

# **The Faces of Katrina**

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## Katrina Relief Effort



I spent the last week in the Gulf States volunteering for the Katrina Relief effort through the organization called “Veterans for Peace”. Their goal was to collect as many supplies as possible and go into the “underserved neighborhoods” of the area, distributing essential items and assessing medical needs. Each day trucks and buses full of supplies left our camp to seek out these survivors and do what we could for them. We worked from early in the morning until the sun went down. No one returned to the camp site until we had given away everything we took out that day.

I left my home in NJ with three other volunteers and two 24’ box trucks of supplies we had collected from people in the area. These are just a few stories and photos of some of the people I met. And hopefully helped.

Sept. 14, 2005  
28th Street Apartment Projects  
North Gulf Port Mississippi



Dazhiona



**"Dazhiona is examined by Dr. Saul"**



After servicing a project close by, we happened upon this complex by chance and decided to pull in and speak to some people about their needs. Within minutes we had heard many stories and decided this place definitely fell into the ‘underserved’ category. The crew hit the ground unloading boxes & cans full of supplies. Within 10 minutes the word had spread and we had more than 40 people with their children being supplied. We met up with Dazhiona and her family early in the distribution. She was walking with a limp and crying. One of the medical staff on the road with us that day, Dr. Saul, took her over to assess her foot and ankle and made sure her mother had proper medication and instructions. Dazhiona lives in one of the apartments with her mother, sister, aunt and 3 cousins.

In little over an hour, our crew and medical staff had given out diapers, formula, food, school supplies and cleaning essentials to each resident. The medical staff talked to each person, asking questions about health and medicinal needs. We also made sure that each

of the children received a toy or two from our collection.

There are 35 low income and Section 8 apartments in this development. The owner of these units, CAL Realty, did show up after the storm to collect rent. He had promised to send someone to begin tarping the roofs and cleaning up water damage. 12 days later nothing has been done. These apartments have extensive roof & water damage. Many had gaping, uncovered holes where the roof had been ripped off. Most have had electricity and water restored, except the front units which sustained too much water damage and can not be reconnected for safety reasons.

Residents say mold is spreading quickly and many of them have maggots coming up out of their doorway. There is a 'maintenance man' on site, who doesn't receive paychecks, only free rent. (I asked because I thought I might get an address from his pay stub) According to him, he is only authorized to write down complaints and report them to the realty office. I took the numbers from him and called repeatedly. No one answers. He told me he has tried calling repeatedly but was only able to get in contact once with the owners. At that time he was told by them that "FEMA would take care of it". I know better. I continue to call and seek out the owners.

Sept 13, 2005  
Gulf Port Mississippi

"Amy"





What is left of the grocery store in Amy's neighborhood



One of the damaged Homes in In Amy's neighborhood

I met Amy on my first morning in Gulfport Mississippi. We had received word from an American Indian woman that she and her neighbors were having a very difficult time and no help from the government agencies. The caravan rolled into the neighborhood and began to unload supplies. I took the job of scouting the neighborhood, getting the word out and making sure no one there got left behind.

I knocked on Amy's door and she answered with a warm smile. I explained to her what we had set up, about 4 blocks away. She informed me that she had 4 children ages, 7, 5, 2 and 5 months old. And then pointed out her car: broken down in the drive way, telling me she was in need of everything, but had no way to get anywhere. I quickly called up to Monica who was heading up this run, and she deployed a small van that was part of the group.

While we waited for them to load up for her specific needs she and I talked about her experience. She had gone to her mother's small apartment, with the children, just north of Rt. 10 to weather the storm, and had returned home in the last few days. The day after her return, her car broke down. The grocery store nearest to her home (pictured above left) ceases to exist. A few days before the storm hit, she'd gotten a letter that they were cutting off her food stamps. She knew, especially now, it would be almost impossible to clear up the mistake.

Her home was damaged pretty heavily by water. There are 3 rooms in her small home she can't use at all. She says she just keeps the doors closed, windows open, and continues to go in and bleach clean to stop the mold. Most of her children's possessions were destroyed by the water. But her attitude is amazing. She knows a lot of the other homes nearby, as the one above right, have a lot more damage than here home. The connecting neighborhood has been condemned, wired off, guarded and you need a pass to drive in."If this is the worse thing that ever happens in my life, I'll be fine." she says. Amazing.

