

SUM Hurricane Relief Team Answers Prayer of New Orleans Woman

Eleven weeks after Hurricane Katrina knocked her New Orleans home off its foundation and water from a levee break soaked its contents, Danielle Veal returned with two of her young sons to try and empty the house of its waterlogged contents.

“The insurance company or FEMA wouldn’t even come out to look at my house unless the place was completely empty, but that could cost \$5,000 and we had already lost everything we owned,” Veal said. “I spent three days out there moving things to the street and thought it might take 100. I began praying, ‘how am I going to get all this stuff out, Lord?’”

Veal is sure that the answer to her prayer came in the form of a team of volunteers doing a ‘mud-out’ of a house around the corner as part of hurricane relief efforts for the School of Urban Missions, located in nearby Gretna. The team included more than 20 volunteers from churches in Virginia, Michigan and Pennsylvania.

“As our group was emptying out a damaged house Danielle drove up from around the street corner and I could tell she was just numb with her loss,” said Jill Harrison, who along with Cindy Johnson led a team to New Orleans from West End Assembly of God in Richmond, Virginia. “I could see her heartbreak and thought there was an opportunity here we just couldn’t pass up.”

Harrison gave the phone number for the School of Urban Missions to Danielle, who went back home to call and see if a house-clearing team could be assigned to come and help her.

“We recognized that this is the kind of work that blesses both the recipient and the team,” Harrison said. “We made the arrangements with the SUM office and decided to surprise her by walking on over to her house right then. The look on her face made the whole trip worthwhile.”

“I was in my backyard when one of my boys started yelling out in front by the street,” Danielle recalled. “By the time I got there I saw Jill’s whole group walking down the street for my house like it was the Million Man March. It was truly amazing and truly a work of God.”

“When we marched around that corner we could see her jaw drop open,” recalled the Rev. Dave Odrey, a member of the mud-out team from First Assembly of God Church in Coraopolis, Penn. “She began dancing and crying at the same time. She had a big hug for everybody.”

The team was in its third day of doing mud-outs for SUM and by now had a lot of expertise in stripping houses of soaked contents and dealing with the flies, gnats, lizards, and even a snake they found in Danielle’s house. Aware of the mold, each was equipped with a respirator mask.

Danielle, husband Byron and their four sons had lived in a succession of cities after evacuating New Orleans ahead of Hurricane Katrina. After relocating to Texas they had to evacuate yet again to avoid Hurricane Rita. Byron, a plasterer, had been working long hours to get the family back on its feet economically, leaving Danielle to see what she could do about the house back in the Gentilly section of New Orleans.

“Now we can begin to think about starting over again,” Danielle said. “The schools here are still closed, so we can’t come home yet, but we want to rebuild and have our boys back here for the beginning of the next school year. And we really want to return to this place and rebuild because it always will remind me that this is the place where God blessed us.”

To learn more about volunteering for hurricane relief efforts through the School of Urban Missions in the New Orleans area go to the Web site at www.sumonline.org or call 1-800-385-6364. For information on making donations in support of SUM’s relief work call 1 (888) 567-6174 or send an e-mail to mtilton@sumonline.org.