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## Answering the Call

*Helping others in the wake of Katrina*

Every summer I do a disappearing act. A good friend once told me "The really smart people deal with the Arizona summers by *leaving*." Seeing the logic behind this philosophy, I leave Arizona each August in search of the really smart people. This years respite was transformed into an emergency response trek to Louisiana.

Until Hurricane Katrina made landfall, I hadn't paid much attention to the news. However, the impact of a Category 5 hurricane, with winds up to 160 mph, striking a city 70 percent of which was built below sea level is hard to ignore. At first, it looked like New Orleans had survived the worst of Katrina and it's residents could heave a collective sigh of relief. Then all hell broke loose. The protective levees collapsed and New Orleans was submerged under the staggering force of an unbridled sea.

As many of you know, I am a part of the Scientology Disaster Response Team. Known as Volunteer Ministers, we have provided help, counsel and manpower at almost every disaster site for the past decade. Veteran clients remember my trip to Littleton, CO after the Columbine High School shootings. After the September 11<sup>th</sup> tragedy, I gave backup support to the 200 plus Volunteer Ministers who assisted rescue workers at Ground Zero. Less than an hour after the second levee broke in New Orleans, I got the phone call that I was in charge of a 5 person team and we were on our way to Baton Rouge.

There is not enough room in this newsletter to describe the experience of being on the ground in Louisiana. Every day, we came face-to-face with the loss of lives, homes, family and legacy. We met and helped those whose lives had been torn to shreds. My father often said "Once I cried for I had no shoes, till I met a man who had no feet". Having witnessed the tragedy of Louisiana, I no longer cry for lack of shoes.

Yet, in the face of such devastation, we also experienced the indomitable spirit of those who would not give up. From the single mother who traveled across 3 states in search of her two children to the 88 year old black woman who lost everything – except the hope and joy of living – at every turn we saw courage and determination in the face of overwhelming circumstances.

On our last day at a Baton Rouge shelter, a talent show was held to raise spirits. The final performer was a woman who had lost everything in New Orleans and was still looking for some of her family. She dedicated her song to my team of Volunteer Ministers, saying "You all came here from far, far away just to **help** us all. If you hadn't been here, I don't know what we would have done". Then, with the voice of an angel, she sang Mariah Carey's "Hero". This touched all of us deeply, but words cannot describe the feeling when the rest of the shelter joined her and thanked us in song.

Many of you have said "I wish I could do more to help". I want you to know you have helped. A part of my consulting fees is donated to social betterment and disaster response efforts such as the Volunteer Ministers, so you have been contributing all along. Some of you sponsored my team directly and you have our deepest thanks. By helping us to get down to Louisiana, you have helped many people. All of you "held in there" and gave support just by patiently tolerating your computer dilemmas and online fiascoes while I was away. Your loyalty and quiet support helped me to help others. Thank you all.

I'm back in the office now, but a part of me is still in Louisiana. The worst is not over for them. My heart is with the Red Cross, National Guard, FEMA, law enforcement teams and all who work to restore what has been lost. Even more so, my heart is with the over 400 Volunteer Ministers who comprise the Scientology Disaster Response Teams on the ground in Baton Rouge and New Orleans as well as Biloxi and Gulfport, MS. Along with supplies and tetanus shots, we bring hope. We help the survivors overcome the mental torment Katrina brought to their lives. While others work to rebuild the cities, we will continue to restore the spirit of its people.