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Makers of the Award-Winning Cascade Server content management software

One Year After the Storm

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A year after the storm, how are things going to look? I had seen pictures of the destruction of Hurricane Katrina, but I had no idea what to expect. My college roommate called me up one day and asked if I would take a week off help the people who have met this storm 1st hand, and I couldn't turn down the opportunity. Living in Atlanta and working in a high tech industry, it's easy to feel removed from the situation, even though New Orleans is not that far away.

Upon first arriving in the city, all I could think was... Are we still in America? I have traveled all over the world and I have seen my share of poverty, but to me the city looked like it had just been set aside for people to fend for themselves. I felt very uneasy in the Big Easy. We spent the first few days cleaning a nursing home in the lower 9th Ward – one of the worst hit places during hurricane Katrina. Even one year later, I felt like I was entering a war zone. Furniture was strewn everywhere and there was a smell that I will never forget. Clothes in the closets were still wet even a year after the storm! The kitchen was stocked with molded food that had never been cleared out, and yes, that brings cockroaches. Large colonies of them lived in between the walls in their own cockroach heaven. My job was to remove every inch of that building so that only the wooden beams were left standing. Black mold was rampant. Sorting through other people's belongings is an eerie feeling. I was throwing away parts of people lives... photos were the only remains of these people who once lived here. Once the nursing home was stripped bare, we moved on to clean up a woman's house that was located in heart of the city. We met her at her doorstep, and realized it was her first time back since the storm. Can you imagine what she was going through? All the emotion of seeing all of her belongings completely destroyed? Walking into the house I could see a large dark brown water mark about 6 feet up the wall.

After a couple of days of backbreaking work, we managed to make our way to the very back of the house where the kitchen was located. The refrigerator was lying face down, meaning that food had been in rotting in this refrigerator for over a year. The smell was unbearable. There's no way to salvage a fridge like that, so we duct taped it shut and hauled it out. A few hours later we were finished, with just the skeleton of the house remaining. Depressing as it sounds, it was really great to see – a sign of rebirth. It means this place is ready to start fresh with a new family who can start building new memories. The last day of my trip was the most memorable. We spent the entire day sweeping up some of the most dangerous areas of New Orleans. We were able to talk to people who survived the storm, and the stories they had to tell were incredible

– so far removed from what my life is like. One man lost his son to Katrina; another woman we met experienced the Super Dome first hand. At a nearby corner market we met some guys hanging out outside. They said that they really appreciated the hard work that we were doing and they believed that the storm was a positive thing. Before, they told us, there were so many racial barriers in the city, but now people are coming together to help out anyone in need – no matter who they are and regardless of the color of their skin. Now that we're about to celebrate Thanksgiving here in the States, I'm happy to have the chance to step out of the content management world for a moment to share my experience with you. This trip really opened my eyes to how fortunate I am and how when situations in life go bad, you should always be thankful for what you have been given.

Have a great Thanksgiving, everyone!

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