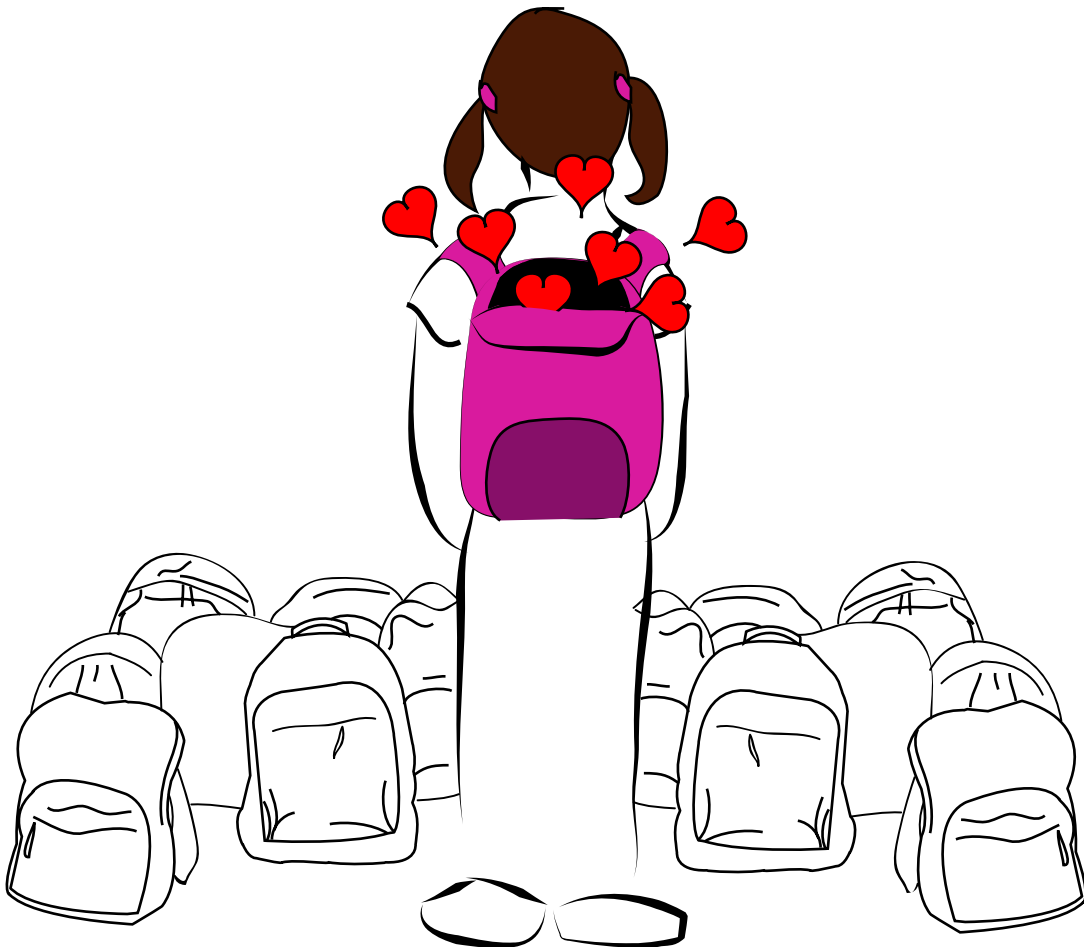


PROJECT BACKPACK

Kids Helping Kids

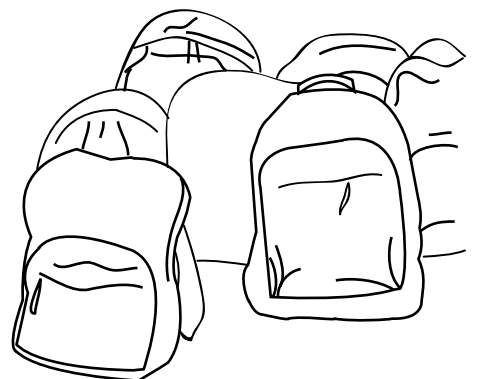
A Relief Effort for the Children of Katrina
Stories of Love
Charity, Community, Caring, Empathy, & Optimism



DRAFT AS OF
11/21/2005

We need your stories

Please send your stories or thank-you notes received
from kids, parents, schools to: Steve.kantor@gmail.com
We will add to this developing book and website



INTRODUCTION

Welcome to a collection of stories from people involved with [Project Backpack](#).

We decided to collect and share these stories for many reasons:

We want to recognize and thank the thousands of people who helped us all help the kids.

We want to share words of thanks and stories of need with volunteers.

We want children who were affected by Katrina to know how much people care.

We want parent's of children of Katrina to know that other people want to help.

We want to encourage other people, who are reading these stories as they are forwarded from friend to friend across the country to consider helping the kids of Katrina with ongoing efforts of [Project Backpack](#) for the holiday season.

If you have a story about leading a community effort or your children packing their backpacks for other kids, or anything else, please share it with us and we will add to this developing book.

Please see www.projectbackpack.org for latest information on [Project Backpack](#) and how you can help.

Thank you for helping our daughters' idea of backpacks for the kids at the Superdome/ Astrodome become something which has helped many people in many ways.

It is an ongoing honor to be one of the hundreds of coordinators of this effort.

Sincerely,

Steve Kantor
Coordinator
[Project Backpack](#)

Note:

If your own personal story or e-mail is in this group of stories and you would like to edit it further or remove it, please inform us and we will do as you wish.

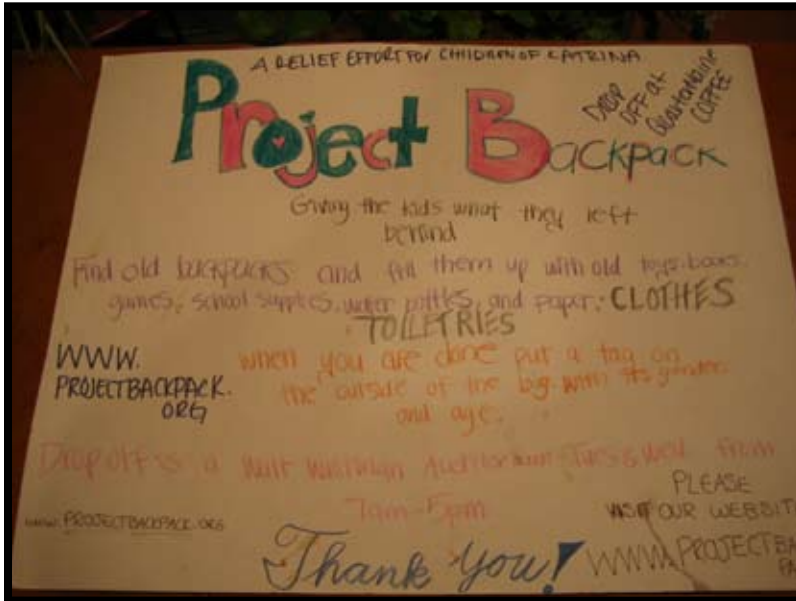
This has not been edited, so if you notice some bad typos or would like to help edit, please tell us.

