



April 10, 2007

Dear Reader:

This section of our web site doesn't relate directly to the business of JIT Remediation & Restoration Inc. and some might suggest that perhaps it doesn't belong on a business-related web site.

We think differently!

This is a story as told by one of JIT's owners who traveled to Biloxi, Mississippi with his wife and 11 year old grandson to do some volunteer work to help clean up after Hurricane Katrina. Not as an owner of our company but as someone who had a personal calling to go there and serve!

It took a year and a half before he could put everything together and make it happen but on February 22, 2007 they left Ottawa and returned March 17, 2007. An incredible 6,050 km and 24 days later they returned, armed with dozens of stories: stories about despair, courage, hope, revival and joy; and remarkably, stories about the many blessings they received from the people they went there to help.

In our business, we deal daily with disasters but nothing on the scale of what happened during the hurricane season of 2005.

We are proud to be associated with someone who cares so much, who would travel so far, who would give of his time and be willing to give so much in order to volunteer to serve for such a desperate cause.

It's a story he feels is worth telling and we are honored to host it on our web site.

The JIT Team

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## A BLESSING IN DISGUISE

Mr. James and Ms. Marjorie started to cry when we showed up at their door and told them that we came from Canada and were here to help. He was 80 years old and she was 78.

### A Forgotten People

On Aug 29, 2005, Katrina's 130 mile per hour winds pushed a 4 foot storm surge through their house, blowing out windows and doors, washing out most of the belongings they gathered in a lifetime and deposited them amongst the rubble of many of the 6000 homes completely destroyed in the most powerful storm to ever hit the U.S. gulf coast.

If you can imagine the heartache and despair they felt as they sifted through what remained in their house and everything they had spent their lifetime working for, your heart will ache. They were given a total of \$1,200 from their insurance company and told that they wouldn't receive any more. And if you can imagine the crushing sense of lost hope they must have experienced when they looked at the destruction and damage to their community and their neighbor's houses and they began to understand the level of effort that would be required to rebuild their own lives, your heart will break. After all, where does somebody go to get renewed when you're 80 years old and the world as you know it, is in shambles?

Shortly after the storm, they moved into a small house provided by FEMA, located a few miles from their damaged home. The money they both earned working at night cleaning office buildings was put towards the necessities of life, with none left over for repairs. In the first days after the storm, they would every now and then meander over to their house and spend a bit of time trying to salvage and clean the few things they found while sifting through the mud and rubble. As a health precaution, the city came by and tore out the interior of their house and cleaned up the garbage. And when that was all done, their home sat there: damaged, empty and cold—for the next 517 days.

And daily, the light brought about by hope for the future became dimmer and dimmer for Mr. James and Ms. Marjorie.

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## Out of Sight, Out of Mind

It would be difficult for anyone, but especially a foreigner to pass judgment on the State of Mississippi, the City of Biloxi or FEMA. Given the magnitude of and devastation caused by Katrina and what we saw nearly a year and a half later, it's impossible to imagine that any disaster preparedness plan would have been able to handle this crisis. In all likelihood, it worked to the point of where their planning took them and then got blown away when the storm kept coming... and coming.

Katrina destroyed 6,000 of the 25,000 homes and businesses in Biloxi. Hundreds of historic homes and landmarks were leveled by a storm surge that was 27 feet high in places. Entire blocks of neighborhoods were reduced to debris fields. Huge casino barges broke from their moorings and were pushed across U.S. 90 as far as three-quarters of a mile down the road. The infrastructure was decimated and 53 people lost their lives in Biloxi alone.

In some of the hardest hit areas, about 45 percent of the homeowners had an annual household income of \$24,000 or less before the storm. A year and a half later, many property owners are still either waiting on insurance settlements or grants or other financing, contemplating the impact of the new flood elevations, or still unsure of where they are going to rebuild.

A year after the storm, the city of Biloxi released a report declaring that they were on the road to recovery: the vast majority of the debris that filled the streets and neighborhoods has been removed and they've issued thousands of repair permits and more than a hundred permits for new homes. Thousands of residents are back to work, many of them working at the 5 casino resorts now back in operation and the Mayor issued a statement declaring: "People across this country are going to remember Katrina not so much for the devastation, but for the remarkable recovery effort here in Biloxi and though they have a ways to go, everyone feels that they're headed in the right direction".

And on the day that that report was released, Mr. James and Ms. Marjorie still couldn't say as to what direction their own lives were headed!

## A Glimmer of Hope

Heritage United Methodist Church sits up on a ridge, overlooking south eastern Biloxi. Though it suffered significant wind damage: unlike it's sister church — Seashore United Methodist which was completely de-

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stroyed and washed away, it suffered no water damage since the ocean surge peaked 2 city blocks below the ridge. Within days, it reopened its doors and quickly became a resource center for the entire community. Residents and volunteers who sauntered through the doors, looking to help or be helped were greeted with a message that told them that they had just entered into a very special place. It read as follows:

### **Heritage United Methodist Church**

To all who need comfort  
To all who need friendship  
To the broken who seek healing grace  
To the wounded who seek sanctuary  
To rest and power to face tomorrow  
To all who need a savior  
This church opens its doors  
And in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ says

### **Welcome**

In an overwhelming show of support, volunteers showed up at the church, prepared to forego anything related to comfort and do anything they could to help out. And they went out into the streets daily providing comfort and in the first days, distributing some of the basic necessities such as food and water and helping the elderly and the sick make it to their doctor appointments.

