

Voices from the Recovery Gulf Coast Winterim 2006

Day 4 – 3/8/06
Thomas Hipp

On our fourth and final day, teams went to two different house lots and picked up debris left in the wake of Katrina. The first house we went to was on the bayou, and the owner, a man named Rock, met us there. When we got off the bus, he started thanking us for showing up at his “house” (in reality a concrete slab). We worked for a couple of hours shoveling and picking up debris, during which time we were able to recover a few personal items. Rock seemed eternally grateful. Before we left, Rock invited each of us to “crash” at his place once he rebuilt.

Following a lunch break, the groups rode to another house just up the road from the first to pick up debris. The lot was a mess, full of cinder blocks, trash and wood. We worked for about four hours. The owner, Ann Guice, worked side by side with us. She seemed to take comfort and pleasure in our group being there. While we were working, a group of US Army choppers flew overhead.

This trip was definitely a humbling experience for me. These people had everything, and one day it was simply taken away. Imagine driving away with a car full of personal belongings and returning to find an empty slab. Mrs. Guice related how she evacuated in about an hour and asked all of us what we would take if we had only an hour to decide.

I’m also taking home some hope. The people of Mississippi seem to be full of it, and even have enough to give away. Without it, they may have not been able to survive the storm. With it, they continue to endure.

Day 4 – 3/8/06
Betsy Williamson and Whitney Cantey

Today is our last working day in Ocean Springs. Group 6 went to the distribution center. Our group entered the building looking for a man named Bryan, the guy who runs the show. He gave us the seemingly impossible task of moving rows and rows of mattresses from room to room to make space for new volunteers who would be staying at the center in the weeks to come. Amazingly enough, time flew by as Whitney and I took charge of moving the mattresses and within a short time the job was done. Bryan was quite impressed. After lunch, he had a number of smaller tasks, but the enthusiasm and willingness to work made those tasks go quickly. Bryan treated us to popsicles after the work was done.

While we ate our treats, Bryan told us his story. After high school, he went into the army and had never gone to college, but he had a sense of wisdom that had many of us sitting in our thoughts. He was such a funny, simple man.

After leaving the distribution center the girls went to “freshen up”, no small task with 21 girls on the trip. We went to Eucharist in an empty lot where a house belonging to an old family friend of Coleman and Sara Davis used to stand. The owner told us a story of her experiences after the storm in which she related how she “cried, laughed and cried some more”.

This whole experience has been life changing in many ways, and it’s not over yet. To see the devastation first hand is much different than seeing it on TV. It’s real. The people are real. They have a spirit we’ve seen first hand. I hope to find that spirit and have it in my life.