

Pete Campola

From: Jodi Haier [jodester32@twcny.rr.com]
Sent: Monday, October 24, 2005 9:46 AM
To: jodester32@twcny.rr.com
Subject: Special devotion

Hello Dear Readers:

Today's devotion is very special and very different. Please take the time to read the enclosed letter. I cannot find the words to say these things any better. This week we are discussing teamwork and having one goal and one spirit. Brenda, the author of this letter, is now an authority on what teamwork really means. If you feel led to respond or act please contact Marguerite Edwards at jmedwards@adelphia.net or your local VIM(Volunteers in Mission) coordinator. Locally that would be Jeff Childs of Rome First UMC. (revchilds@hotmail.com) Already our response to the hurricane is diminishing, just when our skills are needed most. Please lift these people up in prayers. Now is the time for prayer warriors. Tomorrow we will return to our regular format. (same bat time, same bat channel) May God continue to bless you and may you continue to bless others. You've already been a blessing to me. Love- Jodi

Hello to my friends and family,

Today, I know how it feels to get a hug from across hundreds of miles. I was blessed yesterday with a letter and an out-pouring of love from Vancouver, Washington. All, because my "cousin," Jay Seastone with Re/Max Equity Group decided to help in a personal way. He started The Tucker Relief Fund for our family on the Gulf Coast. With his infectious will, Jay has enlisted others to contribute and they will *know* where the money is going. I am one of those whose life was changed when Katrina swept through Biloxi and took my home and left nothing on my lot except the foundation on which it stood.

My name is Brenda, and I was at fifty a sophomore in college with two boys living in my modest home on the back bay of Biloxi. This was my first home that I had owned. My son Remington who is twenty and my son Kurt now fourteen were living there when we were told we would have to evacuate. How were we to know we would never see our home again?

But I'm not the only one affected in our family, Brady and Barb Tucker, Jay's brother and my cousin, had five feet of water in their house and the winds of Katrina ripped off part of his roof. His house is considered un-inhabitable and they did not have flood insurance. My uncle Richard and Aunt Marilyn, Jay's mom and dad, had extensive damage to their home when the roof to their two story garage pierced the roof of their home from the 150 -160 mph winds.

My sister Mary and her husband, Otto Vuyovich, also were faced with only a slab and two driveways leading to it. Their beautiful waterfront home and Otto's large shop and garage were literally swept away with the winds and reported 25 to 30 foot tidal surge. Mary's daughter, Gindy and her husband Anthony, had just finished building a beautiful 2,500 square foot brick home just next door and had moved in with their children, Courtney, 8, and Kyle, 5, just before Christmas. I was shocked when I went there the day after Katrina and was only able to recognize her lot by the raised slab where her house stood.

I would like to tell you how it looked and felt like seeing this war zone we call our homes, because, seeing it on television

doesn't do it justice. Tuesday, August 30th, I parked about a mile from my home and walked down Race Track Road towards my home I didn't know what I would find. We had been turned back from many of the ways to my home because of houses or trees blocking the roads. There were power lines down and gas lines hissing out their poison as I trekked with trepidation towards my home. My friend Richard Handy, a Methodist minister of two small churches, accompanied me down to see my home so I didn't have to go alone. (Both of his churches, one in Pearlington and one in Claremont Harbor are gone, with only slabs remaining.)

We looked down what used to be Race Track Road, that went along the back bay of d'Iberville and St. Martin, and saw a sea of lumber and debris that used to be the homes and pieces of the lives of the residences along the bay. We trekked over this for more than eight blocks that was over the road, before I reached what was my street. From the moment we stepped on the road again we finally realized from that point on through Langley Point, there would not have one house left standing. Blocks and blocks of homes leveled from the awesome power that Katrina wrought. My lot seemed to be void of anything to remind you of what was there. If not for my son's truck in the middle of the lot with a tree lodged in the middle of it, I would not have recognized it as my own. My cement drive was visible, but, there was so much trash, tree limbs and mud it made it difficult to look around.

I broke down and cried not only for the loss of my only home I had ever owned but for the emptiness of it. No children running in and out of the house, there are no houses. No dogs barking at the neighbors, there are no neighbors. Not many trees for the squirrels and birds we used to watch play. Security is just a word now, not something we know for sure. For most of us, we never believed when we left that this would be the result. We believed we would have damage, yes, but we thought we would be able to get in our homes and mop up and fix up what we had left. There is nothing left.

