

Hurricane Ike with the Red Cross

The National Red Cross was called in for Hurricane Ike. The Pee Dee Disaster Coordinator calls to see if DSHR members were available to go to Texas. There are many Red Cross functions, being a nurse, I am in Health Services. The usual deployment routine goes like this. One calls the Red Cross phone number for an air flight, that day, if possible. Then, one attends to home responsibilities for the next 3 weeks ie. pet care, bills, appointments. Pack lightly. I have an index card in my back pack that lists the essentials. There is a recording one can call for details of the location of the new headquarters and vital information of how to get there. Even though this information is updated, it was better to get the initial information while still at home instead of the busy airport. Usually, one is instructed to obtain a rental car at the airport, with others, if possible, and go to a certain location.

Headquarters was at Fort Worth. Here is where volunteers find out what and where their assignment will be. Three other nurses and myself were assigned shelters 2 hours away. They are now my Kansas and Tennessee friends.

Eventually, I was assigned a Red Cross Church shelter. It was the best shelter I have ever been in. Buses brought people in from the coastal areas. There were babies and elderly with medical and mental conditions such as diabetes, cardiac conditions, infections, pregnancies. These conditions were made worse by the stress. Most were improvised and hadn't sought medical care or filled a prescription in a long time. Many said they were going to do it just before the Hurricane hit (???).

These Church volunteers welcomed evacuees as part of their church family giving them loving care and concern. They enabled medical care by providing transportation to clinics, hospitals and pharmacies. I was offered a day off but refused. I can't remember when my skills were so needed. I didn't mind the long hours, sleeping on a cot, unfamiliar food, losing contact with the outside world. If only other shelters could be like this. Eventually, the contract with the church was over and the people had to move.

I was assigned to a shelter in Orange, Tx. This was a shelter in a school gym area with just a sea of cots in a gym floor with none of the warmth of the church volunteers. Transportation was also gone. Many of the people had homes flooded in the area and would go there or to work during the day. They had a place to sleep and eat. Not all the assignments are the same.

Some people ask why I do it. It's an opportunity to share in the lives of others and perhaps help them at the same time. It also provides an opportunity for adventure. After one gets off the plane from home, it is a surprise where one will be, what services one will be providing, where one will be sleeping (cot or motel), what one will be eating ie. spicy food of Texas, what new volunteer friends one will meet, and of course using the American people's resources to serve those whose losses are so great.

When one returns home, one takes a fresh look at their surroundings and routines. The simple things in life take on a renewed value such as walking the dog outside in the sunlight.