If there is something you read that you think should be edited out, please tell us.

If you have any suggestions, please tell us – this is an overall effort of [Project Backpack](#).
Thank you!

THE BEGINNING

The first poster created by Jackie Kantor, 14, and used in Bethesda, MD on Bethesda Avenue and Quartermaine Coffee store in early September 2005.



Friday 9-2-2005

First **10** backpacks at Walt Whitman High School, Bethesda, MD.

One week later

10,000 backpacks.

100 days later

50,000 backpacks collected all across the country.

Three sisters who started [Project Backpack](#) One idea from one person can do a lot of good

On Wednesday, August 31st, Jackie Kantor, 14, came up with an idea while watching news and reading paper about Superdome and kids headed to Astrodome. Melissa, 11, and Jenna, 8, joined in and added to the idea of backpacks by kids for the kids. Mom, Aileen, and Dad, Steve decided on Thursday to make it a family charity project with a goal of 1,000 backpacks. [Project Backpack](#) started on 9/1/2005. By Sunday, there were over 20 volunteers and hundreds of people making backpacks. A week later, hundreds of volunteers boxed up over 10,000 backpacks at Walt Whitman High School in Bethesda, MD. They were delivered to evacuee children in 5 states within a few days. And then the effort started to grow across the country in over 90 cities...



Melissa, Jenna, and Jackie Kantor of Bethesda, MD at Walt Whitman High School.

From South Louisiana

The following is an excerpt from an e-mail Maria received:

I am begging you to please open your hearts, not your check books and help these people. I live here in South Louisiana.

Fortunately, we were spared. Our town is hosting victims and their families and still getting more each day. Where they will all go is yet to be seen.

But here is my plea: There are many people without clothes or shoes. When they left they didn't bring anything with them except the clothes on their backs.

There is a pregnant woman with six weeks left to go who has nothing to wear. Children who are sad because they left their favorite dolls and trucks at home. If you have anything, clothes, shoes, underwear, toys, books, etc., you can spare please send it to these families in need. They are in need of everything, physical and spiritual right now. Extra Bibles or rosaries, cards and notes of prayers, letting them know someone cares.

These people are disoriented and confused as to how they will survive. I am asking God's angels on earth to help these people, please. The things we take for granted like toothpaste, toothbrushes, even soap are needed. If you can help please send these items with a letter of encouragement to these families.

Amanda Thille

Thank You

from a 2nd grade teacher in South Louisiana

November 11, 2005

Hi! My name is Nicole Dubois and I am a 2nd grade teacher at Seventh Ward Elementary in South Louisiana. I happened to come across your card today in my class and decided to write to your family.

First of all, thanks so much for all of the help that your community has been providing us with. *We have received numerous booksacks with supplies in them that the kids have enjoyed so much. The things that you have sent have really brightened their spirits.* It has been amazing to see the amount of donations that we are getting on a daily basis.

Right now we are not in our school. Hurricane Rita caused a really bad storm surge to flood much of our southern parish (where the school is located). 7 schools were damaged with ours and another being the worst. We got about 2.5 feet of water in the school and our school is now full of mold! We were allowed to go only to the gym last week to see what the cleaning crew salvaged. The principal "snuck" me into my classroom to see my damage and I was devastated. All of the hard work that I have put into my class was just ruined. I felt for my kids, too. Their pictures were still hanging on my wall but their books and supplies were muddy and it smelled really bad. I had to wear a mask and gloves and it was really dark because we still did not have power. Our school however, did well in comparison to the homes in that area. Some homes were completely blown apart, homes were washed off of their pillars, and worst of all there are dead cattle everywhere even in homes (we are a farming and cattle community). The Catholic church in the community had coffins that had been blown out of the ground, corpses were in the parking lot, and the church had about 6 inches of mud with everything inside of it destroyed. It looks like a war zone. So, anyway, the pick-up has been just awful. I am fortunate enough to not have ANY damage to my home but many of my students and teachers from our small school have no homes left. *The feeling that someone does care about them far away has had such a positive impact on them. We have been reading all of your letters and they can't believe how nice everyone has been.* Hopefully soon maybe by the end of the year we will be back at our own school. (we are sharing a school right now and it is hectic. we have 48 2nd graders in one small classroom right now without a lot of teaching materials).

So once again, thanks! We really appreciate all of your prayers and help. Please tell everyone in your community that Mrs. Nicole and Mrs. Ledet from Abbeville say "thanks!"

Sincerely,
Nicole Dubois

I will send you some pictures!

Letter to a Bethesda 9-Year Old

An E-mail from the Father

Thank you so much to you and the other organizers for this very wonderful program. We live in Bethesda. Our 6 and 9 year-old daughters, students at Wood Acres Elementary, donated backpacks to [Project Backpack](#). Today, our 9 year-old received a letter from another 9 year-old girl, now relocated to Houston, who had received one of the backpacks. She had just started her first day at school in Houston and was very happy to receive the backpack. Needless to say, our daughter was over the moon to receive the letter and is looking forward to writing back to her new pen pal. Like everyone, we have sent off our checks to the Red Cross, which are hopefully doing some good. *However, it is so gratifying to know that our kids also made a direct connection with someone in need of help and cheering up. At the same time, it offered a valuable opportunity to talk to them about the unfortunate victims of Hurricane Katrina and the importance of helping those in need.* Thank you again.

Project Backpack Reaches Mississippi

Subject: [Project Backpack](#)

Date: Thu, 15 Sep 2005 11:06:35 -0500

From: Dr. Randy H.

