

Good morning Habitat friends:

I have been spending a great deal of this Covid-19 “shutdown” time thinking about each and everyone of you....praying for your health and the health and safety of your loved ones. It is so overwhelming and frightening that I decided to stay away from the television and my computer during the day and to find an activity to bring me simple joy such as walking my dogs, jogging with my daughter or simply sitting with my husband and watching a movie. In the beginning I struggled with “what” is God teaching me but now I think part of it is simply to be more present to the people I love and to the “simple things” that I take for granted like the blooming of the forsythia plants against the vibrant blue sky or the squirrels scurrying to find food.

Our culture is so busy. We rush from one place to another seven days a week...some of us don't even rest on the Sabbath. We plan and over plan our days, weeks and months. We schedule 10 hours of activities in 8 hours so we are always tired and stressed...maybe just maybe we will use this “rest time” to reevaluate our priorities and slow down long enough to “smell the flowers”.

I remember when Super Storm Sandy hit the Jersey Shore. We were a small affiliate building one affordable home a year and doing a couple of Brush with Kindness exterior repairs. It was overwhelming...people had lost their homes all around us and many were marginalized even before the storm. The questions were beating at my brain as I prayed for God's help: What do we do....how do we do this....who do we help first....where does the money come from....how fast can we rev up our construction team... Within days the community was called to the Holiday Inn in Toms River (now the Days Inn). Every organization, business and municipal township sent a representative...in one large banquet room unity within the community became a beacon of hope. This was the birth of the Ocean County Long Term Recovery Group.

During the Sandy Rebuild I learned many things but what stood out the most was the strength and the resilience of the people I met. Gordon and Carol loved their old farm house in Silverton. They created a retirement that was built around their home and their community. When Sandy hit their life as they knew it was over. With their home under four feet of water they struggled to find dry land and safety. Carol was rescued by a group of volunteers; strangers that soon became friends. Gordon chose to stay with his home, shivering on his roof as the water continued to rise. The next day he too was rescued by volunteers. During this time I looked for signs of hope... always wondering how God would send a message that He was there with us. This one day while we were rebuilding Carol and Gordon's home I looked across the yard and there was a violet flower...just one but one that was so beautiful. I will always remember that moment on that day in the early months of 2013. Hope was flowing everywhere...thousands of volunteers had arrived from all over the country, financial support was arriving in every form from grants to simple fundraisers like Kick Back to Give Back; a soccer birthday party turned into a fundraiser for Habitat, our construction team grew from one team to three, the OCLTRG was strong and positioned, community collaboration was at its best and people were hope-filled once again.

I believe that this will be the same scenario once we have pushed through this darkness and back into the light. We will witness the best of humanity as strangers become friends, time is made to help a neighbor, random acts of kindness become natural, compassion is not just a word in the dictionary but a way of living, patience is restored, judgement is removed, empathy is understood and love is stronger than hate. Northern Ocean Habitat will need you at the other end of this so please take this time to replenish your soul so that when we open the doors again we can like Super Storm Sandy respond to the needs of our community. Stay patient and stay positive and find God's grace in your family, friends and your home!

Wishing you and your loved ones safety & health!

Suzan