



# Coming for All

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Journey to New Orleans

By Joyce Serdinsky

# Prologue:

*The journey begins with a call.*

**W**hen the voice of God speaks as a small whisper in your heart, it has immense power to change your life forever. The devastation of Katrina was a shocking blow for this country, and many people watched in anguish as the people of New Orleans suffered unspeakable hardships. Yet in the aftermath of the devastation, the hand of God moved powerfully to heal and restore. And in my heart, God whispered to me, calling me to go - to make the journey into the midst of the suffering and hardship - to bring healing and comfort to the people of New Orleans.

For the past eight years, I have followed and interceded for Georgian and Winnie Banov of Global Celebration Ministries. They lead an anointed music and preaching ministry that the Lord has used to touch the deepest areas of my soul. I have followed their global itinerary on the Internet and have kept them in my prayers. After Katrina hit New Orleans, Global Celebration cancelled many of their mission trips abroad to minister at home in New Orleans, where they actually live. One night after worship at a meeting in Harrisburg, Pa., Georgian asked for volunteers to come to New Orleans. They needed help. At that moment, the Lord called me in the deepest part of my spirit. I knew that He wanted me in New Orleans. The conviction was so strong, that I would not have peace unless I made the trip. Georgian and Winnie belong to Victory Fellowship, which is led

by Pastor Frank Bailey. Victory Fellowship would house and feed the volunteers. We needed to pay only for our transportation and miscellaneous expenses.

In the past, I had volunteered on holidays to feed the homeless in soup kitchens, but I had always wanted to go on a mission trip abroad to help needy and hurting people. Here was an open door at home in the U.S. At

the time the Lord called me to go to New Orleans, I did not have the money for airfare, but He put people in front of me who were excited to pay for my trip as their contribution to the relief effort. Everyone wanted to share in the blessing of helping the victims of Katrina. My family, and my church - Jerusalem Farms Ministries in Jackson, N.J. - and other friends were very generous. They sent me on each trip with every single expense paid, plus money to give away in New Orleans as the Holy Spirit led. The prayers and financial support I received will forever touch my heart. A precious girl from my church, named Joann, even wanted to pick me up at

4 a.m. to take me to the airport. I set aside my vacation time at work to be in New Orleans before Christmas. As I prepared for the trip, somehow I knew it would change my heart forever. Part of the preparations involved health precautions. Global Celebration advised me to get a tetanus shot and a hepatitis A shot (to guard against contaminated water). I also needed to bring a sleeping bag, workboots, workgloves, and a lot of love for people who were working 12- to 16-hour days for extended periods.

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**Arrival:  
The blue city.**

The flight to New Orleans was strangely quiet. I thought about the type of people who might be on the plane: Business people, residents or volunteers. I was blessed to sit next to a resident who opened up and shared his story with me. His name was Nathan, a businessman who had evacuated with his whole family to Texas. Fortunately, his home was repairable. He told me they actually worked 22 hours each day in the beginning of the restoration period. They suffered migraines for weeks from exposure to the mold. He commented on the tireless chain-saw crews, many of whom were volunteers. He had been on the receiving end of people reaching out to help him and his family. He told me that his life would never be the same. The experience has forever changed his attitude, his values and his outlook on life for the better. As Nathan spoke, his gaze was steady - without blinking. His eyes were glassy as he struggled to hold back tears- it was obvious he was speaking from his gut. He is grateful for everything he has, especially his wife and daughters, and will never take normal things, like an open convenience

store, for granted. He went through the flood and came out with greater depth to his character. I asked him if he would let me pray for him, and he welcomed prayer. He mentioned that the Catholic Church had been helpful to him. Nathan also spoke for everyone in New Orleans, saying that they were grateful for all the volunteers - that they didn't know where they would be without the help. As we were flying over New Orleans and preparing to land, he pointed out the lake that flooded the area, and he also pointed out the innumerable blue roofs. He explained that the blue roofs were actually temporary replacement roofs, covering the tops of homes that had lost their roofs in the storm. The impact of hurricane Katrina hit me right there. There was blue everywhere. Later on, I found out everyone who needed a blue was not even able to get one.

**Encountering a hawk in Jefferson Parish.**

Once I arrived in New Orleans, the airport and shuttle workers were very welcoming. A shuttle worker named Kelly took me under her wing and helped me find my way



around. I had preferential treatment as a volunteer. She knew about Victory Fellowship, the ministry that would be my host, and she was thankful for the considerable help they had provided for people in the area.