Yesterday two employees of the [REDACTED] School District traveled to [REDACTED], Mississippi to pick up backpacks for the displaced students recently enrolled in our schools. We presently have 88 students enrolled with new enrollees arriving daily.

I would like to let you know how much we appreciate the campaign for the backpacks filled with school supplies. *As you are aware, some of these students came to us with only the clothes they were wearing.* They are so appreciative of anything that gives them a sense of normalcy and for many that is just getting back in school. Most of our enrollees are still in the Red Cross shelters and you have helped to make a difficult situation more tolerable for these students.

On behalf of our displaced Mississippi students, thank you.

Dr. Randy H., Superintendent

...More Thank You Emails

Subject: Thanks

Date: Thu, 15 Sep 2005 11:00:59 -0500

From: Melanie H.

Thank you, [Project Backpack](#) so very much for your gifts to our displaced students. Your assistance and caring mean a great deal to these children, their families, and our staff members.

Melanie H.

Superintendent of Education

_____ County Schools

██████████



From: Nancy C.

Sent: Thursday, September 15, 2005 3:17 PM

Subject: Thank you

My name is Nancy C.██████████. I am an Area Director for the ██████████ Parish School System. We are struggling to meet the needs of the Hurricane Katrina students. Our parish has registered over 4,000 students and currently has over 2,500 in our schools at this time. With the help of our community and people like you throughout our country, every child who was a victim of the hurricane has a uniform, a book sack, and school supplies.

The supplies you sent down came to the homeless office just down the hall from my office. I wish you could have heard the excitement when the backpacks arrived! You can't imagine what an impact it had on the morale of the staff who are working so hard and such long hours. Even greater has been the impact for the students who have received your wonderful gifts. They have lost everything - literally. They hold on to their new treasures with tight hands. It's as if the book sacks and supplies have given them hope and a chance for normalcy. On behalf of our parish, thank you to all who were involved in this project. What a difference everyone has made.

...More Thank You Emails

From: Pam C, _____ School District, Mississippi
Date: Wed, 14 Sep 2005 14:48:40 -0500
Subject: Thank You!

Good afternoon....

On behalf of the approximately 75 displaced students who we now claim as our family, we want to express our gratitude for the best packed bags in the nation! Our only sadness came when we realized that we had not taken photos of the students faces as they received each bag and then opened each one to find such a variety of treasures from other young people in our great country.

One middle school student was trying to be brave and all grown up for his siblings. As he turned to leave the room he looked at me, with tears in his eyes, and came back for a hug. He broke into many more tears and was overcome with a sense of belonging and appreciation over all that had been extended to him as well as his family.

Your efforts have touched many lives, those displaced as well as our own community. We realize how blessed we are and know that we too have much to share. Please thank all the many young people and other adults who played a role in making this a special day for the displaced young people and their families in our area.

May God continue to bless each of you!

Pam

Interim Superintendent

Letters from Kids to Kids

Letters from Kids in Michigan to Kids of Katrina

The kids who live in Brown City Michigan wrote very compassionate letters expressing their support and concern for the kids displaced by Hurricane Katrina. Each and every letter was personalized and concluded with a "I hope you write back", This could be the start of an old fashioned Pen Pal Chain (I had one back in the 80's). Here are some of the highlights:

There were more than 100 letters that went out from Brown City High School. Nathan Kreiner wrote a letter that best represents much of what was penned:

Dear Boy,

Hello. My name is Nathan Kreiner. I am 16 years old and live in Brown City, Michigan. It is a very rural city in the thumb area of the lower peninsula. I am writing to express my sympathy for your loss in the recent hurricane. Like everyone else, I am very sorry for what happened to you and everyone else in the southern states.

I am also writing you to wish you good luck with school. Although it is a new school and different city, you will still have an opportunity to make new friends there. I hope that you find new friends and have a great time being with them. If you ever need someone to talk to or just want to introduce yourself, please feel free to write back.

*Sincerely,
Nathan Kreiner*

Carrie McIntosh wrote a very lengthy and compassionate letter, starting with:

Dear Courageous

Letters from Kids to Kids

Letters from Kids in Michigan to Kids of Katrina

DeeDee writes:

*The floodwaters came pouring in
Homes and businesses were destroyed
Everything was lost
But as time ticks by
The water will dry up
As will the tears
Homes will be rebuilt
As will the lives of the one affected
A new start brings hope
Hope for the future
That everything will go back to normal
Life once again will go on
And the memories of the ones lost will endure*

Scott wrote:

*I would like to tell you that you are
very brave for what you are doing
and what you are going through*

Natalie Thomas, 17 years old writes:

...No matter how high the waters rise, there is always room to float. There's always a need to. It's just how we are, as born survivors, as the human race. I don't know how much you have lost and I could never possibly comprehend the chaos you call life right now, but I am confident you can overcome it. I hope you can; I wish you luck. Just keep your head up, and remember that, wherever you are, the entire world is thinking about you. We're worried, especially now, after the devastation.

Without a doubt, the road to recovery will be a long one. But you're alive, right? That has to count for something, and I hope it will be at least one step in the right direction. I wish you the best, once again, and maybe someday things will hold a little more semblance of "normality". Good luck and please take care.

Andrew Rhodes, age 15:

...I am very impressed at how strong you must be. I don't think I could be as brave as you are being right now. I know that you were probably devastated, and yet you have hung in there and are still fighting. I respect you fully and completely and I think that you are one of the most amazing people I have wrote to. Good luck in the future!

Jason Linck, 16 years old:

If I were in your situation I do not know how to survive. That is why I think your so brave at your situation. You are about the coolest kid I am writing to. I hope you enjoy your supplies and have a wonderful time at your new school."

Letters from Kids to Kids

Letters from Kids in Michigan to Kids of Katrina

Jeffrey Proctor wrote from his heart,

...I am writing this letter to let you know that everything will be alright. I know you have probably been through a lot after the hurricane, but people all around the country are chipping in to help you and all the others going through a hard time.

...I just wrote this letter to let you know that we care

Jason

*Dear Boy,
I am sorry about what happened to you. That is a terrible thing for anyone to go through. I am an 11th grader that has been watching this disaster on TV since it happened. It is something no one needs to go through.*

I believe things will get better. New Orleans will be opening up soon, I hope you have a great school year and make a lot of new friends.

