

September 5

Well, I'm here.

Got here this afternoon. Finding a place was harder than any time in my 27 years in disaster relief. At first, I thought I'd have to stay 250 miles from ground zero. Luckily, I'm only 130 miles from Biloxi, where I'll be spending most of my time. So far, my assignments are in Biloxi, Gulfport, and Bay St. Louis.

People who do this for a living network heavily. That's a nice way of saying they gossip like a bunch of old ladies at a quilting guild. My phone never stops ringing. It's been that way since Katrina moved towards Florida.

Many, many strange stories. The media has focused on New Orleans, and understandably so. It's the obvious choice for incredible footage. What human suffering.... what drama.... it's got all the ingredients of incredible theater. How many movies do you think are already in the works about this past week in New Orleans? Too many.

But I've said it before, and I'll say it again. Once the media is done chewing the bones of New Orleans, they're going to discover that Mississippi took a savage, devastating hit. They're finding bodies, drowned, up in trees, miles inland. There are many, many isolated backwoods areas of Mississippi that search and rescue simply haven't got to yet.

One of my friends is an adjuster for State Farm, by far the biggest underwriter in the area. They bring in their own tankers of gasoline and give it to the adjusters. They have armed guards everywhere you look. They run indoctrination sessions and he just got out of a class that scared the beezus out of him. They're sending him for a diphtheria, tetanus, and hepatitis shot. They're giving out bug spray to everyone, and purel. They make it sound like if you touch anything you'll glow in the dark within days. Also, they said the stench is horrendous. A lot of dead animals, livestock, and sadly, people.

So, I just went out and got some deep woods Off, purel and wet ones, since no running water will be available down there.

They also told him some stories about security in the Biloxi area. They said that all the gun and pawn shops had been looted, and that there were a lot of very stressed out, very desperate people down there, and a lot of stories of muggings and holdups.

So, that's where I'll be going tomorrow. I'm looking at a school. Don't know how much damage, but about a dozen separate buildings. My clearance came through, so I'll be able to get through the checkpoints. They're doing the best they can to keep people out who have no business there. Many of the roads are out, and I have no idea if I'll be able to make it or not. I've got a four wheel drive and GPS, so at least I'll know exactly where I am if I get stranded or stuck. I'm carrying two 5 gallon gas containers on the roof rack, just in case.

Not sure if cell phones will work down there yet, but I'm guessing they won't. No power, no water, no services of any kind. Just people hunkering down, waiting for help.

In all my years of doing this, I've come to the firm conclusion that people are basically good. We hear about the bad ones in the media. They're the ones who make interesting

stories. But I'm convinced that they're the exception, not the rule. People generally do their best to help one another in a disaster.

September 6

The drive from my hotel to Gulfport is 135 miles, one way. Most of it is on I-10. Normally, it would take a little over 2 hours.

Today it took 3 and a half hours each way.

I-10 changes from two lanes each way to one lane just across the Alabama-Mississippi line. It took an hour of inching forward to get through that bottleneck. A traffic jam about 10 miles long. It's going to be that way every day. It's going to get worse as more relief workers and construction people pour into the disaster area.

So, it's going to be a 7 hour commute every day, round trip. I spent \$50 on gas today.

I drove to a major high school just north of Gulfport to inspect 10 buildings. When I got there, I realized that the National Guard had taken over the entire campus for a staging area and command center. There were hundreds of Guardsmen and countless trucks everywhere you looked. There was a convoy of trucks backed up to unload supplies at least a mile long.

The gate was under guard, and I had to show my clearance paperwork to get in. None of the school officials were around, so I did my preliminary inspection by myself, talking to quite a few guardsmen as I walked the campus and took pictures and notes about the damage. This complex was several miles north of the flood damage, and only had wind damage to deal with. The Guardsmen had already repaired a lot of it, reinstalling air conditioning units on the roofs and picking up debris blown off the buildings.

I can't say enough about the Guardsmen. They were working their butts off in the hot sun. I always tell these guys thanks for being there, no matter where I see them. They always say "yes sir" and make me feel even older. The guy at the gate who was in charge, when I told him thanks for being there, said "I love my job, sir!"

It cracked me up, but he was telling the truth. He loved his job, and he relished the chance to help people. It's the overwhelming sense you get from the people in this business. It's not the bullshit you're reading about with the fiasco in New Orleans.

Everyone I've talked to about that is outraged. Pissed off beyond belief. It's a black eye on the relief community, and to a man we're seething.

