

The Resilience of a Community

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and Erin Young

Abstract: This article provides two perspectives of what it is like to experience a natural disaster. One from a helping professional who was in the middle of the natural disaster and another from a second helping professional who arrived after the natural disaster to assist in the recovery process. Reflecting on the experience can be both helpful for the healing process as well as beneficial for those who may experience a natural disaster in the future.

Keywords: disaster relief; Hurricane Sandy; emergency; service learning

At the end of October 2012 – while teaching at the School of Social Work at Monmouth University and maintaining a small private practice in New Jersey – I heard the weather report: a perfect storm would hit the Jersey Shore. Well, anyone who knows me will tell you in my next life I plan on coming back as a weather man because they are always wrong and they never lose their jobs! I paid attention to the warnings, bought extra water just in case the public source became contaminated. We brought in the outdoor furniture because we had just eaten dinner outside the night before with a view of the Atlantic Ocean and Sandy Hook National Park.

I stocked up on batteries, signed up for the town emergency number and collected all the flashlights and candles in the house. I even had enough forethought to fill up at the gas station, but only because I was below a quarter of a tank. Then I laughed, hunkered down and waited for the weather men to be wrong yet again. Preemptively, the University cancelled classes for two days and I thought good, I don't have to grade papers tonight and I can watch movies while I keep an eye on the storm that wouldn't materialize.

The Hurricane: One Perspective

Yet that didn't happen. My husband and I watched with horror and wonder as a wall of water enter our town with such force that it took boats that were docked for the winter and whooshed them down the street into someone's living room. We heard the magnanimous whistle of the wind as it took our lattice work and deck railing off of our deck and almost into our neighbor's back door. We felt our house shake from 85 mile per hour winds, and wondered how many roof shingles we would lose.

This was scary and fascinating all at the same time. Mother Nature is a force not to be reckoned with. And of course we did all of that without electricity.

The town had declared mandatory evacuations of all those that live in the lower lying areas. That was not us, so we stayed. During high tide and low tide in the next few days the flooding exacerbated the situation. As if it could possibly make things worse; yet it did. We worried for our lower lying neighbors. We worried about how large of an area was impacted. The governors of New York, New Jersey and Connecticut called for a state of emergency and requested the tri-state area be declared disaster areas; Governor Christie cancelled Halloween for the State of New Jersey. We heard this news through a good old fashioned battery operated transistor radio. The TV and Internet were not options. We had given up land lines years ago and all the cell towers were down. The winds died down, the tides receded and we could finally venture out (on foot, as no one but emergency vehicles were allowed on the roads).

The area around us was cut off since there were live power lines down everywhere. Trees were in people's houses and strewn across four lanes highways. Boats were being used for transportation in the lower area of town because the streets were still flooded. To say I and my neighbors were shocked by the devastation would be to minimize the emotion that was palpating in the community.

The Jersey Shore was in rescue and recovery mode. The streets were soon filled with National Guard preventing people to enter certain areas. You had to prove residence to gain access to certain streets,

curfews were enacted, shelters were established including at my university. Gasoline lines were monitored by police. They grew to 4-5 hours long for those stations that had generators. Some businesses and houses were no longer there, and numb people started a long and painful clean-up. In the inland areas power was restored more quickly than in the areas near the water. The stores in those areas were constantly busy and there was a run on gasoline powered generators, water, and other items considered to be necessary for long term survival. Electricity was projected to be on in close to three weeks. The university was closed for almost two weeks, and local school districts were closed longer than that. I had the scattered ability to text, but had to charge my phone in my car with the full tank of gas. When the roads were finally opened, a 20 minute ride somewhere took almost an hour because of the detours. Some towns were not to open back to their residences until the week of January 7th, over 3 months after the storm, because it wasn't safe to enter. Power lines and trees stayed down and untouched for almost a month. Not because the tri-state area electric and tree companies weren't working; but there was so much to do. There was a shortage of people power and utility poles. Our county alone lost over 3,000 trees. When you saw an electric company truck or a tree trimming service it was almost always from another state. My eyes still tear to think of the generosity of those men and woman who were working tirelessly 18 -20 hours a day, until we all had power restored. Food in refrigerators went bad. Impromptu dinner parties, cooked on propane stoves or outdoor grills, were convened to eat food before it went bad.