In response, the residents who lived through the nightmare and had recognized that they had much to be grateful for, showed up at 5:00 am to prepare breakfast and lunches for the volunteers and stayed to have a hot supper ready for them when they returned in the evening.

In March 2006, the Indiana Area of the Methodist Church started construction on a volunteer center adjacent to the Heritage United Methodist Church. For the next 8 weeks, people from all over the State of Indiana came to Biloxi and contributed to the constructing of a 15,000 SF facility that was necessary to address the urgent need for housing for the volunteer workers who, for many years to come, will be a vital component in the rebuilding of the region of southern Mississippi.

Being in the Bible Belt, many attributed the response to a calling from God because once the volunteer center was completed, come they did—a steady stream of volunteers bringing with them supplies, skills, money, hearts full of compassion and a passion to joyfully serve.

By the fall of 2006, it became necessary for the church to appoint a full time project coordinator who, over time, reached out to the community and let it be known that they had resources including money, material and the manpower to help those who needed it the most.

In the early days, the sense of caring and community must have been incredible in that place, the evidence being the flourishing growth that continues even today.

It was late in the year that this news trickled down to Mr. James and Ms. Marjorie and ignited



a spark of hope.

## A Call to Action

I try to be a devout Christian and I can only surmise that this is the part that drives my desire to serve. I sat there in horror, watching TV the few days after Katrina was downgraded to a severe thunderstorm and my calling was never stronger than it was at that point in time. Everything seemed to point to me going: I had remediation/restoration experience, I had tools, I had my pickup truck and a chain saw and a strong back and the incredible urge to go and help.

What I didn't count on were all the floods in Toronto a few days later and having to put together a crew and go to help the people there. My calling to the gulf coast was put on hold since my work required my full attention for the next year and a half but never did my heart let me forget that I still needed to go.

In November 2006, my wife Judy and I really started to 'explore' the possibility of going south to help out for a couple of weeks and by the first week of January 2007, we had settled on a camp in Pascagoula, Mississippi and made a commitment to leave Feb 22, returning March 11.

Once we started telling everyone, we were bombarded with good wishes and books and movies and blankets and powdered milk and diapers from our grandson's school, our church and our families and friends: to the point where the only way it would fit into the back of my truck was for me to go and rent a cap.

Two weeks before the departure date, I called the camp in Pascagoula and let them know that I would be bringing a truckload of supplies. Unbelievably, I heard that there wasn't much need for supplies there anymore since most people were back up on their feet. The coordinator explained that camps further west along the gulf coast still had urgent needs and in all sincerity suggested that I look into the possibility of serving in one of them. It was as if he knew we weren't going where we needed to be!

With things up in the air, we remained committed to leaving Feb 22nd, unsure of where we were going to end up but confident that in the end, everything would work itself out. Four days before we were to leave, we were relieved to receive an email from Heritage Church in Biloxi, Mississippi, inviting us to serve there.

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The plan for us to cross paths with Mr. James and Ms. Marjorie was put into motion in the morning of Feb 22nd when we piled into our truck and headed south. (I recall that it was -19 that morning!)

## **A Life Lesson**

We showed up at Heritage United Methodist Church in Biloxi Mississippi in the early afternoon of Feb 25th. By the end of the evening we were set up in an 8 X 25 trailer in the backyard waiting and wondering what tomorrow would bring.

We had some preconceived notions about what we were going to do to help. I believed that my skill set pretty well matched the job description of the work that needed to be done and that I was going to make some valuable and meaningful contributions.

We awoke on the Monday morning to bright skies, +15 and an invitation from our two backyard neighbors to go work with them on the house they were working on.

We declined, telling them that we were going to see Ms. Sheila, the project coordinator who had mentioned the night before that they needed someone with my skills to go and do a house inspection to determine if a house they were thinking of working on was stable enough for repairs or whether or not it should be condemned and torn down. Not everyone had the skills/qualifications to do that and so I was feeling more than a little important at that point.

After attempts by Ms. Sheila to reach the homeowner that morning were unfruitful and secondary calls to other homeowners who needed some fallen trees cut up and removed also failed, we were left with the question of where we were going to work that day. Disappointed because I wanted to do something 'more important' than work inside doing drywall, painting, etc., we mentioned that the two couples in the backyard had invited us to work with them. It wasn't long before we had the address and we were on our way.

That morning, we showed up at the door of Mr. James and Ms. Marjorie and it was only after the tears were wiped away that we realized, for the first time, that this was going to be something much bigger than us going to help these 'poor' people from Mississippi.

## **Receiving Our Blessings**

To be clear, we weren't the reason for their hope.