You don't get people to leave their homes and families for weeks and months on end if they don't care about what they're doing. It was a betrayal to the thousands of men and women who ALL knew it was bullshit from the moment we all screamed in unison at the TV screens we were watching at home, getting ready to head in.

The Guard is on the scene, and everyone is very happy to see it. Helicopters flying overhead, Hummers up and down every road. Their presence will go a long way to help the morale in this beleaguered town.

September 7

I don't know if Mrs. Silvers is still alive or not. Not that she would have died in New Orleans, as her sons would have insisted that she evacuate before Katrina made landfall. It's just that I haven't seen her since 1998, the last flood I worked in New Orleans. She's probably in her mid to late 80's by now, if she's still with us.

I met her on Mothers Day, in either 1979 or 1980, I can't remember. I was representing the National Flood Insurance Program, working her flood claim. She couldn't believe anyone would be working on Sunday, Mothers Day. She was aggravated when I pressed her for an appointment, I remember. When I got there, she was still a little upset that I was disturbing her on Mothers Day, and working on a Sunday.

I was soaked with sweat already that hot afternoon. I probably looked pretty pitiful, after slogging through several flooded out homes with no air conditioning because of the power outage before I got to hers. After she sized me up, we talked a little about the fact that it was Mothers Day, and she asked me about my mother. I told her about how my mother was the only single mother I knew as I was growing up, as she was divorced when I was three. I told her about how hard she worked to raise two kids, living in the back of my grandfathers store in backwoods West Virginia, and how she always put us first, no matter what.

From that moment on, Mrs. Silvers became my surrogate mother. Her mood softened, and we sat on her front porch for about three hours talking about life, her past, her kids my age, and my life as a disaster relief worker. I don't get paid by the hour, so I wasn't slacking on company time. But the best thing about this profession is the people you meet, on a very profound and personal level, and how sometimes you make a connection that lasts forever. That's what happened between Mrs. Silvers and myself that day.

Mrs. Silvers was an 18 year old Jewish mother of an infant son in Germany in 1938, and her world changed forever on Kristallnacht. She and her husband were driven from their home by the Nazis on this disgraceful night, and their home was burned. Her husband was subsequently killed, and she spent the next 7 years fleeing through Europe, hiding with friends with her son, barely staying a step ahead of the Nazis. They lived, as she put it, "on potatoes" for an interminable period, barely staying alive in war ravaged Europe.

Her eyes had such wisdom, such beauty, such pain of past experience I could never understand. She softly told me stories of those incredible times as we sat on her porch that Mothers Day, not holding herself up as a heroine, but sharing with me her experiences, as she saw how much I was lapping it up. It's the best part of the job, no question about it. The incredible people you meet, who open up to you, and show you their world.

I became a part of her extended family that day. I'm not overstating this. We both felt it, and I'll never forget it. I finished her claim and we exchanged phone numbers, promising to keep in touch. She admonished me as I left to "make sure you call your mother today". I told her she had nothing to worry about there. She smiled that wonderful smile, and went inside to her own family on her day.

I told my mother about the experience and she smiled a mothers smile. She knew. And she was so grateful that I had the incredible good fortune to meet people like that in my travels.

Since that day, New Orleans has flooded many times. I've worked about 7 or 8 of them, and every single time, I always found Mrs. Silvers and stopped in to visit. Several times she was having trouble with her adjuster, and I wrote an estimate for her to present that was fair. Not exaggerated, but fair. She got such a kick out of that, and so did I. I'd have dinner with her and we'd talk about her kids, and my travels, and she'd tell more stories from her incredible life.

She was the consummate mother figure, and she never failed to ask me about mine. One year, she asked if I would mind if she called my mother. I was surprised, but I loved the idea. She spoke with a heavy German Jewish accent, and my mother is from West Virginia. The contrast in accents was pretty funny, but they spoke the common language of motherhood and they had a great talk. That was pretty special to me.

Every mothers day after that, when I'd call mom, she'd always ask about Mrs. Silvers. We'd always talk about her, and how interesting and wonderful a life she'd led.

I haven't seen her since I left New Orleans in 1998, the year of the great evacuation from Hurricane Georges, a near miss that pounded Mobile, Alabama.

There's no way I can get in touch with her, the part of the city that she lived in was flooded. I hope she's still alive. If not, I was blessed with an opportunity to meet her and hear her stories, and let her mother me.