We realized that the Jersey Shore would never be the same. Pictures viewed nationally (that most people in New Jersey could not see) told the tales. We also knew that the disaster was maybe as bad as Katrina when it hit New Orleans. We just didn't know then that in many ways it would be worse. There were no horrible reports about large groups being left behind in some unforgotten area but there were fatalities and decimation that couldn't be taken in with one look of the naked eye. It took more than a dozen times up and down my path to school to see most of the devastation. My town alone had 1400 homes (not people) that were unable to return to their houses because they were structurally unsound or had to be condemned. In the weeks that

followed, that number was decreased to only 400 homes that needed to be condemned. But others were told by FEMA they couldn't rebuild unless they were 8 feet above ground. How do you do that to a 200 year old cement building (our post office)? What if you were someone who makes a living as a fisherman, living catch to catch, and now without a boat?

I was overwhelmed as a person and never really "kicked into" social worker mode except to show empathy for my fellow neighbors. I was numb to what was happening. I was frozen in the moment of crisis that couldn't really be understood intellectually or emotionally. I talked with people about the damage and none of us could comprehend the devastation. We were emotionally and physically exhausted from what we saw in our little corner of the world. Without electricity we found ourselves going to sleep extremely early and sleeping 10-12 hours, talking little about what was going on around us. Since I have managed crisis after crisis in my years as a social worker my lack of response was almost as surprising as the overwhelming catastrophe the people of the tri-state area experienced because of Sandy.

This area also survived 9/11. Many in this county could see the twin towers fall and smell it weeks after from their homes. Highlands New Jersey is where many of the rescued folks came in ferries after the twin towers were hit. Middletown NJ (one town over from Highlands) lost more people in the terrorist attacks that day than any other place in the US. But terrorism and natural disaster, while creating similar issues, evoke different feelings. With 9/11 there was fear, but also rage. During 9/11 people were cancelling airplane reservations, setting up bank accounts in neutral countries and talked about moving out of highly populated areas that were considered targets to terrorism. Yet people were willing to enlist in the military and protect the freedom that Americans covet.

During Sandy a sense of community and protection came. People reached out to their neighbors and gave what little they had to anyone that needed it. An awe of Mother Nature and a sense of vulnerability engulfed the air. Before I even had power back at my house I was flocking to towns that had electricity and Wi-Fi spots to check in with

colleagues and students. One of my fellow faculty members had damage that took more than a year to fully find and repair. Fellow students helped those that needed it, neighbors helped neighbors, you could hear a common refrain of “it is just stuff” as people were managing and thankful to be alive.

As I write this I am ashamed that I didn't jump in to help like my students did. I still don't know why I didn't just drive to the university and help with those being sheltered. I just didn't think about what was happening beyond my small and heavily impacted community. The crisis in my town was monumental and extremely hard to comprehend. The town was sheltering its' own residents in the high school. I didn't even realize that the university had power or had opened the doors to those that needed shelter. I am not even sure how that news was disseminated. There was no information via e-mail (which was my only form of communication with the world) that the university was accepting families. In retrospect, I want to do something different if I am ever in the middle of a crisis and I hope I can.

I had to meet with my clients using candlelight; with blankets and no heat or water (a town with wells). My area of specialty is addictions and I had to assure that no one relapsed over Sandy. Sitting with people and listening to their perspective of our shared experience deepened our already private and privileged relationship. One teenage client – seeing me for his Adderall addiction – said that the event gave him reason to stay clean, since his parents needed him to help with the clean-up and to care for his grandmother. That level of responsibility motivated him to strive for sobriety.

Another client, a Caucasian male in his 40's did relapse over the event. His business in the financial services industry had been impacted financially and he wasn't sure if he would be able to return to his place of employment. Eventually he did gain sobriety and get another job, but he took a large financial hit.