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A month before we showed up, 12 volunteers made the 12.5 hour trip from Kentucky and in a weekend put on a new roof for them. Two weeks before we showed up, our backyard neighbors: Percy and Mary, from Ocean Springs, Mississippi and who are retired and Larry and Deborah, who are from near Austin Texas and who are semi-retired showed up and promptly told them that they were there to stay and would work on their house until either all the funds ran out or all the work was finished. And on the morning that we showed up on their front door, they were simply overwhelmed that someone from Canada cared enough to drive all the way down there to help them out.

And over the next 2.5 weeks, (it was only supposed to be 1.5 but at the last minute we decided to stay an extra week in an attempt to get everything done so that they could move in before we left—it didn't happen but it was close!) as we went about our work — redoing the entire interior of their home, they hovered about, preparing lunches for us, thanking and encouraging us, blessing us—never, not once complaining about the unfairness of life, the painful devastation they had just gone through or the things lost, that would never be replaced. Choosing instead to see the blessings in each thing any of us did, as if each one of them, through no thoughts of our own, was a hand-picked, personal gift we had selected and gave to them. They were so appreciative of even the slightest of things.

And the moment of truth was revealed and we were humbled when we watched Ms Marjorie, as she stood looking up at the front of her house, clap her hands gleefully while doing a little jig when the porch light, that had remained dark for a year and half, came back to life with a single flick of a switch. How much beauty was there in seeing that? It's a moment that none of us who saw it will ever, ever forget!

It was at that point that it was revealed to us that we weren't really 'sent' there to minister to these people: instead we were 'sent' there so that they could minister to us; in an effort to help us settle our own troubled souls.

On the day before our departure, all the drywall was up and painted, old parquet floor was torn up and awaiting new carpet, doors were hung, windows installed, bathroom fixtures (tub, vanity, shower) were installed, kitchen cupboards and countertops were installed, lights and ceiling fans were installed, all electrical outlets were tested and repaired, all the plumbing lines were cleaned out and fixtures installed, a new air conditioner and the venting was installed, the front door was replaced and Mr. James and Ms. Marjorie were ecstatic!

At lunch they served us plates of spaghetti with all the fixings and presented us with a cake and T-shirts that expressed their thanks for all the work we had done for them. And after many promises to stay in

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touch, many hugs and buckets of tears later, we left to go back to our trailer to pack up for our return back to Ottawa, planning to leave early the next morning.

It is disheartening to leave such a beautiful place where people gave so freely and the people received what ever we had to offer with hearts filled with gratitude. We departed the next day hoping that we would never forget that in a true spirit of giving, what you receive back will always be multiplied.

For the sake of interest, we can tell you that we received a letter from them a week after Easter and they are indeed back in their home!

And still we continue to live off of their energy.

## Conclusions

The reason behind calling people in Mississippi with a salutation of Mr. or Ms. is surely a sign of respect. Though our experience there wasn't vast, it would appear that most people even go so far as to call each other with the salutation included. To hear them, it sounds so right!

Mr. James and Ms. Marjorie are real and to know them is to love them for they truly are remarkable people.

Mr. Percy and Ms Mary showed us that by having a strong faith and a belief that the Lord walks beside you, you will look beyond what's in front of your eyes and begin to see the beauty in everything around you. Helping people is what they do. Once they completed the work for Mr. James and Ms. Marjorie, they were driving up to Kentucky to help build an addition on a home for a family that had taken in 2 kids who's parents were killed in a car accident. After that they were joining 30 other people in Arkansas, all who belong to a group called the Nail Benders, to build an addition on a church. Such is their life!

Deborah and Larry who also had immeasurable faith, were incredibly joyful: constantly singing and humming and laughing: never seeing the dark side of anything. If there was any one failure between them, it was Deborah's failure to learn Bob and Doug McKenzies' 'Call of the Great White North'. I may have done a disservice to all Texans for trying to teach her that. I can only imagine the cattle stampedes if she tries to imitate that call after sundown.

Both couples became surrogate parents to our grandson Louis. I am sure that in all the years to come, he

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will never forget them.

In more ways than one, this was a lifetime experience. God willing, Judy and I and perhaps a group of others will travel to the very same volunteer center next March for more of the same. If you have any questions or any interest, please feel free to contact me directly at [rgreen@jitottawa.com](mailto:rgreen@jitottawa.com).

Sincerely,

Rick Green

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The faith in our team  
The faith in the bible belt  
The blessing from the guy who rented us the cap  
The deer  
The swimming dogs  
The tornado in Alabama Thurs mar 1  
The tree, cross and necklace  
The people with the pills  
Trailer roof  
House inspection and the desire to cook  
Being adopted by different groups  
Louis' adoption  
Minister and old guy coming to cook  
The kids and the pet moose  
Carole feeling good about herself and then remembering that we had come all the way from Canada  
Percy/Mary going to Kentucky to build an addition  
Nail Benders  
Making lunch for us 3 times and all the work that went into that.  
Why Mr & Ms

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