Driving through Louisiana was an eerie experience. Even in Jefferson Parish, everything looked like it had been swamped with muddy water. I passed crooked signs, countless boarded-up windows, grass bent over like on the bottom of a riverbed, ditches full of garbage, and chain-sawed tree trunks. I arrived at the compound by 11 a.m. and registered at the office. There was a team from the Bahamas leaving as I got settled into the ladies' tent.

Up since 3 a.m. and hungry, I walked across the compound to the huge tent by the road, where volunteers were feeding the public. I walked past a large gymnasium that had been converted into a warehouse. There were tables full of assorted supplies set up outside, along one side of the warehouse. Cars were lined up around all three sides of the warehouse, and all the way out to the road. Workers were loading the cars with various supplies that included drinking water, baby formula, diapers, buckets of cleaning products and boxes of food. An American Indian with a long gray ponytail and a cowboy hat was shouting orders and driving a forklift. He stopped short in front of me and asked me if I were a new volunteer. He then introduced himself as Red Hawk, and offered me a ride in the forklift to my destination. I climbed on the forklift as this high-spirited man proceeded to dart back and forth riding the forklift like a pony, shouting orders, and spinning around quickly. I almost fell off twice. It was the first and only time I ever did "donuts" on a forklift! Finally, I arrived at the big tent, in one piece. I knew I would see Hawk again.

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Once under the tent, I could feel the total desperation of the people. I decided to skip lunch and just started serving people. The blank faces of totally humbled people with nothing left and nowhere to go made me quickly forget about being hungry. Just as the flood had ravaged the land, leaving its scars everywhere, the trauma endured by the people of the area was chiseled into their faces. A simple smile or act of kindness would bring light to them. I looked around at them and suddenly the reality of their suffering overwhelmed me. As Jesus said, "What you do to

the least of these, my brethren, you do to Me." Serving people whose spirits are broken, and sitting with them while they eat somehow comforts them and lifts the burden a little bit off them. Sometimes they needed to tell their story. They needed someone to share their reality. And some of them couldn't talk about it yet, although all of them needed comforting.

Most of the volunteers under the tent that day were from Canada. A team from Quebec had come to remove trees while others worked in the kitchen trailer. Most of the outreaches were either in a tent or a trailer. There were people from many different nations staying at Victory Fellowship to help the people of New Orleans. There was a team of 50 volunteers from Holland. Many denominations were there helping, like the Mennonites, who had a "perpetual" team onsite gutting houses.

#### **Steak and potatoes – and the miracle of God's love.**

An hour later, an intercessory friend of mine came by to pick me up and take me out of Jefferson Parish, into New Orleans, on the other side of the canal. This was where we would encounter the most serious damage. Our driver was a resident who was a street pastor supported by





Global Celebration. Pastor Janyce Stratton of Jesus' Miracle Power Ministry had operated a halfway house before the hurricane. She would take in drug addicts and turn them around. She lost nearly everything - the halfway house, her car, and a music collection. She expressed a need for worship music and preaching cassettes. We were now driving to the seriously damaged areas of the streets in downtown New Orleans to hand out dinners and minister as the Lord called us. We gave Janyce money for gas, and then picked up food at a restaurant that generously donated T-bone steaks with broccoli and potatoes! There was no silverware, but we didn't mind. As we headed into New Orleans, the devastation that we drove through was unbelievable.

You really would have to see it to believe it. It was as if there had been a full-blown war. Debris lined the streets. Streetlights were bent in half or pulled out of the ground by the concrete, pieces of houses were ripped apart and

tossed at random. There was a virtual sea of blue tarps in every direction. I saw a mattress on the island of a highway. Car after car was soaked in mud. And tired people were laboring everywhere to clean up the mess. How fun it was to stop and ask them if they wanted a free steak dinner. If they said yes, a couple of us would hop out of the van and ask them if we could pray for anything for them. If they didn't want prayer, we would simply ask God to bless the food. Most people were thankful for prayer. Many people bowed their heads when we prayed, or closed their eyes or took their hats off. I was touched by their reverence for the Lord. Some people looked so deeply troubled. I was flooded with compassion and wanted to pour out all the love of God that was in me. All of them were grateful.

One young African-American girl on the street put out one hand for a dinner, then the other arm out for a hug. I held her tight for a moment. Sometimes prayer doesn't require words. In fact, words don't even come close to cutting it. No words can really express the compassion you feel for someone, how you are hoping God will heal their traumatized world. Words can be inadequate when you can hold someone with the love of the Father. The Bible says that in all our afflictions, He is afflicted. At this moment in my life, I suddenly discovered the power of an embrace. The book of Hosea says that God's heart cries out for us. God will use your arms to wrap around someone so that He may touch the broken. God will use your smile to reach deep into someone's soul as a beacon of hope. He will use your ears to listen to someone's story, receiving what they have to say so that they know someone cares about what happened to them. And these moments don't have to be in extraordinary circumstances, such as the aftermath of a hurricane.