Deanna Welch writes:

I am sending this letter that will hopefully bring lots of hope and encouragement to you. I know it must be devastating to be going through what you are, but my prayers go out to you. I am sure you feel like all the doors are shut in your life, but trust me, they will open again. New Orleans will reopen soon I hope, and your life will be getting back on track.

Matt Papineau had a funny perspective on relocating:

...I have been to 4 different schools in 2 years and on the second day of school I always had tons of friends. Just be yourself, (unless your one of those really bad kids then be somebody else) and every one will like you.

Alyssa Ferri had some advice on making new friends:

...Some advise I have is just to be yourself. Tell a joke here and there, laughter is the best friend maker.

Derek Van Damme has some great questions:

...What was it like to experience an actual hurricane? After being in the hurricane, what was the aftermath like? Please write me back.

Stories from People Requesting Backpacks

We have not yet received backpacks. I have two sons age 17 and 13. Their names are Darel and Justin. We lived in Metairie, Louisiana. On the Sunday of Hurricane Katrina, my husband and I were debating whether or not to evacuate. We decided to leave for our hometown, which is Kaplan, La. This is roughly 140 miles away, 2 hours plus a few minutes. My husband and I are not breakfast people, we only drink coffee in the morning. When we left, I told my husband that we would stop in St. Rose to grab something to eat. We took 4 16 ounce cokes and departed. The traffic was bumper to bumper and we moved a few miles ever 15-20 minutes. Cars were overheating, people ran out of gas. There were no businesses open as far as Houma. It took us 8 hours to Morgan City, which should be about an hour drive. The gas stations that were open had lines for miles. The ones that had enough gas like ourselves kept driving, wanting to get to our destination, because the weather was deteriorating and didn't want to get caught in the storm. The whole time we were on the road, we were starving, getting nauseated. The only thing I had in my purse was two cough drops. We each took one and made it last as long as we possibly could. My husband described it as wafer thin. When we finally made it to Kaplan in 11 hours, we weren't even hungry anymore. We have remained in Kaplan as our residence is unlivable.

Also, I am not sure how many, but I know that the towns of Erath, Delcambre, Forked Island, Pecan Island, Cow Island, Perry, Abbeville, Lake Charles, Gueydan, Cameron, Holly Beach, and I am sure there are a lot more I am not mentioning. This is all near my new home in Kaplan. This whole area had severe damage during Hurricane Rita. We had a shelter, here in Kaplan, but they closed it down because of inability to take in all the new evacuees from Rita. These are all small towns, Kaplan's population is only about 5000 or so. By the way, we evacuated during Rita as well, we ended up in Cape Girardeau, Missouri. The folks down there were awesome. They treated us so nicely and lovingly, they made us feel at home. I would like to thank all of them. We love you Cape! We were fortunate enough that our residence was still livable.

Thanks Again! I will pass the message on to City Hall and see if we can gather up a volunteer group. I will contact you as soon as I can.

Blesses and God's Wishes

Stories from People Requesting Backpacks

My victims all are from New Orleans, some are my family and some are total strangers that our church housed. They lost everything because of the flooding. It has been so sad. Two of my cousins are in their late 70's & early 80's. They still haven't completely decided what to do. They raised their families in New Orleans and that is their home, but they also have brothers and sisters here, so I am hoping that they decide to stay here.

The others are families with children from 18 years old to 18 months old.

One of the little boys is in my Sunday School Class and he told me last Sunday that he was afraid that Hurricane Wilma would hit New Orleans, I assured him it would not. He & his little brother live with his single, unemployed, practically disabled grandmother, due to the fact that their mother was unfit and the father is in prison. It is such a sad situation.



The Colar family thought it would be safe to stay at the Grand Palace, due to the low impact of the last hurricane earlier in the season. Unfortunately, as the brunt of Katrina bore down on Louisiana, and subsequently causing the levy break, the hotel where they were staying began to fill with water. As a result, 18 members of the Colar Family waded through deep water in a desperate attempt to flee the rising flood. All 18 members of the Colar Family, slowly made their way to the Interstate 10 interchange where a large majority of fleeing New Orleans residents were seen heading. For several days without food, water or bathroom facilities, the family, along with hundreds of other people struggled to survive among horrible conditions including the floating corpses of those that didn't make it. Eventually, a convoy of buses came to evacuate the family and took most of them to the Salvation Army shelter in Beaumont, Texas. Some of the family were separated from each other but eventually were reunited. See www.looking4marcelcolar.com.

When Hurricane Katrina approached the Louisiana coastline, the Colar family decided to evacuate and sought refuge at the Grand Palace Hotel. Amongst the 18 family members who evacuated their homes were several school-age children. The family finally got settled in their shelter in Beaumont Texas and all family members were accounted for. Unfortunately, Hurricane Rita came along and they had to evacuate again!

The family and children have now relocated to Dallas and Houston and have or will be moving into apartment homes they have been placed in. Many of the children have recently registered for school and are trying to get their lives back together. Throughout this ordeal, the Colar Family has been devastated and overwhelmed with the loss of their homes, vehicles and all their possessions. Many of them, all they have are the clothes on their backs. They have very little in the way of personal items. There are immediate needs for this family that must be met and we are looking for anything anyone can do to help this family.

Stories from People Requesting Backpacks

Steve,

Thanks for responding to my request. After reading your story I can truly say that you have amazing daughters, and they are a true inspiration to other children their age.

I have not received any backpacks since I've started my request a few weeks ago.

Yes, I still do need them.

If they could be shipped directly to my home I would appreciate it since Father is not always at the Church. If they are coming by way of an 18 wheeler then we would have to ship them to the Church. My home address is: ...Perkinston, MS 39573.

Quantity:	K-2	30
	3-5	30
	6-8	25
	9-12	28

I am the mother of 5 children...

We decided to stay in our home for Hurricane Katrina.

We weren't worried about the water, just the winds.

There were times throughout the hurricane that the winds were so strong that had not my family held our back doors closed the wind would have blown them in and we would have lost our entire roof. We were fortunate to come out of the hurricane with only losing 50% of the siding on our house, 50% of the shingles on the roof, some wind driven rain damage on our carpet, and the roof being blown off of our shed.

My sons car had three huge transformers fall on it at college and demolished it. Unfortunately the 8 other people who had come and stayed with us did not fair out as well. They have lost everything but the clothes on their backs. There is nothing left of some of the homes except for the slab. We were without power for 2 and a half weeks and didn't have phone service till Oct. 10th. Gas was extremely hard to find and we had to drive over 80 miles one way just to purchase gas and the basic essentials that we needed.