If you take the time to listen, and open your heart to people, most of them are basically good. Sometimes you get lucky and meet someone who's not just good, but great.

September 9

I was on Highway 90 in Gulfport, Mississippi today.

It was a beautiful four lane road, running parallel to the coast, about 100 yards from the beachfront. Many multi million dollar homes, hotels, casinos and commercial properties lined this prime real estate.

It was in the middle of ground zero.

Here are some photos I took today, both of the highway and buildings along the way, and a 4 million dollar office complex that is a total loss.



September 21

Well, Katrina's big sister Rita has rolled into the gulf with a savage fury. It figures that it's headed for Texas. Everything's bigger in Texas, right?

How bad must it feel to have been evacuated from New Orleans to the Houston area, only to be moved again?

At least the feds are all over this one. Mike Brown is out of the picture, and the cruel lessons of Katrina have every state and federal agency pouring resources into preparing for Ritas arrival.

A large percentage of contractors and insurance adjusters working the Katrina relief effort are Texans. Most of them are pulling out of here and heading home to secure their property and evacuate their families, if they're from the Houston area. Many of them aren't coming back. If Rita goes worst case scenario, most of them aren't coming back.

There aren't enough people who do this for a living to meet the needs of Katrina already. This will break the back of an already wobbly recovery, and I have no earthly idea how all the various agencies and private interests will staff Rita.

Houston and the surrounding area is so much more heavily populated than the area Katrina hit. New Orleans is a fraction of the size of Houston, and the area from the coast that Rita is headed towards is built up much much more than the gulf coast of Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama.

At least they seem to be taking the evacuation seriously this time. Katrina is fresh in the minds of the residents, and you don't hear anyone talking about Hurricane parties any more.

The surf outside my hotel room is pounding right now. It's amazing how much power a storm like this can generate. The waves are 6 to 8 feet high, crashing on the otherwise docile beach here with a relentless procession. The lightning and storms in the distance are marching along like a giant army of destruction. There's a feeling of impending doom just watching it, it's breathtaking, really. And all I can see are the outer bands of this killer. I can't even imagine what it would be like to be at ground zero as it passes by.

But I know what it will look like when it's done.

September 27

I'm in a hotel in Gulfport now. The 6+ hour commute is over.

There are several hundred FEMA subcontractors here too. They mill around like ants, all of them with a tablet computer they use in the field to fill out their forms. They verify the condition of homes of people who have applied for aid. They go to the site, check a few boxes on their tablet regarding habitability, and upload it to their mainframe. They suck the bandwidth out of the hotel's limited supply, so I'd really like to see them leave.

I've gotten to be friends with the owner of the hotel, and he kicked one of them out today. A middle aged woman who complained to him that her room smelled like smoke, and demanded another one. You'd have to be here to know how absurd that is. I've fought for a month to get over here, and this dipshit bureaucrat is complaining about her room. The owner told her "you don't need to be here", and her boss overheard it, and fired her on the spot.

I know that sounds harsh, but this isn't for the faint of heart. This is damn serious business, and not a picnic. People are sleeping in their cars, and she's bitching about the smoky smell in her room. People are begging for a room here to eliminate their 6 to 7 hour drive a day, and she's looking for the concierge.

I'm running out of patience. I feel no pity at all for her. She wouldn't make it 5 minutes in the private sector of this industry. She's not even tough enough for FEMA.

I've really held back telling some stories about FEMA, because they're just so freakin' unbelievable. Hearing a little of the Mike Brown testimony on the news tonight may push me over the edge. I have so little respect for the organization and the way it's run. Let's just say that your tax dollars are not being well spent. These guys subcontracting these inspections are riding the gravy train. The only people they look productive in comparison to are the FEMA staffers who they report to. And they're sucking up my bandwidth.

The blame game is rolling into high gear now. Politics, bureaucracy, posturing, spinning.... what a load of bullshit. I'm running out of patience for it all. And we're just getting started. This thing will go on for months before it gets better.

Lead, follow, or get the hell out of the way.

I'm running real short on patience tonight

October 4

I've been here in a Gulfport for a week now. The power goes out every couple of days for hours at a time. So does the internet. I picked up a Verizon air card. They're broadband in major metro areas, but not here. At least I can always get my email with it. The hotel's bandwidth has improved, since the FEMA subcontractors headquartered here have set up their own network now and have stopped sucking up all the hotels resources. But it's still dependant on the wireless network of the hotel, and it's through their cable tv hookup, and it goes out every other day for hours on end.