The VfP volunteer van arrives and begins to unload. She seems almost overwhelmed by the fact that the other 2 volunteers have thought of everything. They load food, formula, diapers, water, cleaning supplies, some new clothes for everyone. The 2 oldest boys were thrilled to see the juice boxes. We loaded her up and she threw her arms around me. “Thanks for coming by, thanks for caring about all of us” she said.



“Clyde”



I met Clyde during my 2nd visit to North Gulf Port area. We had come across an area in obvious need and set up in the parking lot of a small store central to the neighborhood. The store was actually open; however stock was next to nothing, so the owner was happy to oblige us. Clyde was among four men who were outside of the store when we pulled up. He immediately started helping us unload and sort supplies from the truck. As

residents began to arrive I saw him help direct people to what they needed, and then bag up a few items himself. I then saw him take the items he had gathered and walk about a half a block away, knock on the door and give the bag away. He did this several times during the distribution. He was also one of the people who made sure we knew the man who lived directly behind the store was handicapped, and they took him a variety of supplies. When things began to wind down a little, I went over to Clyde to thank him for his help and to let him know I appreciated what I saw him do. He told me, "I try to help the people of this area as much as I can. I don't have much to give them, but what I have is theirs if they need it" I knew exactly what he meant. We went on to discuss many things and found that we shared so many commonalities of ideas.

We were both the type of outspoken people who always say exactly what's on their mind, especially when we perceive inequity. We also found mutual beliefs as far as setting an example for children, passing on the love you have, and being of one race- the human race. It occurred to me later how significant this meeting was to me. Here were two people who could not have been more different in most ways. We were from different parts of the country, different ethnicity, gender and educational backgrounds. And both, I'm sure, with completely different definitions of 'not having much to give'. When you peel away the outer layers that make up what we all see in each other on the surface, Clyde and I are very much the same.

He left that day with only a pack of tissue and paper towels for himself -and a big hug from his new friend from New Jersey.

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Sept. 16, 2005  
Washington Parish  
Franklinton, La.



One of the volunteer's at our camp site had come across a small church in Franklington, La.  
The church had no electricity or running water and was very low on supplies. Trying to

feed 40 families in the badly damaged rural area out of there small kitchen without benefit of electricity.

One of my teammates, Jan Deruiter, decided to take on task. Thursday evening, after a full day of work, he made a \$1,500+ trip to the grocery store to help replenish their food pantry. Before leaving for the church the next day, we also purchased two generators and the fuel to operate them.

On Friday morning he and I set out to find the church, and make our delivery. We drove through the small town of Franklinton and into the outer lying area where the church was located. The area became more rural as we drove, and the damage became more evident as we moved on. The area holds small homes, a lot of trailer homes spread out among the now badly ravaged land.

We began to unload in the small kitchen area of the church. As word got out that we'd arrived church members began to arrive to lend a hand. We heard stories from them about the storm and conditions of their homes. Most of them had no electricity. Few were lucky enough to have a generator. The tarps we brought with us were much needed, with rain in the forecast. Many had open roofs and no supplies to cover them.

Jan had befriended a young boy from the church, and sat down to talk football with him for a while. He turned out to be a big fan of the Falcon's, who had just beaten our hometown Eagle's the week before. A little bit of normalcy in this boy's anything but normal week.

We left the church fully stocked and with the capability to cook hot meals for the people. The reverend and his wife, along with the parishioners, expressed their relief and gratitude. As we drove the 15 miles back towards the center of Franklinton, Electric Service trucks were at work on the poles closer to town. We hoped they would make it towards the church area soon, but we knew it would not be soon enough.

I left the camp at Covington with a heavy heart. There was so much more to do, but I knew the people that remained or were about to join the group would keep moving - keep finding people in need, one by one.

They had all come for pretty much the same reason I did: To give as much as they could, to let the people of the Gulf States know that they would not be forgotten, and to step in and do something for the people where we felt our government had let us down. These volunteers, as well as the survivors I met, will stay in my heart and mind forever. Their spirit, conviction and determination revived my faith in the citizens of America, and mankind.

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