A lot of people from my Church were not as fortunate as myself, and that is what has driven me to this project of trying to put smiles back on the children's faces. We have always taught our children that it is better to give than to receive. In the past we have had "Happy Birthday Jesus" parties where the students brought in canned goods to furnish our Church pantry for the needy. Because of the hurricane and the number of people staying in my house I became one of the needy and was able to use that food. I just thought it would be nice for this one time for the children to be able to receive.

Stories from People Requesting Backpacks

I will begin with my story...

I am Director of Student Activities at Mount Carmel Academy in New Orleans, Louisiana. We are an all girls Catholic high school grades 8-12 with an enrollment of 1260. We are accredited by the Southern Association of College and Schools. Our school is located in the Lakeview neighborhood 1/4 mile from the 17th Street Canal, which was breached after Hurricane Katrina hit our coastline. As a result of this catastrophe, our school was devastated with 8-10 feet of flood water. Needless to say our school sustained extensive damage.

I began my journey with Mount Carmel as a student in the late 60's only to return as a teacher in the early 80's. Mount Carmel has been my life for over 35 years. Never in all these years have I encountered any challenge such as this. The damage is indescribable. We are determined to rebuild our beloved school. In addition, many of our students have lost everything. We are going to re-open on January 17th, 2006 and rebuild our strong community at Mount Carmel Academy. We are committed to helping our students overcome their losses and begin the healing process. Knapsacks will begin this rebuilding process. To see how school pre and post katrina - please visit our website at www.mtcarmelcubs.org

From: Sent: Monday, November 14, 2005 2:30 PM
To: Phylis Wakefield
Subject: RE: BOL

GUESS WHAT?! They arrived. And they are full of great things. Two children were here when they arrived and did they ever have fun. They had to look in every bag just to see what all they had in them. The little boy was so happy to find a batman and superman and a truck. He played the rest of the time. How wonderful of your school. Hopefully some of our children will write to the children there. We will certainly encourage that. Thank you so much.

Community Involvement

Departure Day is at hand for the 1,721 backpacks assembled in New York, Delaware and Philadelphia...

Yup, that's how many backpacks will begin wending their way down to New Orleans tomorrow morning, thanks to the help of an equally astonishing number of people who collected, sorted and packed them up and stepped in to help get them where they need to be.

The primary destination will be a warehouse run by the Brothers of the Holy Cross for their high school and middle school students. That school, in New Orleans itself, will be taking the 200 or so backpacks for high schoolers as well as about 80 middle school backpacks. The remaining backpacks – 900 of which are destined for elementary school students – will go to Boudreaux Elementary in Jefferson Parish and other surrounding schools.

The truck is expected to arrive in New Orleans on Thursday. It may take a few days to organize and distribute the backpacks, but we hope they will be in the hands of the kids by Thanksgiving.

The backpacks come from here in New York city; from upstate NY (where a group of early childhood education students at SUNY sent out 22 boxes full of backpacks); from Philadelphia (the Har Zion Temple) and from Wilmington, Delaware (Brandywine Springs Elementary put together an astounding 325 backpacks for elementary school students). We received an immense variety of school supplies for the packs from the Columbia Law School and all the law firms to which they reached out (playing cards, yo-yos and bags with an incredible array of legal logos!), as well as 140 empty backpacks and school supplies, books, toys and games to stuff them with from a generous private donor. There were amazing synergies: Citigroup Asset Management dispatched 150 surplus backpacks to students at the Buckley School, who filled them with an impressive array of items that I'm sure any student would love to receive. Thanks to Blythe, Shaylee, Justine and the beleaguered cops at the 19th precinct in Manhattan for agreeing to serve as dropoff points for more backpacks than they have ever seen in one time or place before. (Imagine, if you can, the spectacle of two police cells stuffed to the brim with backpacks...) Special kudos must go to the UJC, which at the last moment stepped in to help me finance the purchase of the 250-plus boxes into which backpacks were packed on the 5th/6th, to the few, the brave & the hardy who volunteered to help sort and pack up hundreds of backpacks and run associated errands (Jen, Lee & Elizabeth, Susan, Emily, Arden, Lois, Ethan, Jerry, Coren, Lisa, Monika, thank you!), to Ruth Arberman & the Sterling School for springing to the rescue and offering us a venue for the packing and sorting, and above all to UBS, for saving our bacon at the last minute and negotiating our long-distance transportation to New Orleans AND picking up the tab for it! (Three cheers for "Bobby Backpack", please!) It's almost enough to make me believe in miracles.

Best of all, more than 1,700 children of all ages will benefit from the hard work of these and many other people over the last several months.

I'm hoping to get photos and feedback from the schools when the backpacks are distributed, and will send that out to you all as and when it is available. Also, please keep checking the website for more details.

Thank you all for playing a role in helping this happen!

*best,
Suzanne*

Community Involvement

Thank you! I hope that we will have an article in the Cornell Daily Sun...thought it was going to be last week, but when it is going to be free...I will take it whenever. I made a connection with the school superintendants office and they put me down at first, stating that many of the schools had already do something. I made my case by letter her know that at the Middle School where my grandson attends, I get all of the e-mail notices. And that I was really impressed with the only effort that had been made being a collection of Clorox and cleaning supplies. (Just what we want having our kid's bring HAZ/MATS on the bus!). So, I restated my pitch...that this project was about "KID'S HELPING KID'S" ...and what better way to empower them to get them involved in this project. So, she was having a meeting with the principals this past Monday and did open the door for them to participate. And what perfect timing with the journal story coming out the very next morning! I have made contact with our local UPS to try to work on shipment and have them excited...they think we can do 1000 packs! And I have Borg Warner Automotive on board with us which is the largest manufacturing operation in town. Thought is that they would do packs with their kid's but also a general collection and we are going to contact some of the local after school programs to see if the kid's want to pack things for us and do letters. I have a dynamic young mother of 4 kids (a three year old and triplets age 7 months!) that is on fire to help us!