Right within our families, among friends, neighbors and co-workers, God can love through you. You'll have to get over yourself, your busy schedule, your needs, your hang-ups and your own wounds. You will find that as you forget about your own needs in order to help someone else, God will take care of the bigger issues in your life, almost by surprise. Naturally, we all get caught up in our schedules and don't make the time to give love, but if we



spend all of our energy meeting schedules and making a living, what eternal value will our life have in the end? All the “treasures” that we accumulate can be washed away by nature’s fury in a hurricane. And then what? If your treasures are in your heart, they cannot be washed away. God rocked my reality with that girl’s hug. The experience may even have been supernatural. Hebrews 13:2 says, “Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by doing this, some have unwittingly entertained angels.” God works in mysterious ways. And on top of the many blessings that day, I had skipped lunch and God gave me a T-bone dinner!

**Toys in the rain.**

I found out later on that Victory Fellowship had conducted a toy drive in New Orleans that same evening. A generous soul from New Jersey had donated something like \$70,000 worth of toys for the children of the area. About 800 families came out despite the pouring rain to get toys before Christmas. It was the first time we had passed out something that was not a vital necessity, such as drinking water or baby formula.

That evening we had a torrential rainstorm. Sheets of water came down leaving two inches of water on the long walk from the church to the tent area. I was wearing clogs and it still amazes me that my socks were dry when I got into the tent. A storm like that can be rather dramatic when you’re only shelter is a tent. The walls and ceiling bellowed, the two hanging lamps swung around, and the rain hammered on the canvas. Three of us prayed together before bed. I slept through the entire night.

**The Second Day:  
Stopping for a lamb in the line-up.**

There were several places where I could serve, including different street outreaches, kitchen duty, feeding the public in a big tent, or in the warehouse. Everything was good, but I needed to know what God specifically wanted me to do. During worship, I prayed about it, and I felt that I should stay at Victory Fellowship and work in the warehouse supply line. This work required a great deal of preparation, and was nonstop once it began. Cars would line up for

**A day in the life of a volunteer.**

Victory Fellowship housed and fed us, so we abided by their rules. Housing was in either a big tent or the gymnasium at Christian Life Center, a few miles away. Everyone brought sleeping bags, and Victory supplied the cots. The showers at Victory Fellowship were in a shower trailer or at the gym. The kitchen was a trailer, supplied by Operation Blessing, and pretty much managed by a Motorcycle Ministry called His Laboring Few, along with a wonderful chef from Long Island, named Kramer. We were up early and lights were out by 10:30 p.m.

<b>6 a.m.</b>	Shower
<b>7 a.m.</b>	Breakfast
<b>8 a.m.</b>	Team worship, prayer worship and mandatory meeting
<b>9 a.m.</b>	Prepare for the outreach site
<b>10:30 a.m.</b>	Depart for the outreaches
<b>11 a.m. to 4 p.m.</b>	Outreaches, warehouse, front-tent, on kitchen duty, office help or cleaning and gutting houses
<b>4 p.m.</b>	Clean up in work areas
<b>5:30 p.m. to 7 p.m.</b>	Dinner
<b>7:30 p.m.</b>	Teams back to the tents or gym
<b>10:30 p.m.</b>	Lights out



supplies all the way out to the road. If the line dispensing the supplies didn't move fast enough, the people waiting in cars that were out on the road would be ticketed. A young mother whose name was Brandy managed the warehouse activities. Red Hawk helped her out a great deal, especially on the days when she could not be onsite. When I showed up, Red Hawk at first placed me at the very end of the supply line. It was my job to hand out baby formula to people who needed it, although I didn't know a thing about baby formula. Suddenly a very pretty girl drove up in a Corvette. She didn't need any baby formula, but she lingered in front of me. Her eyes were searching for something else. Almost casually, I told her that God loved her. Instantly, her eyes welled up with tears. She replied, "I know, but I just need to hear it sometimes." I assured her how much He loved her, how beautiful He made her, and that His presence was all over her. I asked her if she would open her heart and let Him in, and she said yes. We quickly prayed in the midst of the long line-up of cars. Her face lightened. I know she left that day a different person. Her name was Sandy. She was another special one God put in front of me.

Jesus always stopped for the one in front of Him and gave that individual His undivided attention, regardless of what those around him said. The shepherd leaves the whole flock to go after the one sheep that has wandered off. In fact, if the sheep continues to wander off, putting itself at risk, the good shepherd will break its leg to keep it from getting into danger. He then will carry the sheep, safe, in his arms. I was one He had to break and carry - are you? Nothing is of greater importance than the one God has put in front

of you. Embrace that person and that moment, and your busy schedule will - by an act of God - fall into order, your needs will be met and you yourself will be healed. The Bible says, "Seek His kingdom and His righteousness and all these things will be added to you as well." If Sandy were the only person I would be privileged to help, it would be worth the trip to New Orleans.

