

The Log of the Guinston Gutters

Mission Trip 13 April 18-26, 2009

Mission Team 13 met at Guinston Church on Saturday morning for a prayer and group photo, and the Road Crew departed about 6:30 AM with two trucks and a van. The weather was much improved from our January trip. The Road Crew consisted of Walter Blumenfeld, Ralene Miller, Patti Johnson, Jim Wynegar, Wayne Deller (Senior), Elizabeth Deller, Roy Leiphart, and Mae Lewis; the Flying Squad included Donald Ruff, Dave Riddle and Seap (Steph) Sanh.

The usual breakfast stop at Ingram's Diner: Mae's pancake syrup wasn't sweet enough, but Tabasco sauce on French toast cleared Patti's respiratory congestion for a while. The nearby lawn art gallery displayed a colorful 8-foot fiberglass rooster which set Walter drooling with an urge to haul it back home to his front yard.

Points of interest and conversation topics as we passed through Harper's Ferry.... appreciation of the classic Studebakers, does the end justify the means, is John Brown's body still smoldering in his grave, how do you define a "friend"? We are enjoying getting to know the "new Gutters".

Passing Woodstock (VA) prompted Mae to ask Walter (referring to Woodstock NY Hippie event) "Were you part of that Hippie group?". Walter said "No, but I knew some of them. I had to work my way through college. The Hippies there were mostly from wealthy families and didn't have to work. We don't get to choose our parents. The Hippie group was a large concentration of fruit-cakes. Some of them killed a few brain cells with hallucinogenic drugs, then went on to become brain surgeons. Wouldn't that give you a lot of confidence if you needed a brain surgeon?"

About 10AM we passed a road accident outside of Harrisonburg VA and said a prayer for those injured. Pit stops at 1:30PM (Natural Bridge, VA) and 5PM (Pilot Travel Center, just North of Knoxville TN, with an antique & custom car show next door). Mae was concerned about a misplaced cell phone and pointed to Wayne's cell phone case, asking "Is that open?" So Wayne immediately checked his fly! What a sense of humor.



Back on the road at 6:30 PM, we chose a wrong turn in circling around Knoxville's eternal bridge repair project; our first convoy detour only took 2 miles and 10 minutes. 107 miles later, we rolled in to Northminster Presbyterian Church (Chattanooga, TN) to a welcome from Nancy, sandwiches and snacks for dinner, and free lodging for the night.



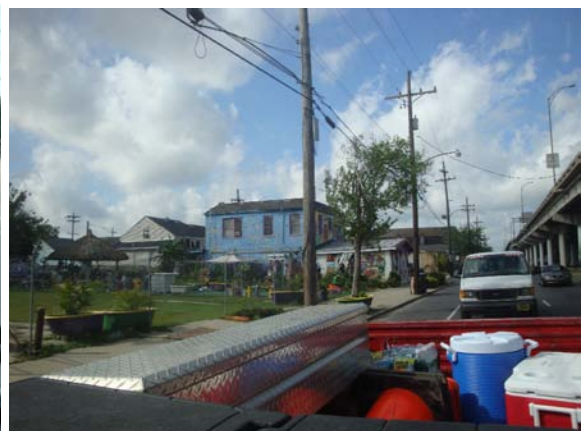
On the road again at 6:30AM, with breakfast at 8:30 at the Waffle House in Gadsden AL. We passed York (Alabama) on I-59, singing Amazing Grace since our "road choir" didn't know the anthem. Enjoying miles of spring wildflowers in the median, we crossed into Mississippi at noon, heading to our usual lunch at Barnhill's Buffet in Meridian MS. Continuing southbound and playing the Roadkill Game, we saw several raccoons (10 points for ordinary varmints) and armadillos (25 points for unusual varmints), and some of the armadillos were even alive and doing whatever it is that they do. Walter claimed 200 points (really exotic varmints) for allegedly sighting a three-toed tree sloth hanging in a tree over I-59. The Road Crew covered 50 miles in a discussion of ways to protect armadillos crossing the highway. Walter will apply for a patent on high-tech automatic armadillo-sensing triggers for traffic lights. Another option would be to set up an invitational armadillo hunt, in which Yankee rednecks would pay a fee to drive jacked-up pickup trucks through the woods and swamps to run them down. We might find it more profitable to start a chain of armadillo fast-food restaurants, which would feature a breakfast bar all-you-can-eat armadillo with eggs. When passing by the Purvis, Mississippi exit, we realized that the 300 acres of FEMA trailers rotting there (our federal tax dollars at work) could be used for armadillo shelters. If the windows were left open, then the formaldehyde vapor might not kill the armadillos. Or we could stuff the trailers with AIG executives, haul them to Mexico (one way trip), and park them in the high desert where they could live on cactus juice and Gila monsters. (Editor's Note: after 2 days non-stop driving, the Road Crew is subject to a psychological phenomenon which we call "Road Crazy". The preceding discussion is one of the common symptoms.)