Also, yesterday as we gave out letters and posters at the mall, there was a couple at a seasonal store that I was speaking to and they said that this other gal standing there was their relief effort. I was confused and I asked this gal if she had been helping with the relief effort...and she again said...no I "AM" the relief effort. She had been there and evacuated...but had friends that had not and they were in the area that was hit bad. They don't know to this day if their friends are alive or not. Her sister went back to visit recently and said that there were still National Guards there with the dogs that they use to locate bodies...and they strongly suggested to her that she would "NOT" go into this area as it was still a very terrible scene. She said with teary eyes, "you guys have no idea how much we appreciate everything that you have done and everything that you are doing. It means more that you would ever know". God works in wonder ways to bring us together with the right people at the right time.

So things are under motion...and I will be nervous until we are done! I still have not done anything to set up anything on the web site...and I am on overload and have not had time to get in touch with Terra. I know she prefers the phone call but I will copy her on this.

Patti

Community Involvement

I have been assisting with Katrina needs since the first weekend. I have been able to get over 20000 lbs of food donated to one local food pantry for distribution to the evacuees. I have given out clothing that people have donated to ove 2000 people who have lost everything. I am now working on Holiday projects for evacuees or orther needy people in the Dallas area. I have not received any financial support for this ministry and have carried all expenses myself. The look of joy on the evacuees faces when they are presented with items that they desparately need is worth the budgeting issues and the lack of funds. So in spite of this all I have truly been the one blessed to have been able to coordinate the distribution of needed items to individuals in the Dallas area. The need is growing greater as it gets closer to Christmas my families do not know how they are going to provide Thanksgiving and Christmas meals for their families much less Christmas gifts. So if you can assist in any way please do so.

Thanks a million Deborah Cook

Community Involvement

Sir:

We are a small Presbyterian Church in Campbell, Nebraska. Our Sunday School children have been bringing items to fill nine backpacks to go to children who lost everything in Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma that hit the Southeastern part of the United States. We are hoping to have the backpacks filled and ready to send before Thanksgiving. What we need to know is where do we send them?

We heard of the idea of the backpacks on NPR radio and thought it would be a good mission project for our Sunday School children to take part in. The children liked the idea too and have tried to remember to bring something for the backpacks each week. We only have between 10 to 15 children in attendance each week so doing a project like this takes some time. We started out with only five backpacks and four more were donated so thus we have nine backpacks to fill. If that is too small of a number for projectbackpack, perhaps we could send them to our Presbyterian Church's Presbytery and have them find a way to deliver them to the children. Either way, the children's mission project of filling backpacks for the children who suffered great loss from the hurricanes will be complete and be delivered with God's help to the children in need.

Please respond to this e-mail and let me know if our backpacks will be accepted and if so, where should they be sent?

Thank You,

*Sandra Poe - Sunday School Superintendant Westminster United Presbyterian Church
Campbell, Nebraska*

Community Involvement

Did you organize a community effort, and if so, what was core city?

Ours was a small effort confined to the tiny town and school of Marlboro, VT

How many backpacks did you collect?

We collected 52. I have also heard from 2 groups nearby who have collected 50 and 12 respectively and I'm trying to help them with cost of shipping.

Where did they ship to or do you still need help with destination?

We sent ours to Christ United Methodist Church in Mobile, AL. They distributed them in the coastal town on Coden. I am asking them if they can distribute the additional packs as well.

If you still need help, be sure to tell us how many backpacks you have and whether you have transport arranged or will be shipping via UPS/USPS/FEDEX and just need a good destination.

I'll get back to you if current plans don't work out.

Are you still collecting in your community or is there someone else who wants to collect?

No and no. And thank you for all your support. This has been a great experience for the kids at our school. One of our teacher assistants worked with the kids in small groups and really helped them imagine the child on the other end. They thought about the child they were packing for and picked items from a large selection with that age and gender in mind. Then each child wrote a note, drew a picture, and included a photo of him/herself. Of course, we'd love to hear from the kids who receive the packs but we already feel quite close to them. We did receive a nice note from the volunteer coordinator at the church.

Thanks again, Steve, for providing this opportunity for our kids to connect with their own fears and to increase their own sense of power.

Community Involvement

Hi Steve – Here is my response to your request for stories of our involvement: First, comments from my daughters:

Danielle (age 8) : “I wanted to participate in the Backpack Project because it helped children. And the Backpack Project was fun!”

Hanna (age 6): “I liked it (the Backpack Project) because we made the children’s feelings better and it was fun!”

From me: I first heard about [Project Backpack](#) on NPR as I was driving to work one day. I was so excited to hear about a project that ‘spoke to me’ – an effort that spoke to my own values and ways of contributing to others. I love children and I value the opportunity to teach my own children how to make a difference in the world. As soon as I told my children about the Project, they began collecting items that they wanted to send the children. They wrote notes to the children to include in the backpacks that were very sincere and kind. Then I decided to take this project to my children’s school and see if there was an interest. It is a small private school, Merryhill School at Brookside – about 150 families. I had never spearheaded a project of this scope before and was nervous about how to pull it all together – especially the shipping piece. Fortunately, a woman in Sacramento, Elise Becker, who was ahead of me in collecting mentored and helped me along the way. I received donations from colleagues at work at Kaiser Permanente, Department of Psychiatry, and took on sending about 18 backpacks from Elk Grove High School as well. All in all, we sent 80 backpacks filled with love, kind notes, and lots of school supplies to the Jackson Public Schools in Jackson, MS. We also sponsored a family of 4 children and sent them backpacks, uniforms and toys to help them out. WOW !

*I think the greatest gift for me personally was knowing that I contributed to the children in a meaningful way. I absolutely believe that I could do something like this again which was a bonus – a boost of self esteem! **Lastly, the opportunity to participate in a project that children started – your children – was very meaningful to me.** I want to be a part of community efforts that empower children and their creative ideas. I want your children to know what a difference they made in my life and my family’s life, not to mention the thousands of children receiving backpacks. You are blessed to have such thoughtful, compassionate, creative children and our country is blessed to have them as well! Thank you.*

Phylis Wakefield

Community Involvement

Steve,

Yes, the 4 backpacks were received by the Ward Family. The parents were so elated over the contents and the kids were excited to have some new things all their own. I spoke with Mom and she said she even took a few items out before giving them to the kids so they would have some things to wrap for the children for Christmas. Unfortunately, it is going to be a tough year for these and so many other Katrina victims, but folks like you show that there is still a Godly spirit at work, and we wanted to share our heartfelt thanks.

Thank You and God Bless You,

Andrea Hall

Steve - Thanks for your follow-up. We did in fact make it to Stacy's Coffee Shop in Falls Church on Thursday evening to drop off our backpacks, 6 total.

