

FLOODS IN NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE, ON MAY 2010



Maybe you heard a lot about the flooding in Nashville, Tennessee in May of 2010. But then again, maybe you didn't. The national media seemed to be stuck on two other stories—the aborted bomb plot in Times Square and the BP oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. So the attention of the nation wasn't really focused on the devastation in Nashville and surrounding counties, at least not until some country music stars began to stage benefits for their beloved Grand Ole Opry and for flood victims. And the raging waters did victimize many people in a widespread area, not just Opryland and downtown Nashville.

In the early morning hours of May 2, 2010, after torrential rainfall of between 13 and 18 inches in a two-day period, the waters of the Harpeth River were rapidly swamping the neighborhood of River Plantation in Bellevue (about 12 miles SW of downtown Nashville.) An area of condos and town homes, River Plantation is home to people of all ages, but a large percentage is senior citizens. From May 23 to 27, 2011 a mission team from FUMC became a part of the River Plantation family and assisted several flood survivors with finishing projects around their homes. We'd like you to tell us their stories.

Betty is a retired insurance representative from AFLAC. 2010 was a devastating year for her. One month before the flood, her daughter began treatment for breast cancer. Then, following the flood, Betty's mentally ill nephew committed three murders—killing his sister, her husband, and their daughter. So with that one act, Betty lost her niece, great-niece, and nephew-in-law, as well as the nephew who was sent to prison for life. Betty was in a fragile emotional state, but our team repaired her fence and created a new drainpipe for her, and she was very grateful. Pastor Ellen spent a couple of hours one afternoon visiting with Betty and was able to answer many questions that Betty had about breast reconstruction surgery—her daughter was having the procedure the very week we were in town—and Pastor Ellen has been through the exact thing with her daughter. We felt sure that God had put us at the right place at the right time for Betty.

Charlie and Kay are retired educators. Charley played college football in Mississippi and Tennessee and coached high school football and other sports for 40 years. Kay was a teacher and school counselor. Both diabetics, Charley had a partial foot amputation and does not maneuver well; Kay has had 2 knee replacements in the past 4 years and still goes to physical therapy. When the waters were rising, they had to wade through hip deep water to higher ground at the community clubhouse where they were stuck for 2 days until the water receded. They could not live on the second floor of their home after the flood as some did, because Charlie cannot climb stairs. They had to rent an apartment for 10 months while their home was being renovated. We helped them with window cleaning and removing redwood stain from their fence, as well as prepping a concrete wall for painting. Visiting with Charlie about football was great, but the most poignant moment was when he said, "I've been an athlete all my life and now I can't do much of anything."

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Grace, an 86-year-old with macular degeneration, needed fence repairs. We replaced a fence post and made the fence safe and operable.

Hazel, the youngest of our clients, works as a travel agent. She was able to get her car to higher ground during the flood but then came back to her house—we think to rescue her dog—and then had to swim out. The dog must have swum too! Probably the most physically demanding job, Hazel's existing fence was demolished and disposed of, and then the team built her a brand new fence. When Hazel arrived home and saw her new fence, she cried with happiness—or so she reported when she called us that evening to express her thanks over and over!

Word spread through the neighborhood about our mission team's efforts and we were able to assist Hazel's neighbor Sue, who needed her thresholds sealed (left undone by her contractor) and Betty's neighbor Judy with a fence gate repair. Grace's neighbor Linda also needed help, but we met her too late in the week to tackle her fence project. We were able to refer her to our contact person at the Flood Recovery Network and her name was placed on the list for repairs. Linda was very grateful and gave the team a loaf of delicious sour-dough raisin bread, which we ate on the bus on the way home!

People would stop by our job sites and compliment our work and thank us for being there. While sitting in the Home Depot parking lot waiting for supplies, a woman stopped by the church bus to thank us for coming to help them. We were housed at a Church of the Nazarene near downtown Nashville. Both pastors came by to visit us and thanked us for coming; the senior pastor shared that the fee we paid to stay there is helping to keep their doors open, as the church is currently struggling. We also shared food with a couple of homeless men, Lloyd and Curtis, who regularly sleep in doorways at the church.

It wasn't all hard work and sweat (though there was a lot of that!) We enjoyed delicious meals and snacks prepared by our chief cook Pastor Ellen Willett, and had nightly singing and devotions. Ben Bishop played his guitar for our hymns, and we also enjoyed a couple of impromptu piano concerts performed by Gradylene Pate. She said the piano was horribly out of tune, but we loved hearing her play anyway. We went to downtown Nashville on Wednesday night and walked around soaking up the sights and sounds. At the end of our week, on Friday night, we attended the newly repaired Grand Ole Opry and saw a full program of country western music artists.

As we approached Huntsville late on Saturday evening May 28, Gradylene serenaded us a cappella with a wonderful song about making memories with good friends called "Witchcraft." The song tells us that there is no magic or witchcraft in this world—we make our own magic with friends and shared experiences. Listening to her was a moment of grace not soon forgotten.

Paul Harbison led Mission Team 2011. Hardworking team members included Chris and Lorrie Bell, Ben and Gigi Bishop, Anna Harbison, Dian Herrod, Gradylene Pate, and Jim and Ellen Willett. All team members say "Thank You" to the generous members of our church who supported us with prayers and who supported our fundraising efforts so that we could do this good work and share our love of Christ with the good folks of Tennessee.