Finally a client returned after being absent for over two years, because he couldn't cope with his losses and needed a place to talk about his experiences. The group of mental health professionals that I work with increased our clinical supervision time so we had a place for self-care and to watch our secondary

trauma since so much of what was happening impacted us personally as well. Collectively, rather than meeting one a month, we increased supervision to twice a month for almost a year after Sandy. We also alerted each other regularly when we were meeting with those particularly hit by Sandy. At the end of the day we would stay in the office to talk with one another about those particular clients and the emotions needed from the clinician to work with those who were challenged after Sandy. Luckily, those in the office were inconvenienced in minor ways with up to two weeks without power or hot water with no permanent damage. It was easy to provide self-care by replenishing refrigerators and taking hot showers when electricity returned.

The university had to get back to the work at hand; but we couldn't always do that since some social work agencies had been washed away or had significant damage and couldn't re-open right away, internships were closed. More than a dozen of our students had lost most if not all their belongings, and some had lost loved ones. We just kept taking it all in and dealing with the adversity life brought us for the semester.

Then there was a dramatic shift. The outside world was checking in on us. Faculty colleagues who lived outside the area started texting. Family members could finally get through via e-mail and text. You were aware that people were concerned. I heard from them about the pictures and videos that we could not see on social media. I didn't know for weeks that the iconic roller coaster in Sea Side had been washed into the ocean. I finally grasped by their descriptions the vastness of the devastation. When others started asking about us, I suddenly had an energy to act, and to use my training and skills to help others. Those inquiries about our well-being and our immediate needs finally knocked me into second gear. I realized I needed to access my network. The rest of the world was intact and could assist! I reached out to family and friends, asking for the help that was needed. I went on the radio show of a niece; I connected another niece's Catholic school with the local church. I asked a social work faculty member from the Midwest to run an underwear and sock drive. Money was requested for cleaning supplies, new underwear and baby supplies. We had multiple communities that were totally decimated. Just in this county, the

towns of Sea Bright, Highlands, Atlantic Highlands, and Union Beach were so damaged that they would need help for months, if not years. These weren't beach towns with million dollar second homes, these were working communities who needed everything...pots...pans...clothes...beds, TVs... everything.

Then an e-mail came to Dean Mama at the School of Social Work at Monmouth University. A stranger, a faculty member with a social work background from University of Louisville wanted to bring a crew of students to the Jersey Shore to help in whatever way they could. I thought how nice! I also thought why didn't I do that after Katrina? The students would come after finals were finished at the University of Louisville. But details would need to be worked out, money raised, housing, room and board and of course what work they could do. I thought, how generous and how easy. Dr. Hayden and I communicated and I told her to go ahead to plan and come on to New Jersey! It turned out I was correct on the first thought - the generosity was legitimate, but I was wrong on the second item, it wasn't easy. Our university, when approached about room and board, appreciated the generosity of the gesture but was worried about liability, putting students with other students while our university still had two weeks of school left, and using university funds in a way that didn't directly benefit our students. Our students who lived off campus were anxious about taking in strangers who they might not like. Faculty, staff and the few students willing to take students were too far away from the targeted area of work. Finally, a housing plan came to fruition, faculty from another discipline, colleagues from my private practice, a soon-to-be MSW graduate and his wife and my house would be the designated housing.

From the beginning of November I made regular attempts to find work for the students. I was leaving messages (voice mail, email and in person) telling everyone I could think of that I had a crew of folks that were coming to work for a week and needed something to do. Housing was arranged but as of 36 hours before their arrival the crew from Louisville had no work! Out of desperation I was asking everyone and anyone, people at grocery stores, people in line to pick up their mail if they had any ideas. A neighbor gave me a number for a friend

who was in charge of work crews in a very hard hit town, Sea Bright. A connection happened...logistics almost completed, and with 30 hours to spare before the group from Louisville was to arrive!

