

# “The most important work I’ve ever done”

ANNIE CARD, PETERBOROUGH, NEW HAMPSHIRE

AS ANNIE CARD SERVED LUKEWARM CHICKEN AND mixed vegetables to thousands of southeast Mississippi residents battered and displaced by Hurricane Katrina, she couldn’t shake the feeling that food just wasn’t enough to get them back into their homes. Then she met 10-year-old Eddie.

Every day, he visited the Red Cross canteen truck where Annie worked, loaded his wagon, and returned to his neighborhood to deliver meals. One day, Annie came to see how Eddie and his family were living. What Annie saw unnerved her: Their house, stripped down to the studs, was empty except for a salvaged cot, a webbed chaise lounge, one table, and one chair.

Annie and hundreds of other Red Cross workers took up a collection to buy the family a hot-water heater. In this simple act, and in the miles of water-damaged appliances and mattresses piled up along curbs, Annie saw her answer. People needed appliances and beds. Walls could come later, but without the basics—refrigerators, hot-water heaters, and washers and dryers—they couldn’t go home. “All people want,” says Annie, “is to have clean clothes to go to work, to send their kids to school, to sit down to dinner as a family. Just the basic things we all want. It gets pretty simple once you’ve lost everything.”

Annie, 45, a photographer, returned home to Peterborough, New Hampshire, with a collection of portraits of the people she met, their faces full of character and determination, each with a harrowing tale attached. “I was pretty sure if people outside of the devastation zone could meet the people in Mississippi and hear their stories, they would care and they would help me help them,” she says. She and fellow volunteer Tammy Agard worked long hours to create a list of families in need.

In New Hampshire, Annie raised funds for Gulf Coast relief through the Monadnock Express Fund. Ten days later, she returned to Mississippi with \$20,000 to buy beds and appliances. “The pickup trucks of new stuff kept coming, and the families stood in the street and wept. We restored a whole

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TAMMY AGARD



neighborhood,” says Annie. “They still needed everything else, but this was a good start.”

The project quickly grew, fueled by \$10 and \$20 donations, by bake sale and car wash proceeds, by generous gifts from Rotary and garden clubs. People wrote two and three checks each, motivated, says Annie, “by the idea that their money was going directly to the people who needed it instead of through a large organization.” She and Tammy have since incorporated as a nonprofit, Mississippi Home Again. They received their first grant—\$78,000 from Mercy Corps, an international relief agency—in April.

Annie estimates they’ve helped several hundred families so far. In partnership with groups such as World Vision, AmeriCorps, and Habitat for Humanity, and with the opening of a warehouse in Pascagoula, Mississippi, to store large donations of appliances, “we’re helping hundreds more,” she says.

Just as the severity of Katrina caught the Gulf Coast unawares, Annie never expected to still be working in Mississippi more than a year later. “It just feels right,” she says of her relief work. “I feel like I’m meant to be there. It’s the best, most important work I’ve ever done.” *Learn more at: [mshomeagain.org](http://mshomeagain.org)*

**Annie Card shares an embrace with Wilbur Bolton, 82, at his FEMA trailer on Christmas Day last year. The organization Annie cofounded, Mississippi Home Again, bought him pots, pans, towels—real necessities people need as they build homes again from scratch.**