

Pass It On®...

The Calm in the Storm.

Being that one voice of encouragement in a community makes all the difference.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, when the volunteers have moved on but the residents are still there, David parks his car beside an apartment building. The light is waning. The building is made of stone, one of the few on this side of New Orleans. He opens his trunk, drags out four grocery bags of food, closes the trunk with his elbow and enters the building.

It's Wednesday, the day he regularly arrives after work. He doesn't look back at his car. He doesn't worry about it anymore. At first, someone would scratch the side of his door with a key or a rock every time he left it for the hour he was making visits. But the anger in the neighborhood has subsided, and he has become a regular. The scratches remain, and he just shrugs. It's only a car.

The apartment building is home to four widows. They live week to week and look forward to David's visits. He brings each a bag of food beyond the necessities, a box of cookies, fresh (not frozen) meat, cans of instant coffee, new dishrags and laundry soap. But mostly, he stays to talk.

They tell him that each storm seemed to take a little more of the neighborhood away. That people are angry at the world. That their community is trying to come back, but it's taking some time. What they all miss is the sound of children playing in the street. They hope that comes back someday soon.

Cleaning up after a hurricane takes time. It's more than pumping out the water and mucking out the mud. It's more than replacing moldy carpets and furniture. A violent storm can test a community's bonds. It leaves residents numb, with barely enough energy to take care of themselves, let alone help somebody else.

There's always an initial push when they all clean up together. That first response is encouraging, life-affirming. But then the doldrums hit. The sails are no longer filled with optimism. David knows this. He has spent his life helping grieving people. So when he leaves the office on Wednesday evening, he

stops by the grocery store, picks out favorite cookies and sauces, and drives to the apartment building where loneliness is a constant storm. He hikes up the damp stairs and delivers a smile, a hug, a long conversation and a few tokens of friendship.

This Wednesday, when David arrives at his car in the dark, a young boy is standing there. "I watched your car," the boy says. "Nobody did anything."

David looks at the boy and smiles. "You did something, young man. You did a good thing."

The boy lights up. A little encouragement is rare these days; seems it, too, got swept away in the storm. Without warning, the boy hugs David, the tall stranger who quietly brings groceries to the widows and tells them everything is going to be all right.

And it is. Everything is going to be all right.

Encouragement...PassItOn.com

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