Sea Bright is a town of 1,400 people that has streets that flood at high tide every time it rains. It is the town that all newscasters report from for every nor'easter, and it's a town of limited means. This town was badly hit, natural gas lines broke and three feet of sand was in the streets, delaying residents return to assess damage right after the storm. Consequently, by December when the students arrived, mold was setting into the walls and other parts of the houses.

The students arrived late on a Sunday and began work Monday morning with their faculty member and my husband Bob Ward. I must admit I am not much for physical labor, especially what they had on the agenda, but I was jealous. I was not a part of something so tangible to help those in need. Yes, I was still in school, struggling to cram 15 weeks of knowledge into 13. Yes, I was listening to my clients who experienced their own trials and tribulations through the storm and aftermath. Yes, I listened to students who had challenges of finishing their semesters, making up internship hours and dealing with family crisis because of the storm. Yes, I had done some fundraising for my town. And yes, I had 4 strangers living in my house and the responsibility of managing the logistics the whole week. Still, I didn't feel like I did enough. This was my community and it would never be enough.

As it turned out the experience of having the students could not have been better for me, my husband, the town of Sea Bright, and I think also for the great group from Louisville. The devastation seen through their eyes two months later when things had already improved reassured me that the devastation was as bad as it seemed. The fresh eyes and committed energy that came with the group was revitalizing. It provided hope and comfort that others cared and were willing to assist.

Their arrival forged new networks and they were an energizing resource for the hosts and the town in which they served. The stories "our girls" Tia, Tasha, Maddy and Lanna came home with were touching and inspiring. They were not permitted to

be in anyone's home unless the resident was present.

Consequently, they heard the stories of the lives behind the houses they were gutting. Their stories in their words are below. They met the people whose lives they were touching. It changed all of them forever. They went to the library in which most of the books either had water or mold damage. The person coordinating the work for the town had his own story. He had no damage to where he lived but quit his job to help coordinate the effort in the town in which he grew up. Over eighteen months later some of those houses that they gutted remain condemned, with no clear decision if they would be repaired or destroyed.

I realized that despite the fact that I personally only lost electricity and a deck railing I had been impacted as a community member of the Jersey Shore. I had to recognize there were constraints on my ability to help based on responsibilities and circumstances. It had to be enough this time...but next time there is a Katrina or a Sandy or any other disaster I would like to believe I now understand what is needed and will be able to offer my skills and talents. When natural disaster or a terrorist event occurs again I know I can offer help from miles away by collecting needed items and money or traveling and offer manual labor and counseling services. Personal and professional responsibilities may prevent travel, but do not have to prevent other kinds of assistance. Remembering the events of 9/11 and Sandy allows empathy, compassion and understanding as a resilient survivor rather than a curious concerned bystander. That energy and knowledge will come in handy when assisting in other disastrous events.

My life was positively affected by the generosity of Theresa Hayden, our host children and the rest of the Louisville crew. I may not ever get over watching the 12-12-12 fundraising concert with four college girls jumping, dancing and singing at the tops of their lungs in my family room, but I will always remember their generosity!

As we write this narrative, over two years have passed since Sandy. There are about 250 houses in my town that are still empty, with people waiting to hear from insurance companies and FEMA about

how much funding they will or will not receive. They live in a closed down Army fort and expected to stay there for 3-5 years, but just recently heard they can only stay a few more months. House lifters have moved into the area. They are an interesting sub-culture. None of them own homes; they just travel from disaster to disaster lifting houses and living out of their trucks. Unfortunately two homeowners lost their houses when they were being lifted, crumbling to the ground when the crews were not careful enough. Re-traumatized again, losing everything for the second time.

I think it is important for everyone to remember that just because the 24 hour news cycle has moved on to the next crisis – the flood in Denver or the tornado in Illinois – the communities impacted won't recover that fast. There are some folks in New Orleans still in temporary FEMA trailers since 1999 and the aftermath of Katrina. As of the end of January 2015, there are still people in New Jersey who have not been able to go back into their homes to even look at the damage from Sandy. There are others who permanently lost their homes, jobs, and maybe even family members.