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Of course, by this time, Hawk was hollering at me for holding up the line. He ended up moving me to the front of the line because I liked to pray with the people. The front of the line was not as rushed and busy as the back of the line. I had to ask the people driving up in cars three questions: How many families did they need supplies for; did they need drinking water; and how many babies did they need supplies for? Hawk stuck a bar of soap in my hand to write their answers on the side windows of the cars to help expedite the warehouse line. This was a very intense three hours. Actually, the entire trip was intense. In car after car, I greeted people and "interviewed" them. Almost everyone let me pray for him or

her. The Holy Spirit was all over many people. God is near to the broken. In Isaiah 61:1, it says that, "He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted." Many were desperate for God to touch and heal them. So I would ask them the three questions, then ask them if I could pray for anything specific for them. Many people opened up, and out came stories of trauma. I would stand next to the driver's car window, with my eyes closed and pray. One woman startled me. She stuck her head all the way out of the car window to put it under my hand. When I opened my eyes, she said she just wanted ALL that God had for her. Another woman asked



me to pray for her child's dog. As I did, she started weeping. She said, "You don't understand...this dog is the only thing my son has left...and if the dog dies, I don't know what I'm going to do." Then there was a beautiful woman in a minivan. I said to her, "God made you so beautiful; where are you from?" She said she was from Egypt, and a Muslim, and had been in the United States for two years. She had come to Victory Fellowship for boxes of Bibles. Her children were having a Bible study in her basement and it was holding them together. She began to weep. The Holy Spirit was all over her, and I told her so. She said this Christian thing was starting to get to her and her husband. Her name was Wafa. Working the warehouse line became my favorite activity at Victory. Intense, exhausting, but the very reason I was led to New Orleans in the first place.

**Coming for all.**

That night as I walked up to the ladies' tent, I heard an awesome sound. It stopped me. When I got inside, I asked the other women what was that sound and where was it coming from. They said it was the Mennonites in the tent next door, singing. They sing a cappella in wonderful harmonies. It sounded like angels. God has anointed people everywhere. There is no way He is coming back to take sides. He is coming back to take ALL. What kind of responsibility are we taking so the gospel of Jesus Christ can be heard and this can happen?

**The Third Day:  
Many people, one heart.**

On the third day of the trip, I worked in the warehouse all day long. We unloaded palettes of donated items, resorted them and organized everything for the next supply line. This work required constant vigilance in order to keep supplies ready to hand out to so many desperate people. I ran across a bucket of donated supplies that said, "From friends in New Jersey." I loved the fact that God let me find a donation from my home state in an entire warehouse of generous donations. I worked with teams from Connecticut and Ohio, and with Red

Hawk all day. Though totally surrounded by Christians, he is not a Christian yet, but currently considers himself a holy medicine man and has been a chief for the past 30 years. He is Choctaw and Mohawk, and a very special human being. His tribe suffered hardship from Katrina. He had wonderful administrative skills for what needed to be done in the warehouse everyday, and God used him there. He was good to me and made sure I didn't need anything.

**Departure:  
A heart woven into the people of New Orleans.**

By the last day of my trip, I didn't want to leave. A piece of my heart was woven into the people there. As I was carrying my breakfast from the kitchen trailer to the cafeteria in the warehouse, the Lord whispered in my heart once again, telling me that I would be back. The power of God's voice speaking in my spirit stopped me in my tracks. I stood there, holding my breakfast, with tears dripping off my chin. Thank God I was going back. I was too overcome to consider not returning. From my experiences in New Orleans, I am convinced that God has deposited a measure of genuine goodness into every single human being on this earth, and that it can be cultivated to bear fruit. It has been difficult to tell this story...I wept a lot. I believe my heart was made tender by my experience. The devastation to New Orleans and the hearts of the people who lived there showed me how blessed I am and how grateful I need to be for every little thing in my life. I felt so happy and spoiled to come home to my one-bedroom apartment and 12-year-old car. We take so much for granted. After all I experienced, I wonder now if God used the people of New Orleans to help me more than I helped them.

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*Paris and Frank Bailey, senior pastors at Victory Fellowship.*



*Christina Weidener, worship leader at Mt Calvary.*



*Debra Hoffman, business manager at Victory Fellowship, and friend.*



*Worship at the morning meeting in the Warehouse Kitchen..*