

## Special Edition

*"Hamburgers, Hot Dogs and Tornadoes..."*



As you are aware many southern states experienced horrific damage last week from tornados that went through our states. Perhaps you are one of those who were affected.

In this special issue of CrossingCurrents I share just a brief word about my own experience and my observations of the relief efforts going on in Alabama.

I hope the [lessons I learned from the back of a pickup](#) will serve as an encouragement and a reminder of the hope that we find, even in the midst of disaster. If you have experienced a loss due to these storms, please let us know and we will try to get you

the needed help.

If you have a story to tell about your own experience during the recent tornado activity or the relief effort, we would love to hear it. Email us at [info@crosswindsfoundation.org](mailto:info@crosswindsfoundation.org)

You can also help with the relief effort in Alabama through the Crosswinds Foundation. Just make your check payable to Crosswinds Foundation and designate it, "Tornado Relief". 100% of these funds will go directly toward providing for needs associated with the tornado damage.

Mail your check to:

Crosswinds Foundation  
P.O. Box 12143  
Birmingham, AL 35202

May God's Blessings be upon you,

Bob Waldrep

For the next two weeks all online gifts will go toward tornado relief unless otherwise designated.

### **Hamburgers, Hot Dogs, and Tornadoes: Life Lessons from the Back of a Pickup Truck**

By Bob Waldrep



Area hit by tornado (seen in background of photo to left)

As I looked at my feet there were literally hundreds of hamburgers and hot dogs. I was in the midst of a fast food junkies' ultimate burger fantasy. As I stared at all this food and thought how good it would be to reach out and have one, I couldn't help also thinking that the ones for whom they were prepared would probably much rather be sitting at their own table eating a meal of their own choosing.

Last week as tornados ripped through much of the Southeast, my own state, Alabama was especially hard hit. As the rescue and relief efforts got under way I had an opportunity to go into one of the hardest hit areas of Birmingham, my home city.

My friend Andy Jenkins had offered to take me into the staging area of the relief effort, for what he described as a "20 minute" recon trip, so I could better assess bringing in volunteers associated with my group, Crosswinds Foundation. As so often seems to happen when being with Andy, our "20 minute" trip turned into an adventure that lasted more than two hours and allowed me to get much more than just a glimpse of the staging; I was able to see the determination and resolve that is so often found in the midst of seemingly hopeless situations.

Once we arrived on the scene the "recon" quickly ended and I found that we were now "feet on the ground" volunteers. Our task was to help transfer food from the distribution area to a facility that was housing and feeding the residents of the community. Naturally, from Andy's perspective, this was part of the education process for me; however, in actuality, it was driven by Andy's unrelenting desire to help those who are in need. (I have found this to be common among many of the hundreds, if not thousands, of volunteers in our area.)

So it was that I found myself in a truck with its bed so loaded with hamburgers, hot dogs, chicken sandwiches, and all kinds of snack foods, that there



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was barely room for me and Andy. And, though we only had a relatively short distance to travel, our trip was being extended by the many detours required by fallen trees, downed power lines, and debris that blocked most of the roads in this community.

Sitting in the back of the pickup truck I got my first up-close look at the damage. In the 1980's and early 1990's I worked as an insurance claims adjuster. During that time, I had been on the scene immediately after two hurricanes and several tornados to handle property damage claims. I have never seen anything comparable to what I saw last week. I knew from the images being broadcast by local and national media that the damage was extensive; however, after viewing this area in person, I don't think any image can effectively communicate, or prepare you for, the extent of the devastation.

Everywhere I looked I saw houses, businesses, neighborhoods - a community reduced to piles of rubble. No structure in the path of this tornado seemed to have been able to hold its ground; no tree - no matter how mighty or large its reach - was able to remain standing; no person could prevail in its wake. Or, could they?

There, in the midst of all the rubble, the fallen trees, crushed houses, shattered businesses, and crumpled vehicles, were people. People who had lost all or most of their possessions but were still there; people who had lost family, friends, and loved ones, but were still there - resilient, wonderful, courageous, determined people, who would not be moved - who could not be moved. While they did not choose for their community to be destroyed, it would be by their own choosing that they would remain there and rebuild it.

Driving through the area I could hear the chain saws buzzing as I watched homeowners and their families clear their property of fallen trees. I could see neighbors helping one another go through the debris searching for anything that might be salvaged, be it a piece of property, or a treasured memory that could be saved. Others were walking the streets asking if everyone was okay or if

they needed anything. How amazing these people were to so quickly have determined to move forward rather than to be defined by this tragedy.

Then I met Patrick. Well, actually I saw him; our formal introduction would come later. At the time he was simply a man in the neighborhood who, upon seeing us, began running toward the truck waving his arms and yelling. As we came to a stop and he drew closer we could hear him saying repeatedly, "We need some water".



Bob with Patrick

As we came to a stop and he drew closer we could hear him saying repeatedly, "We need some water".

We had a whole truckload of food; but no water since the place we were taking the food already had plenty of bottled water on site. We explained this to him and offered some food but, he wasn't asking for food - they needed water.

I've thought a lot about that. Here he was in the midst of an area where most of the homes had been completely destroyed, there was no electricity, no running water, no air conditioning, no cable, or satellite service - none of the things in life we so often treasure - and all he wanted was water.

We told him that once we delivered the food we would bring him some water. Due to travel conditions it would take us about forty minutes to deliver the food and get back to the distribution center. Upon arrival, we put a case of water in my Jeep to take to Patrick. Andy, who always thinks beyond just meeting the need, also grabbed a bunch of hot dogs and burgers and, as a special treat, some ice cream.

When we got back to the area where we first encountered him, we distributed the water and food. Patrick called out to several neighbors and told them they better come get some ice cream and water. As several folks gathered to get some food, ice cream, or water, we got to know a little of Patrick's story.

We learned that the home where he was cutting up trees and clearing debris belongs to his uncle. He showed us where he played as a child when his Dad would visit his uncle's home. He pointed out where the garage his Dad and uncle once worked on cars had stood just days before. Who knew where it was now.

Other family members were there helping Patrick. As we talked, we discovered that, among them, only Patrick and his uncle still lived in the community. All the other men came from areas of the city that were unaffected by the tornado (one actually worked in my community which had also been unaffected by the tornado). They were there because, as they pointed out, that's what family does - help one another.


When you volunteer to help in these areas, no matter where they are in our State, that's what you hear time and time again. Families helping families to rebuild a home; neighbors helping neighbors to rebuild a community; friends reaching out to friends to move a city forward - that's what makes a state, a nation great.

I am glad Andy turned my "twenty minute" trip into a learning experience. I am thankful that I got to meet Patrick and his family and to hear some of their story. I am blessed by having seen all the volunteers who are tirelessly serving in areas where they don't even know anyone, "giving out a cup of cold water". I am proud of the Church which, despite all its many flaws, often shines the brightest in the face of such disaster and need.

Maybe a lesson we can all take from this is to slow down a bit and take a fresh look at our priorities, at what's really important. Perhaps we need to find greater pleasure in the basic necessities of life - having a drink of cold water. Or, better yet, to share a cup of water in Jesus' name.

*Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give them will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give them will become in them a spring of water welling up to eternal life."*

JN 4:13-14

 **Crosswinds Foundation for Faith and Culture**  
P.O. Box 12143 Birmingham, AL 35202  
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