The United States Congress played politics with emergency funding. Somehow, people move on and some are better for it, but no one ever is the same. As the people move on so does the community. It grows and changes because of every bit of assistance it receives and because the community is resilient. Neighbors helped each other and offered their skill like electrical and plumbing to assist each other. Food was cooked and served to those that worked non-stop to repair what could be repaired and demolish what could not be saved. People walked around in the same clothes for days without judgment or concern of the same because people just continued to move to repair, stabilize, and assess the damage. FEMA has worked with our town to create a ten year plan; their process is quick, community oriented, and effective. Unfortunately although priorities have been named and community members are involved there are not funds secured to assure the projects are completed. Grant writing, lobbying at the state and national level, and fundraising projects are now in the works with no guarantees.

I also want to share with you the perspective of those that came to help. Their perspective as college students coming months after and seeing the devastation was life changing for them and the people they helped. We spent a memorable week together. We talked about everything under the sun. But when they parted our relationships ended, as I understand often happens in disaster work. The relationships are strong, intense, but short lived. I also want to share with you the perspective of those that came to help. Their perspective as college students coming months after and seeing the devastation was also life changing for them and the people they helped. I listened to these students as they changed from thinking primarily about self to thinking about the much larger meaning of life. These students made the connection between individual tragedy and community devastation. After this trip, they really get what we talk about in the classroom.

These 12 students, at the beginning of their careers, will never forget the faces and stories of Hurricane Sandy. They helped the Sandy victims rummage through personal belongings as they wiped off the mold on cherished Christmas ornaments. They talked about carrying a houseful of furniture to the street corner. They cried over coffee with men and women who shared their personal histories wrapped up in objects to now be discarded. They participated as a retail store was re-opened in celebration. They hurt deeply as shelves of books were carried to the dumpster due to the mold and bacteria. These tiny moments have changed the life of each student who has a yearning for understanding the world.

A Distant Perspective

One year after completing my MSSW degree at the University of Louisville, Kent School of Social Work, I took the opportunity offered by the local chapter of the American Red Cross to train as a Mental Health Disaster Worker. I like to learn new things. It never occurred to me that I would get to apply that training. Then 9/11 happened. I watched the TV monitors helplessly with horror. That afternoon I was contacted by the American Red Cross to come to New York to assist. Two weeks earlier I had just started my doctoral studies at the University of Louisville, but nevertheless, on the morning of Sept 13th, I was on a plane to New

Jersey with several other trained volunteers. Then, on Labor Day weekend 2005, I was mesmerized with disbelief to what I was seeing as a result of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans. Even though my desire to assist was as strong as the urgency to respond to 9/11, it wasn't possible for me to leave as a volunteer this time.

Again, in October and early November of 2012, I watched the weather forecasts predicting the magnitude of Hurricane Sandy heading toward the East Coast. Once Sandy hit shore, the news reports brought back memories of my own flooding experience. After a heavy downpour in our city several years earlier, the neighborhood sewers backed up and left 5' of sewage in my basement. I knew what it would be like for the people living in these areas to cleanup and recover. I have to say, I felt a little PTSD symptoms as I watched the daily news broadcasts from the Jersey Shore. I remembered the feeling of throwing personal keepsakes in a mountainous pile at the end of my drive. I knew I wanted to help with the recovery in New Jersey in some way.

It was the middle of the fall semester at UofL but I knew I could leave with a group of students in December. My experience with 9/11 taught me the importance of community connections and that I would need a university partner on the East Coast. As an alumni of Kent School of Social Work, I contacted Dean Terry Singer and explained what I wanted to do. Within 2 days I was connected to Dean Robin Mama at Monmouth University. The chair of my department where I held a teaching appointment provided her approval for my "student service project." I thought I had all I needed to get the ball rolling. I put out some feelers in the classes I was teaching. Student interest was amazing! I extended the invitation to students of social work at the university. More students contacted me than I knew I would be able to manage. I had no money for this project. I had no planning strategy. I had an idea and a willingness to take a group of students to the east coast to work with disaster clean-up.