After our Sunday arrival at Jefferson Presbyterian Church, we set up our bedding, bought groceries at Wal-Mart, and set up our kitchen arrangements. Paul Davis stopped in and loaded us up with much-appreciated Subway lunch “fixins”.

Monday started at 6:15 AM with Elizabeth and Ralene attempting to sing “Oh What a Beautiful Morning”; without Linda and Karen it just didn't measure up to our usual standard. Jim taped the performance on his cell phone and will forward copies to anyone interested.

Each morning in Louisiana began with the ladies packing lunch and snacks, while the men went to Paul's house for ice and then loaded the trucks. We prayed each morning and to the best of our ability became Christian witnesses to those we met.

Breakfast on Monday was followed by Bible study of John 6, building an intimate relationship with Christ. Most of the crew then followed Christina (our PSL job manager) to the PSL job site, which was Carol Jupiter's home at 1130 Forstal Street in Orleans Parish. Four volunteers were detached for a day in Harahan (a few miles southwest of Jefferson P.C.) to salvage a 500-lb. refrigerator and a garage full of tools from a house scheduled for demolition.



There was a long list of finishing work to be done on Carol's house: drywall, painting, flooring, tiling, doors, trim and yard cleanup. Jim and Christina drove to Home Depot for supplies, and each volunteer found “a job” and got started. We found numerous “non-standard craftsmanship” issues left by previous crews, dealt with them and made some progress.



The first day on a new work site is always challenging...our first order of business on site was the inoperable nail guns. Dinner at 7PM back at the church was pork loin and potatoes; Paul stopped by and we engaged in a typical fact-free, logic-free discussion until Jim Wynegar said "I must be really tired because this is all beginning to make sense." The day ended at 9:20 needing five people to close the parking lot gate.



Tuesday morning started similar to Monday; after grunts and groans Walter decided the singing had improved only marginally. After breakfast, we continued our Bible study with (John 15:1-9), "if you want an intimate relationship with Jesus then we need to be faithful". We picked up Christina (her car had died) on the way to the job site, while teasing Jim mercilessly about her being the perfect woman for him (Our first romance on a mission trip!). Roy started the day with a bad case of the runs; Walter did a Wal-Mart run for a fresh set of work clothes for Roy, while trailing a little cloud of uncertainty about his cooking of yesterday's dinner. Jim found a whole section of drywall in Carol's house with no studs behind it. We fixed that, then framed and drywalled a closet. We met the neighbor lady across the street and her daughter (a colon cancer patient) and presented them with quilts.



Christina and Jim made another materials run for more trim, and Paul Davis stopped at the site to bring us a huge box of Cajun chips to go with lunch. Wayne (Sr.) provided lunchtime entertainment by trying to catch a chameleon on the porch. After lunch we discovered more bizarre previous construction: another section of drywall with no supporting studs needed to be ripped out and re-framed. Then we discovered that the

dividing wall between the bedroom and bathroom was very thick – in fact it contained three complete sets of studded frames and no means of access to the internal space! We ripped out more drywall and reconstructed the framing to make an additional bedroom closet and a service closet for the air conditioning system. We re-hung folding doors, installed molding, painted trim and cleaned windows, detailed the trim around the atrium-effect ceiling, and sorted and organized tools and materials.