Things were gone, but through this we have blessings as well. Everyone in our family and extended family are safe. God had blessed us in that, but it would be a few days before any of us would be sure of this. There wasn't any communication except for the few of us with *Cellular South* cell phones that could reach outside lines and let others know we were alright. Land line phones are still out in some areas, seven weeks after the storm.

The power would be out for weeks and we relied on each other for where we could get supplies and especially gasoline. Lines were long, anywhere from 1 ½ to 3 hours to get gasoline or food and water. Frustration is what we all are dealing with daily, waiting in lines for FEMA, Red Cross, and Salvation Army Relief. It was frustrating and tiring but doing these efforts became our jobs. Streets, businesses, homes and lives were a mess here. Yet, everywhere I went, people were happy just to be alive. We cried with each other, and shared our losses and moments we counted as blessings. Total strangers and friends hugging and sharing these moments and more importantly information. While I waited in lines I must have let twenty people use my phone because no one's phones seemed to be working but mine. I felt blessed to be able to give them this opportunity to reach their loved ones.

Yes, times are different for us on the Gulf Coast. As one of my College Professors from Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College, Carin Platt would say "we became a new society, 'Survivors of Hurricane Katrina'." But we are not victims, victims are those who didn't make it and there would be many as we found out when the news programs on the radio would report. Our television station, ABC affiliate WLOX, sustained major damage and had to report to us via the radio stations.

We are survivors and a new society with our own language. We know what MRE's (meals ready to eat) are and we have POD's (Point of Distributions,) We know what FEMA stands for but not how to get the help from it. Crisis Counseling is what you receive while you are waiting in the lines. Sometimes, like with myself, they have a counselor following you from one table to the next instead of being brought to a special table. (I really must be doing bad.) **Mucking** is now used in regards to the houses as opposed to stables. We **Muck** out the water soaked walls and furniture from our homes, all the while wearing face masks and rubber gloves to protect our selves from the bacteria growing and contaminating our homes. One of the many volunteer church groups helped Barb and Brady muck out their home. All these terms are pretty new to us but we are a society that has to adapt rapidly.

We have our own set of customs and a new set of moral codes. And defiantly, a new view of what is *normal*. We think it is normal now to sleep all in one room, head to toe, so you can feel a breeze from the fan. The temperatures have been

setting record highs. Carrying a gun to protect the few things one has remaining from the looters is normal. It is normal to cook and feed the neighbors, because we had a gas stove and a generator for power. We are now conditioned to walk outside when we here the horn of the Salvation Army or the Red Cross Trucks as they deliver a delicious hot meal at lunch and dinner. It was a Godsend when they first appeared on our block, bringing not only a meal but a word of encouragement as they passed through the neighborhood. Many of us were too busy cleaning up the yards and streets and our homes to even remember to cook. Sometimes, we were just too tired to attempt this job.

Times are different, it is now normal to live with your family or extended family. I, now at fifty, am back living with my parents along with my son, Kurt 14, and my brother Joseph who is 40. This never use to make one feel too proud to say, but it is a brand new time. We are grateful with some work done to the air conditioning system and water heater my parents home is nearly back to "normal." My sister, Mary and her husband Otto are living with his sister, Claire and Donnie Reed. My niece, Gindy and family are living with Anthony's father, Arnie and his wife Debbie Taranto. Then Brady and Barbara and their four children are living in his father's house, Richard and Marilyn Tucker, while they live in their fifth wheel travel trailer.

So many people have said, "What can I do for you?" My sisters, Lina Morgan and Marguerite Edwards, from Upstate New York were convicted to just come down and find out was needed. They also brought down a friend, Roberta Matthews, who also felt this conviction. They worked with their schools and churches in New York to be able to send help. These women encouraged and worked right along side us and picked up the pieces when we were not able to go on. They went out and **Mucked** houses and shoveled mud. They visited our church and the schools here and found out their needs. They have brought all this information back to their communities to spearhead more teams to come down. They would like to put a teacher in New York with a teacher from the coast, to give encouragement and support not only now but through the following year. Their hope is to put a face on this tragedy and not let them feel forgotten.

Like I said "Normal will never be the same." With so much attention given to New Orleans and what occurred there, the people here on the Gulf Coast have been feeling forgotten. If not for The Jay's of the world and the many volunteers that have come to help we would have been. Life may not be the same, but the outpouring of love and encouragement helps us to rebuild and gives us all hope as we rebuild our lives and our communities.

I have so much more to say and I will continue to tell you of our ups and downs. GOD Bless you all and pray for us.

Brenda Tucker-Cassity

Biloxi, MS

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