Every single thing here is hard. The traffic is horrendous. Many of the major intersections have no traffic lights. National Guardsmen direct traffic at many of them, others are now giant 4 way stops, with many people just plowing through before their turn. It takes about a half an hour to get from I-10 down to the beach, which is only 3 miles away.

A few fast food places are open, usually drive through service only. Still, it's a blessing, even when you have to wait at least a half an hour to get through the line. Gas is finally no problem, so I took the two 5 gallon containers off my roof rack and poured them into my Explorer. I gave the containers to a guy I met on an inspection. I just want them off the roof. Where they vented stained the paint job. I've got another bad stain on the rear quarterpanel from some toxic crap that splashed up the first week over here on the beach. I'll probably glow in the dark when this is over.

Building materials are in short supply, which means the price of reconstruction is skyrocketing. You estimate a job today, and by next week it's gone up a lot.

And contractors are in short supply. People have resigned themselves to hunker down and get their homes "dried in" with tarps on the openings and just ride it out until the supply-demand curve gets better.

FEMA is making people crazy. The sub-contractors who are headquartered in this hotel are a pretty sleazy looking bunch. They make \$47.50 per inspection to go to a home that applied for aid and simply check off a form on a computer tablet indicating the habitability of the property. Takes them about 5 minutes. Some of them do 15 to 20 a day. Your tax dollars at work.

And they're the most efficient element of the whole FEMA juggernaut. The federal employees, the staffers, they make the post office look like the Delta Force. It's just a bureaucracy, nothing more, nothing less. They probably mean well, but by design, they're inefficient and wasteful. There's not one single thing they do that the private sector couldn't do better and cheaper. Nothing. It's a classic example of good intentions when the program was started which evolved into just one more bureaucratic morass of inefficiency and indifference.

The recovery effort is moving forward with the thunderous momentum of a herd of turtles.

I told a friend's new wife a couple of nights ago that someday, in a few months, when she's back home, sitting on her deck watching the sun go down, she'll look back on all this and it will all seem like a dream. A strange, unsettling, surrealistic dream. Something that really didn't happen, that you really didn't even experience. It is all so foreign to your everyday life away from here, you won't even be able to believe you were here at all, and that the things you saw and experienced were real.

I've had that experience many times over the years. It's absolutely how it goes. Once you leave, the world is so different than what you've carved out for an existence in whatever time you're there seems so absurd, so impossible. You have to hold on to those kinds of thoughts, or you'll go nuts. Every day seems like a week, so many things happen. As I'm sitting here, I think about things I did this morning, and they seem like they were so long ago, it just doesn't seem possible. The inertia of constant motion is your only salvation. You have to keep moving. You can't stop and ponder the complexity of it all, or it will overwhelm you. Keep moving, stay in motion. It's your only chance of making it to that day when you're sitting on your deck and it all seemed like a dream.

October 6

A lot of what you see on TV about this disaster has big homes, expensive commercial properties, and some prime real estate. The pictures I've posted so far show that side of what's going on down here.

But for every well insured hotel or hospital or office complex that lies in ruins, there are hundreds if not thousands of poor people who have lost it all, and have little or no flood insurance.

Flood insurance is the real story of this event. So many people didn't have it. And homeowners insurance doesn't cover flood damage.

Here are a few of the people who lost it all.

Two of the spray painted signs in that last group of pictures are haunting.

"Camp Misery" and "Rebecca is safe. Don't worry".

The spray paint graffiti that disaster victims display sometimes says it all. "Camp Misery" was a group of flood victims who had lost everything they owned. A 25 foot wall of water submerged their homes and all they owned other than the clothes on their backs and what they evacuated with. They came home to find a six inch layer of mud coating all their possessions, and their meager mobile homes tossed about like toys, total losses. They had no flood insurance. They didn't have much to start with, but now it's all gone and they're living in tents.

"Rebecca is safe. Don't worry." That one really got to me. The victims are scattered in tents and shelters all over the gulf coast area, separated from their homes and neighborhoods, friends and loved ones. They painted that message in case someone who knew them would know that Rebecca made it through alive. All these homes were



submerged in the tidal surge. None of them can be rebuilt. None of them had flood insurance.

"Camp Misery" really knows no boundaries.



October 10

I've been here 5 weeks today. It seems like 5 years.

I've driven over 6,000 miles since I left home. I've inspected 173 buildings, including climbing their roofs. I've moved my operation three times.