It took well over an hour to get there from our home in Leesburg and through traffic, but I'm so glad you extended the dropoff and that we had somewhere to take them since we missed the first wave of collection sites. And, it was nice to offer a free ice cream to my two sons (2yrs and 5yrs) after driving for so long.

Thank you again for all that you and your family did to organize the backpack collection. I enjoyed filling them with school supplies and toys, and my boys even picked out a book to place in each one. So not only did we fill them with love from our family, I got to pass along a valuable lesson about giving to my kids who are still at the age where it's hard to share :-). We would love to know where these backpacks end up if that is possible, and maybe even be able to continue to give through the holidays to these same kids in need. Keep us on your e-mail list and please let us know of any follow-ups to this project in the coming months. Thank you again from my family to yours!

Angela, Clint, Connor and Jack Malson

Angela Malson

*Life is not measured by the breaths we take, but by the moments that take our breath.
Enjoy the moments!*

Community Involvement

Hi Steve--

I'm not sure if this is what you were asking for in your [Project Backpack](#) e-mail today, but just in case it is: our Brownie troop (#5718, Chevy Chase/Kensington) put together over 20 backpacks ourselves, and collected a few stray ones from people at Chevy Chase Elementary to deliver more than 30 backpacks to the effort (the second wave). Thanks so much for all your amazing efforts, past and ongoing!

Catherine Clifford

As per your e-mail request, I'm writing to tell you of my participation in [Project Backpack](#).

After hearing of the project my 3 1/2 year old son and I went through our house and collected items to fill two bags for very young children. I loved being able to share with him a concrete way of helping kids that we'd never met, but who needed our help. Knowing that other local parents would appreciate the opportunity to participate in this project, I emailed my parents' group, PATH (Parents AT Home in Howard County) and offered to drive any bags they assembled from here, Columbia, Maryland, to a drop-off site. The deadline was only a couple of days away so I wasn't sure if people would have time to put bags together, but people were so eager to do something to help the kids affected by Katrina that in a day and half I'd collected over 40 bags. In the second wave, I got another 25. Probably half of the bags I collected were for infants and toddlers, with the other half suitable for preschoolers. I'm so glad to have been able to participate in this worthwhile grassroots project. Many thanks to the Kantor family for taking a good idea and turning it into a great opportunity to help.

Community Involvement

Hello guys, this is Zac Tims and I am the Secretary of the 15th Alabama Company G. We are a Civil War reenacting group in Maine. We do living history presentations and participate in civil war reenactments and spend most of the summer camping in the rain portraying and honoring the Confederate soldiers of 1861-1865.

A few weeks ago I personally thanked you guys for all you done with [Project Backpack](#). When I shared information about [Project Backpack](#) with my unit they were thrilled to help out. Many of our reenactors have children of their own. About three weeks ago our little regiment was able to donate eight back packs with school supplies and toys to your organization. We were able to get them over to the drop off location with the help of Maine's coordinator.

On behalf of the 15th Alabama, I thank you all again for accepting and distributing these back packs and toys to the victims of Hurricane Katrina. If there is anything else we can do, please let us know.

*God Bless,
Zac Tims
15th Alabama Company G www.mainerebels.org*

Dear Mr. Kantor,

I am third grade teacher in Connecticut. I heard about the project you and your daughters started and I think it's a wonderful idea. It's such a great way to get kids involved. This year in Social Studies, my students are studying communities. We have been talking about ways communities can help other communities in need. When I heard about [Project Backpack](#), I thought it would be a great project for our class to do to help students in need: our class community helping a community in need.

Since this is my first year teaching, it took me a while to get started with it. I just had a chance to check out your website and look at the details for collecting and drop-off. Unfortunately, the Connecticut location is no longer collecting. I was just wondering if there was another way for me to get backpacks to a location that is still collecting. We border Massachusetts and New York and I wouldn't mind driving there to drop them off, but Massachusetts is no longer collecting and New York's deadline just passed the other day. If you could suggest another way for me to get the backpacks to those in need, I would really appreciate it. I know my students would love to help their peers in this way.

Thank you and keep up the wonderful work.

Stephanie Baldelli

Community Involvement

From: Or Hadash - Rabbi Dr. Edgar Nof
Sent: Wednesday, September 28, 2005 6:57 AM
Subject: Shana Tova

Dear Terri,

Shalom

Yesterday, during one of the activities with our Moadon-it children (consisting of children from regular classes as well children at-risk - an integrated daily program of Or Hadash), we had a discussion about the children who were left homeless following Hurricane Katrina and Hurricane Rita. Our children wanted to send messages of hope. I thought you would like to hear a short list of what they said:

"I hope there won't be any other hurricane storms and that the children in America will be well" Lior, 8.5 years old.

" I hope that the storms will stop and that the children there will be healthy" Ariel, 8 years old.

"I hope new houses will be built for them" Natalie, 8 years old.

"I hope their toys haven't been stolen and that the children will return to their homes and find all of their toys" Carolina, 8 years old.

" I want them to go back to a place where they have a house" Nurit, 8 years old.

"I wish they go back to their new house healthy and not sick" Nimrod, 8 years old.

"I hope there won't be any danger these next few weeks, and that they will have plenty of food until they reach their new home" Yuval, 7 years old.

"I hope they enjoy the food we gave and are happy and strong" Bar, 6 years old.

Community Involvement (cont'd)

"I hope there won't be any more storms that will damage their home and that their new house will be even better than their old one" Maya, 7 years old.

"I wish them a happy new year" Shay, 7 years old.

"I hope they will be safe in the year to come" Eden, 8 years old.

"Shana Tova Vemetuka - have a good and sweet year" Tom, 8 years old.

"I hope when they return to their home they can go to the beach and swim without any fear" Maia, 7 years old.

"I hope they have a new home very soon and if not they should move to Israel. It's fun here and there are no hurricane storms" Bar, 6 years old.

"I hope they will see all their friends from school soon" Rotem, 8 years old.

"I hope they return to school very soon" Tamir, 8 years old.

"Be happy and smile" Nir, 7 years old.

"They shouldn't be afraid, and they should play with friends and family so they have a nicer time" Omer, 7 years old.