Student interest was so strong, that they wouldn't let me drop the project. Students began to get donations from family and friends. Dean Singer, and Dr. Deborah Keeling, Chair of the Justice Department, provided some financial support. Kelly

Ward was finding housing for us in New Jersey. The necessary paper work at the university was completed for student field trips. The semester came to an end and all grades were submitted on my part. On the morning of Dec. 9th, twelve students and I pulled out of my driveway headed to New Jersey in a big red van. These students quickly named our transportation “Big Clifford”. We were filled with excitement and enthusiasm while at the same time knowing to expect the unexpected.

These students were not paid and were not getting a grade for this service project. They all volunteered for the experience of learning about disaster relief. The week progressed and I knew they were getting so much more for their education. As instructor, I constantly apply the basics of critical thinking in my course work. It was only natural to continue this process with the 12 energetic students on this week long experience. From daily rides in Big Clifford and listening to their conversations, I knew they were meeting this challenge.

The students that arrived were diverse in race, age, and sexual orientation. They had the trust to hop in a van, not knowing anyone in the group, and a teacher to help others. Collectively they were amazed at the relationships they forged with each other while working in the midst of the devastation they saw.

At the end of the first day of work on Monday, students were saying, “TV doesn't show how bad it is here.” Their assumptions and beliefs related to natural disasters were already being tested. From their point of view, hurricanes happen and then life goes on. Students began to ask questions of the community individuals who we were helping and of the local leaders. They learned about the concepts of FEMA, wave surges and displacement first-hand, not from a textbook. Students engaged in conversations with locals telling their personal experiences about the realities of natural disasters. My theories about applying critical thinking outside the classroom began to materialize with this student service project.

To sum up the service field trip with students to New Jersey, let me say that this experience reinforced my love of being a teacher and a social worker. I can't explain why I am drawn to teaching,

but I am. I can't explain why I am drawn to social work, but I am. I combined my passion for both as I engaged with students and encouraged independent thinking about community disaster relief. Eighteen months later as I reminisce on this trip, I am reminded of the meaning making of life experiences. I think about the importance of taking action instead of waiting for someone else to step up. I know that this service trip was one short week of my life as a person and in the role of faculty leadership. In the big scheme of things, this one short week affected more people than I will ever know.

Student Perspectives: Latasha Richards

In December 2012, I went on a service trip with my university to Sea Bright, New Jersey to help with the damage of Hurricane Sandy. We cleared out debris from homes and tried to salvage any memorable items we could for families displaced by the storm. The destruction of the town was a horrible sight for anyone to bear. Houses were ripped from the foundation and blown across streets. Homes by the boardwalk had collapsed on the ground from the ocean's impact. A town where people raised their families was ultimately unrecognizable.

While my fellow students and I were clearing debris from one particular home, the home's owner showed up. She was an elderly woman who was happy to engage us in conversation about the many accomplishments she had in her life, and how her home used to be an old church that her husband rebuilt and renovated. She then went on to say how her husband passed away the previous year, and her children were grown and raising their own families. As she showed us around the home, I could see how the water damage was so severe that she may not be able to stay in her house. Many of her memorable items were in her basement and needed to be thrown out due to mold. However, as I empathized with her on her losses, she did not appear as distraught as I would have thought. The woman made a statement that stuck with me. She said everything I lost was just “stuff.” She said she could not dwell on what she lost, rather continue to appreciate who she has.

Although I was not in a cultural environment completely different from my own, I was in an environment that was destroyed, and would take

years to rebuild both physically and emotionally. It was challenging to watch people cry as they looked at their demolished homes and tried to salvage family memories. It was personally challenging going through people's personal belongings and trying to figure out what they may want to salvage.