The AC unit isn't working in the condo now.

No screens on the windows, so you can't open them or you get bugs the size of wombats inside the house.

I'm buried in paperwork right now. Millions of dollars of estimates to write in the next two weeks. The school system is an enormous project. That estimate will be over 500 pages and 1,200 photos. 22 separate locations with 140 buildings. About \$15 million total, it looks like now. And I've got a lot of the little guys I've inspected that I have to write up now.

The stress has changed from get them all contacted and inspected to now get the estimates done.

A lot of guys are burning out now. Every day they quit and go home, dumping their files in all different stages of disarray. It's just too much stress for a lot of people. The veterans all know it's a marathon, not a sprint. If you don't pace yourself and stay in motion, you're definitely not going to make it.

I've got to get all the big commercial projects done before mid November. In the meantime, I'll keep inspecting the little guys I've taken on. The poorest homeowners in the United States. Many mobile homes valued at under \$15,000. Lots of very low income families in wood framed structures worth less than \$50,000. These are the guys nobody ever hears about through the media. Most of them have lost their jobs, as the businesses they worked at are wiped out or closed down. They're the people in Camp Misery.

I'm trying to get some projects in New Orleans. It's only 80 miles away from here, and I can't come down here and not work some of that stuff. Most likely it will be in the 9th ward and some of the very low rent areas, I hope. The guys you saw on their rooftops on CNN.

What's the point in coming down here if you don't want in on that? It's opening back up now, and that's where I want to be to finish this thing up. I've been thinking about it a lot the past few days, and I'm really going to push for those assignments. It's a chance to be a part of history, just like the World Trade Center, Hurricane Andrew, The Northridge quake and some of the other huge events I've been privileged to take part in.

It would just give perfect symmetry to this whole experience. Then when that day comes and it all seems like a distant dream, you'll know that you saw it all, and you really were there, and it's not a dream after all.

October 15

The gulf coast area is getting a cruel education regarding two legal terms that most people have never heard of before.

Concurrent causation and proximate cause.

The application of these two terms will mean millions and millions of dollars to flood victims of Hurricane Katrina.

When Hurricane Katrina moved onshore, the first effects felt were the 140 mph winds that stretched out miles in advance of the eyewall and 25 foot high storm surge. Properties on the beach were first hammered with the winds, and then pounded by the storm surge.

The million dollar question is how much damage was done by the wind before the water got there.

Why does it matter? Because the only flood insurance available to homeowners is through the National Flood Insurance Program, and it's limits are \$250,000 for building coverage and \$100,000 on personal property.

Thousands of homes on the coast are worth many times those amounts, and unless they bought excess policies from companies like Lloyds of London, they are grossly underinsured from the peril of flood. Hardly any of the properties had the excess insurance. Most people never even knew it was available.

Another scenario very common are homeowners who have no flood insurance at all, and

were wiped out by the tidal surge. Most of these people are poor and can barely afford standard homeowners insurance, and most of them never dreamed that the water from a tidal surge could reach them. They live in places like Bay St. Louis and Waveland, Mississippi, in modest communities within a mile of the beach.

So, in both of these examples, the homeowners are hoping against hope that their insurance companies will consider the damage done by the wind, which came first, to be the reason that their homes are destroyed. Why? Because they almost all have enough standard homeowners insurance to cover their losses, as homeowners insurance isn't limited to the \$250,000 ceiling, and even the poorest homeowner has standard homeowners insurance if they have a mortgage, as it's required by their lenders.

But homeowners insurance specifically excludes damage from rising flood waters, no matter what the "proximate cause". Proximate cause is the original source of the damage, which homeowners are arguing is the hurricane force winds which they and their lawyers will contend pushed the water ashore. But the "concurrent causation" clause of their homeowners policy holds that "Such loss or damage is excluded regardless of any other cause or event that contributed concurrently or in any sequence to the loss."

On total losses where the home is destroyed, the companies are paying policy limits on the flood coverage and nothing under the homeowners policies. Concurrent causation.

Basically, the insurance companies have collected premiums on the homeowners policies based on a policy that does not cover the peril of flood. The feds set up the NFIP (National Flood Insurance Program) because no private insurance company would write flood insurance at a reasonable rate, as it's too big a risk. The only people who need it live near the water and are likely to incur a loss, thus the risk can't be spread like standard homeowners.

