

Voices from the Recovery

Gulf Coast Winterim 2006

Day 2 – 3/6/06

Sara Davis

After living in the small town of Ocean Springs years ago, returning to this beautiful place and seeing the devastation from Hurricane Katrina with my own eyes left me speechless. Many old, beautiful houses and buildings I had known as a child were left in ruins, while others suffered major structural damage when the water and wind came in with this angry storm.

This morning and afternoon, the Heathwood volunteers were finally able to get out into the community and experience the joy of doing our part in helping to rebuild the Gulf Coast. I had the opportunity to go with one group (about ½ of the Heathwood students) to a house lot owned by St. John's Episcopal, the church that's putting us up. As the bus rolled to a stop and students were able to get a look at how much debris was on the lot, a chorus of groans filled the air. Everyone's wide eyes spoke the same thought: "how can we possibly clear this much today"? The soil was hidden under a sea of moldy wood and rusty nails, with miscellaneous items ranging from shampoo bottles to dish detergent to children's toys and hundreds of others.

After receiving a few basic instructions, we rushed to begin cleaning the lot. With communication and teamwork, we quickly began to notice a change, small at first, but growing steadily throughout the morning. After a few hours of rummaging, we were able to clear enough debris to make two huge piles, each of which extended over thirty feet from the street. Considering that some people had doubted as to whether or not we could even make a dent in the rubble, our accomplishment was miraculous.

During our time working, we were able to engage in quiet conversation with one of the neighbors. His name was Paul, and he was originally from Liverpool, England. Paul lived in the neighborhood surrounding the Church's house lot, and like many had wondered for months if this particular piece of property would ever be cleared. After talking for a few minutes about his experiences in the storm, Paul departed, wishing his blessings on us as he drove off.

The experiences faced by the people of the Gulf Coast over the last few months have left many with feelings of sorrow, remorse and thankfulness which have been etched permanently on my heart. Now that we're here and in the middle of it all, our own experiences have been and will continue to be treasured, and the blessings and thanks from the people of my old hometown will forever linger in those of us who were fortunate enough to have been able to share in a few.