

New Beginnings:
A Positive Outlook for Katrina Victims

Natural disasters have been a part of life all through history. Earthquakes, floods, tornadoes, and hurricanes affect many people. Hurricanes in particular can cause tornadoes, flooding, and the destruction of property and human life. Although Hurricane Katrina changed many lives with destruction and displacement, many victims are seeing opportunities for new jobs and careers, new schools and homes, making new friends, and a chance to help each other. These all add up to new beginnings.

One of the most outstanding opportunities is in the job market. Hurricane Katrina destroyed many places of business, from corporate offices to fast food restaurants, as well as clinics and hospitals, along with hotels and fine restaurants. Even though these industries and many others who were in the path of last year's great storm are now gone, there is still a spirit of wanting to get on with life among the survivors. In an article by John Seewer entitled "Gulf Coast Job Market Booming, Post-Katrina," from the Arizona Daily Star, "People are begging to come to work, . . . I can go blue-collar, or I can go white-collar, before Katrina, you couldn't even find a job." Long before the storm arrived, New Orleans was suffering from a lack of jobs. Now, a little over a year later, there are jobs for many people in New Orleans and the surrounding communities. Also, many employers are more helpful and kinder toward job seekers, and they try to work harder to put people in new jobs. It's good to see people caring for others in this way.

Not only do adults have reason to hope, but also students. Officials in New Orleans are planning ways to rebuild businesses and schools. Homeschoolers have pulled together too, and are continuing their education even though they have suffered great losses. In the same article by John Seewer, he says, "If they do decide to rebuild, we will probably have a better, cleaner, safer place to live." There are also victims all around in the communities north of the areas that were hit so badly by Katrina. There are also many chances to help and encourage displaced people as they begin a new part of their lives. As long as we continue to help them, it's a win-win situation. They receive help, and we are blessed when we help them.

My dad took me to help serve food at a relief site after the storm. I didn't want to go at first, but it didn't take long to realize that the lesson Dad wanted me to learn was not how to serve food, but how to serve those less fortunate than me. I noticed that there were smiles on the faces of people who had lost everything. Nick is the seventh grader that now lives just down the street. He's a direct Katrina victim; he lost his home and is now living in my neighborhood, in a new home, going to a new school. He's my new friend, and I am his. I listen when he wants to talk about having to be rescued, and how he survived a scary time when the flood waters rose. I'm helping Nick as he starts over.

As long as we have a positive outlook in the face of disaster, we can all have the experience of new beginnings. Life will never be the same for those of us who were touched by Katrina. But that doesn't have to be a bad thing. New jobs, new schools, new homes, and new friends can turn a disaster like Katrina into a chance to start over with a good attitude. In a statement from the folks at the Hurricane Job Resource Center, they say, "If the rebuilding of New Orleans is undergirded by sound labor market policies, many could upgrade their skills, obtain better jobs, and raise their incomes." New beginnings is about more than new jobs, new schools, new homes and friends; it's also about helping others. If we continue to helping each other, we can come out of this so much better than we were before. All of us.