From this experience I learned that one should not give too much value to stuff. Instead, in times of devastation, people must hold on to community. For one week I was able to see – and better yet be a part of – a community that came together during a traumatic time. I gained trust from people in the community with my desire to help. I was able to encourage people to stay strong through fellowship. I was able to listen. The trip gave me a stronger insight on what it means to be compassionate, as well as how to build character.

Lana Jennings reflected on her time “post Sandy.” She wrote when signing up for the Hurricane Sandy Relief project.

Lana Jennings Reflects

I never anticipated the work involved or the experience I gained from the trip. I never imagined some of the tasks I would be participating in during my stay, such as ripping out the flooring of homes, or rummaging through sewage to find a woman's jewelry. However, the most challenging task I encountered was emptying out the local library. A building full of not only my favorite childhood books, but also the other relief workers. Going through the books we the relief workers went from focused on work to sitting together paraphrasing some of our favorites. Not only was it personal for us relief workers, but it was sentimental for the community. The history from Sea Bright stood in the Public Library, and in a day we emptied books, maps and other essentials from the library. For me this was a very emotional day. The Sea Bright Librarian watched as we wheeled out books on desk chairs or as they were carried out by fifty gallon black trash bags. Looking back now the reason why I struggled with the library in particular was because I came to the conclusion that Sea Bright as a community was never going to be the same, nor were the other communities impacted by Sandy. Over a year later, occasionally a ‘recent’ news clip will shine light on the impact of Hurricane Sandy. As I watch the same clips, many of the homes we

were in, are still in the same shape we left them in. Seeing these homes still in disarray is heart breaking for an outsider. I can't imagine what it is like for a local. Sending my thoughts your way Sea Bright.

Maddie Loney Remembers

We heard over and over, from numerous residents, that they “didn't even know what to say” because they were so thankful for us to be there. Our relationship with the citizens of Sea Bright was exceptionally beautiful because it was symbiotic: we wanted to be there just as much as they needed us to help recreate their community. For future disaster relief volunteers, I would say be willing to do anything, because no task is too small. People are appreciative of your help ripping up floors or smashing cabinets, but also the simple act of cleaning an elderly woman's silver jewelry can bring tears of thankfulness. Sometimes the need will be overwhelming, but remember the reason why you are there: to bring joy and hope to an area that may feel disheartened. Stay positive, and you will be welcomed always.

Erin Young Reflects

Many people told me that after my trip to New Jersey I wouldn't be the same. I wasn't sure what they meant by that, and to be honest, it made me anxious about the trip. However, when I pulled into my driveway Saturday night, it was the same. My brick house stood there waiting. My dog greeted me at the door, dancing around and wagging her tail. Warmth hit me as I walked through my house. It was all the same. But they were right, and now I understand what they meant. My heart is not the same as it was when I climbed in the back of the van. My perception of material things around me is a fresh new perspective that I've had the honor of inheriting first hand.

This is not something that can be altered by reading the newspaper or watching the news about the storm. This was changed when I helped carry out of a home everything a person owned to a curb, and then watched it get picked up and carried away. I peeled mold of items that someone cherished. Some materials things are replaceable; others hold sentimental value and will forever be missed. However, the deepest ache in my heart that I have for victims of Sandy is the emptiness of not having a home. Most people can't return home that live

along the coast. They won't get the "at last I'm home" feeling I got on Saturday night. Home is where you can be completely yourself, and feel safe, away from the world. Unfortunately for so many, they have a long journey ahead before they feel at home again.

Nuff Said: Another Student Concludes

I feel like I've aged five years in one week. I don't mean this in a bad way, but I feel like I have witnessed a new light on what is important in life. I got to work side by side with amazing students. I have never been so proud to attend University of Louisville, as we served Sea Bright, New Jersey. I was completely out of my comfort zone but was never home sick. I think this is because we all became a little Kentucky family as we adventured off into New Jersey. The best part is that none of us knew what we were going to be doing, or where we were staying. Yet many people commented on our smiles every morning. This made me grow up and realize what to value in life. The value of stuff can be molded and destroyed, however if you value people you will feel like you have everything you need.

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