutherans from Ankeny.

Steve and wife, retired civil engineer, 80 years old, wife had a stroke and has limited ability. He is her caretaker.

Our team of Scott, Jerry and Floyd worked here all week. The house was gutted with only the frame intact, they continued the rebuilding process, working on plumbing and getting it functional, cabinets and nine doors were hung. Windows and ceilings were trimmed and nine lights were installed.

Michael, retired welder and mechanic, 63 years old, in heavily damaged area of town, received damage from both the storm surge and standing water and wind.

A team of roofers from Iowa State fell through the rood that had been incorrectly done the week before. They redid the entire roof with new joists, plywood, tar paper and shingles. It was only 100 degrees with 95% humidity. This took two and half days. During their lunch breaks, they helped him restore and fix his motorcycle, got it running, and gave him back his smile.

Jamie, 33 yrs. daycare provider and husband Pat, a machinist. After Katrina, Pat had given up on about everything. Jamie has taken charge and worked

hard, by having our crews there, both have new hope and Pat is back helping his wife and family. Their home had 13 ½ feet of water, leaving only the frame after the house was gutted.

Pam Lund, from HTLC, along with Sharon, Pastor Bob, David and others, worked 4 ½ days on cutting, hanging, taping, mudding and sanding drywall, and did window and door replacements as well. As a thank you to their helpers this family made enough gumbo for all of our team to take home.

Victor, 82 yrs. Retired policeman and former WWII vet. His home was completely destroyed; even the foundation and he had reached the end of his rope the week we were there. He finally came in for help after spending several months in a homeless shelter or moving from friend to friend. His home was 150 years old; he had lived in it for over forty years building a wonderful place to enjoy his retirement hobbies of raising tropical birds and plants. All he wants is a place to live and keep the precious few possessions he has been able to salvage.

A combined effort of our eight from Ankeny, plus the roofers and others, designed and built a storage shed and a canopy over his deck. He uses a motorized wheelchair to get around and had no where to keep it out of the elements. He lives five blocks off the gulf and could not see the water before Katrina, he now has ocean front property and the heat from having no trees left is unbearable. The team cleaned his yard of debris, helped repair his patio, bought and decorated a few pots and planted flowers in a planter that was the only thing to survive. Victor loves to entertain and has had very little company since Katrina as the whole neighborhood is gone. He and some of his friends treated the teams to lunch on Friday as they finished his work. He provided fresh shrimp and crab with all of the trimmings, it was his way of giving back. I truly don't know what he needed more - the shed, canopy, clean yard or seeing his new and old friends enjoying his hospitality.

Myrna Johnson, from HTLC, worked at Pearl Mart (a free store for staples and a place to borrow tools, and to apply for assistance of many kinds), stocking shelves, cleaning; handing out tools, building supplies, unloading trucks and

helping pack and deliver 36 forty pound food boxes to homebound frail and elderly, all this in an un-air-conditioned building.

Some supplies are rationed; each family was allowed 2 rolls of toilet paper, 1 roll of paper towels, 2 garbage bags, 2 hotel soaps and shampoos, 1 bottle of dish soap or 1 bottle of laundry soap and 1 cleaner, such as bleach, household cleaners etc. - per week! Some medical supplies were available but no bug repellent was available in a time when there is a desperate need as they have the biggest bugs we have ever seen. Each family was allowed only two small bags to fill for the week with whatever cans or boxed goods had come in from donations or commodities. The only fresh produce we saw was a truckload of sweet corn that was rejected from the closest grocery 15 miles away, because the husks looked dry. On Thursday and Friday, Myrna helped with sheet rock and assisted with the clean up of Victor's yard.

I (Elaine) worked Pearl Mart with Myrna. Together with the Mississippi Public Broadcasting crew, we unloaded seven trucks and put everything away. We helped with home deliveries, checking up on the health of the homebound. We worked in the office taking work orders, calling in resources and was able to arrange for mental health team from NOVA (National Office of Victim Assistance) to come for the upcoming storm season and upcoming Katrina anniversary date. I talked with many people about their trauma and helped to quiet the great anxiety surrounding a tropical depression forecast. I also went to pick up four goats at an animal shelter and get them back into the hands of a family who depends on goats for milk, cheese and meat. We worked with PBS film crew to tell the story of life of a volunteer 11 months after Katrina for their upcoming documentary around the anniversary date.

Gift cards from congregation bought:

26 sheets of drywall paint & door

Pots and flowers

Tape and supplies

Gas

Materials for Victor's shed

Covered the cost of our three volunteers at \$150 each

Needs of the Pearlington area:

Prayer
More volunteers
Bug spray
School uniforms and supplies
Insulation
Gift cards for Home Depot, Lowe's and Wal Mart
All building supplies
All home supplies—they have nothing to move into the new homes as they are completed

My dream is to load a truck of household and construction items to take to Pearlinton, so if you know anyone with a very large truck please let me know. I think we could seriously fill a semi!

What of the people? They are the most courageous, bravest, open and friendly people. They fully believe that their help is from the Lord and his people. When they need something they turn to prayer. They have a great deal to teach all of us, but make no mistake they are hurting and need our help. They will tell you that Katrina was in many ways a gift of God, teaching them to treat each other with loving kindness. They say, "Let's not wrestle with Katrina. Let's dance with her and receive all of her gifts, for they are gifts from God."

Thanks to all of you who helped make this first trip an unforgettable experience. If you wish to go on the next trip please call or email me with dates you would prefer over the next year.

- Elaine Haugen

Update 10-25-06

When I reflect on what I learned or how this trip affected me, the answered is so simple. I saw humanity in a most vulnerable state being helped by each other as the open hearts and homes of the survivors of Katrina reached out and accepted help from the likes of me. Who received the most help, only time will tell but I came home greatly enriched by the spirit of those who have witnessed so much. These people are special and their acceptance of us in their midst puts new meaning into the word hospitality. Gracious and loving they made our clumsy offerings of help seem

extraordinary and I am sure at times they really wanted to wring our necks. Would we be so gracious if the table were turned, yes I believe we would because we would have had the same lessons on what is ultimately important in life, our friends, our country, our family and our communities. When one of us hurts we all hurt and when one rejoices we all rejoice. Katrina, you came and you left but we are not poorer because of you. We have all been enriched and so we will survive a better people. And yes we will come again to help and to be helped. Why? Simply because you asked us to not forget you and as people of faith we are doing what our Heavenly Father asked us to do when He said, "Love your neighbor as yourself." See you in February.

-Elaine Haugen