The bathroom tile work became a complicated rework job when we discovered that there was inadequate support for the cement board backing the tiles, and that the windows had been installed with framing which prevented them from opening. So we had to rip out the cement board and windows to re-frame the works, re-install the windows, and then put up the cement board again before we could do the tile wall. The tile walls were a custom design using 14" x 14" blue/tan marble floor tile which required each shape to be cut and beveled to fit. We returned "home" to Jefferson PC for a dinner of noodles, corn, burgers, leftover pork, fried chicken and potatoes. After dinner Jim, Christina, Dave and Steph went out to listen to a jazz group.



Wednesday morning 6AM. Paul Davis picked up Elizabeth, Dave and Steph for a fishing day. The team split into two crews for the rest of the week. The smaller crew (Patti, Donald, Roy and Walt) stayed at Jefferson to build a wheelchair ramp, steps and railing for handicap access to the new church office in the Perkins house. Jim Wynegar designed the structure, materials were purchased with mission funds, and the job was completed at 8PM Friday evening.



The larger crew of volunteers worked rest of the week in the ninth ward at Carol Jupiter's house, attempting to complete the interior construction while repairing the damage left behind by a dishonest contractor who had taken Carol's money, did some hasty work on part of the job, and then vanished.



Walter served as “gopher” for both groups (“Walter, go for drywall tape and window caulk”. “Walter, go for lag screws and liquid nails”). We were fortunate in having Christina Druck as our site supervisor, and in having several professional builders and experienced volunteers in our group. Everyone on both crews worked together in a united effort, without pushing individual agendas or egos, and we were blessed with success at two sites simultaneously.

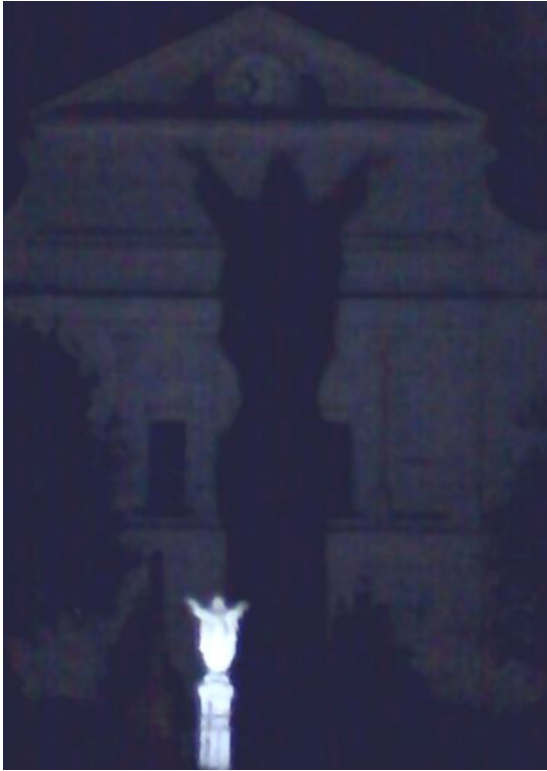
Wednesday evening we were treated to dinner by the congregation at the Jefferson PC fellowship hall. Thursday morning part of our group helped out sorting and bagging groceries for the Food Bank run by the church (now helping about 200 families). Thursday evening we partied at Paul and Sally Davis' garage fish fry.



Through the week of work and travel our group grew in patience and faith. Jim Wynegar captured our emotions with a night photo of the Jesus statue in Jackson Square, casting a giant shadow over the front of the church. We all felt that shadow over us and knew that nothing can separate us from the love of Christ. And we share that love with those we meet.

Saturday morning we packed up, loaded the trucks and left for home, already two hours behind schedule. We ate breakfast at Shoney's in Picayune, Mississippi, skipped lunch, and ate dinner at the Dinner Bell in Sweetwater, Tennessee. We arrived at Second

Presbyterian Church in Knoxville at 9:45PM, tired,weary and ready for a good night's rest.



At 6:30AM Sunday morning we began the final grueling day of travel, showing our usual signs of humanity with testiness, impatience and fatigue by the time we arrived safely at Guinston Church at 6:30PM. Trucks were quickly unloaded, and we all joined hands in prayer, giving thanks for God's safe hand holding us until our return from Mission Trip Thirteen to New Orleans.

POSTSCRIPT: August 2009...after almost four years displacement, Carol Jupiter is now moving back into her own home.