The policy language has been tested many times in court, and appeared bulletproof. But there has never been a disaster like Katrina, and the lawyers are forming a conga line preparing suits against the major insurers in the gulf to test these principles. If they prevail, it will be the end of insurance as we know it. Many companies will go under, and the Feds will have to get further involved in underwriting insurance, as they did with the NFIP.

The stakes are enormous to both sides.

October 17

The eye of Katrina passed over the small towns of Bay St. Louis and Waveland, Mississippi. They are coastal communities who have been brushed by hurricanes in the past, but nothing like Katrina.

Most of the people in Bay St. Louis, once you got away from the beach, don't have flood insurance. They weren't in the "flood plain", which would cause their mortgage holders to require flood insurance.

They just never thought it could happen to them.

When Katrina came onshore, it pushed a 25 to 35 foot wall of water into these residential

areas. Many very nice, expensive homes right on the beach. Many, many more low and middle class neighborhoods as you go further inland. In some areas, the water was 25 feet deep, three miles inland. The water came 11 miles inland in some areas. When you talk to people down there, you hear crazy stories about waves 50 feet high and higher. When you see what's left of these two towns, it's hard to argue with those crazy stories.

This is Lionel.

He's standing in the rubble that used to be his house.

When the water got neck deep, he and his wife crawled through a scuttle hole into their attic, with their dog.

As the tide went back out, their house disintegrated and collapsed around them. His dog was ripped out of his arms and washed away. In total darkness and in the middle of the hurricane, they somehow got out from under the debris and made their way North, away from the ocean, through knee deep mud, debris, hurricane force winds, and when they couldn't walk any further, they collapsed under what was left of a tree until dawn.

They lost everything they owned. They don't have flood insurance. He was going to retire in two more years.

As he was telling me his story, he didn't complain once. Not one single time. The only emotion he showed at all was when he was telling me about his dog being torn away from him when the house collapsed, and scratching his face as he frantically pawed.

"I really loved that dog" he said.



November 5

This is my last night in Mississippi. I'm leaving Gulfport tomorrow, moving my operation to Opelousas, Louisiana. With Hurricane Wilma hitting Florida, many people stationed here were moved over there. This left a big area in backwoods Louisiana with a lot of people who haven't even been contacted since Katrina and Rita swept through the area. The worst of them have probably been helped, but the guys I'm inheriting are pretty much the poorest and least politically connected people in Louisiana. They were left for last, partly because their damages weren't as catastrophic as the people on the coast, and partly because they're poor.

And my experience over the years has been that they're also the most grateful for any help you can give them. They're used to being last. They're used to having to wait until the white folks are taken care of. That whole dynamic sickens me, and makes me feel a little better about staying here instead of going to Ft. Lauderdale to work Wilma.

I had my last two inspections here today, and I drove down Highway 90 one last time on the way back to my place. The pictures I posted early on were all up and down this formerly beautiful highway. It's now a barren wasteland, leveled by Katrina, like a giant lawnmower rolled over it mowing it to the ground.

I left home 62 days ago. It seems like I've been here much longer, and the things that appeared amazing to me in the early weeks have become commonplace. It doesn't seem unusual to me now to have to drive around mountainous piles of debris or through military checkpoints. I'm used to not having all the little things we take so much for granted back home.

All the sights and images that I came across and tried to share with you guys in the pictures I posted seem normal to me now. It's all you see here. It's just how it is. We're over the shock.

And driving around today, I got into a very introspective mood. One of those "I know I won't see this ever again, or be here again under these circumstances" kind of states of mind. It felt very strange to know that I'm leaving tomorrow, and it was very emotional. I'm not going home yet, that will happen sometime next year. But I'm leaving Katrina, ground zero, and it's a very weird feeling.

When I think back about all I saw and all the people I've met, one image stands out in my mind. It ranks right up there with any image I've ever encountered in my 27 years of doing this. I posted a picture earlier of a house with a spray paint message "Rebecca is safe. Don't worry". For some reason, that image has haunted me since I first saw it. It's such an incredible statement of what's important in life, and speaks so profoundly to the human spirit which is tested beyond belief in events like these.

"Rebecca is safe. Don't worry". They lost every thing they owned. They had flood water 10 feet higher than their roof. All their possessions were coated with an inch of mud. They had no insurance.

They knew what mattered. These are the people who will rebuild this area. These are the people who will be here long after I'm gone and it all seems like a dream.

It was an honor and a privilege to be here. I'll never forget it.

Rebecca is safe. Don't worry.