B'Birkat Shana Tova,
Rabbi Dr. Edgar Nof

Stories from People Requesting Backpacks

hi, my name is XXX... my daughter's name is XXX .. we evacuated before hurricane katrina thanks to the urging of friends (i would've stayed), we stayed in lake charles for a week while we heard the horrible news.. never in my wildest dreams... unfortunately, my mother, my sister and brother stayed behind... the water started rising in our home and that's when my mom finally decided to go... my brother borrowed a boat and started towards the church.. we live in a vietnamese community and there were about 150-200 vietnamese who stayed behind... they all grouped together and stayed at our church.. they stayed alive by gathering food and water until they were rescued... they were rescued on friday (hurricane katrina hit on monday) they were dropped off at the convention center and we picked them up in texas... i couldn't eat or sleep for days... lexi was fine in lake charles because she didn't have a clue on what was going on at first until she saw the news... we prayed that family and friends were safe.. then we silently prayed for our home... we couldn't go back until weeks later and that was only to see... we had about 2 feet of water and the ceiling crashed in 2 rooms.. we could not salvage anything.. everything is ruined and molded... jenna, michelle, andrea and michael are my cousins and their parents does not speak english so i am requesting the backpacks for them... they evacuated early and is staying with their father... they are seperated from their half sisters and mother because they were with their father at the time and they got seperated.. their mom is in california right now and can't take them because there is no room for them to live...their home is kinda the same situation as mine, because we lived a few blocks away from each other before the hurricane... there is still no water or electricity there so we can't go back home to live... it would be a long process to clean up and repair our home... it has been a challenge to say the least but we are thankful that everyone in the family is alive and safe... the backpacks would help us parents out because of our financial situation and the kids would be very happy to receive them....

i think the kids could really use a nice uplifting x mas... times are hard since most parents have no job, no home, no money.. x mas will be very scarce for countless kids...

Project Backpack Stories

New York - Terra

Hello everyone,

In the middle of September, I joined a relief effort called [Project Backpack](http://www.projectbackpack.org), www.projectbackpack.org. Many people all over the country took part in the project. It is my understanding that over 30,000 filled backpacks have been collected and delivered to various hurricane effected locations through this project. Local groups within the project are still collecting, so that number is sure to go up. However, these are the details of my local project and the 500 backpacks that came out of it.

But first... Many people volunteered time, energy, ideas and enthusiasm to ensure this all happened. Some important people and groups to mention are the women of Rye Resurrection's CCD in Rye, NY, the firefighters at the South End Firehouse in Port Chester, NY, Shel Dosik and Jason Judd from the best bike team EVER, the numerous friends and family members who just showed up to help, including and especially James, and of course anyone who delivered a backpack to the drop off site.

The backpack collection left the South End Firehouse last Wednesday. They were delivered by Arnold's, a sausage company, by the following Monday. The collection arrived 2 days early to the destination site in Covington, Louisiana. The receiving group, who would distributed the collection, was the Wardline Church of God and Covington Freedom House. At that point, our contact person, Tammy Flemming, took responsibility for the packs. On Thursday, Tammy and her husband delivered them to a school in Lacome, Louisiana called Chahta-Ima Elementary. According to the information given to me by Tammy, the children at this school were greatly effected by the hurricane.

Some of the children and teachers were asked to help unload the truck. Tammy reported that the kids were quite excited. They were saying things like "This one is really heavy." and "Look at this one." The teachers also expressed their excitement over the collection. It is my understanding that they were thrilled with the quantity and quality of the contents inside of the packs.

The policy of the school is to inventory all donations. Currently the packs are going through that process. However, by Tuesday they will be in the hands of the children they were meant for. I could not be more excited, relieved and overjoyed.

After seeing the devastation on television, that was caused by the hurricane, I thought it was important that everyone do something to help. This was a great way for me and many other people to do just that.

I am hoping to hear from Chahta-Ima Elementary school this week. I will be sure to send an additional update regarding the collection. I know many of you will be hoping to get some information about the reaction of the school and of course the children children who received backpacks. I am anxious to get that feedback myself.

Again, many thanks to everyone who helped with this project. We provided 500 children with supplies and extras that they needed. More importantly, we may have raised some spirits too.

Terra

Stephanie's Story

Portland, Oregon - Stephanie - 10/14/2005

Project Backpack: My Story

Like many people in this country, I sat and watched the events of the last week of August unfold on tv and thought to myself, "I can't stand it!" It wasn't so much the pain and suffering that I couldn't stand watching – it was the unanswered cries for help that made me crazy! It was seeing that actor, Sean Penn, was able to fly down there and pull people off of roof tops, but our government wasn't. It was knowing that 3 young men from Duke University were able to make it into New Orleans before the Red Cross did. If it weren't for my 3 small children, my husband, and my job as a labor and delivery nurse, I would have been on a plane headed down there to try and rescue people myself! But when reason set in, I realized that flying down there on a whim was not the best idea after all. I was a nurse, and, surely, they needed nurses, so I could enlist myself to help with one of the many organizations which I was sure were about to send loads of people down to help. Only, things didn't go just as I thought they would. Instead, here is what happened...

By August 30th, I had called every medical organization I could think of to offer my services, and by each I was turned down. The Red Cross, in particular, stands out to me because the person answering the "Hurricane Hotline" told me that they had all the people they needed for September, but that they would be sure to let me know if they needed me in October! Now, at this point, reports were coming out of New Orleans that nurses, doctors, and patients were still stuck in hospitals with no food, water, or electricity and were using buckets as bathrooms. You can't tell me that they didn't need me! What I now feel to be true is that they didn't want to spend the money and time to use me.

So, after being rejected and feeling very helpless, I received a phone call from a friend of mine (also a nurse) who lives in Kensington, Maryland. She had just received an e-mail from a friend, telling her of this great effort called "Project Backpack," and felt like she needed to let me in on the deal. She knew that I would be right there with her filling backpacks to send to those in need, if only I lived close enough to get them to her in time. She said I should consider mailing some to her. I told her I could do better. I would make it happen here, in Portland, OR, and I would get them to those in need myself! It seemed like it would be easy enough – everyone in the country wanted to help, and there were plenty of people to receive the help. Only, that didn't happen just as I thought it would, either.

Several days worth of phone calls and emails to every contact I could think of led me nowhere! I could not find a single person or organization who would accept backpacks filled with school supplies, personal items, toys, and love on behalf of the tens of thousands of children who I knew needed them! I finally wrote to Steve Kantor, the man whose daughters got me into this mess, and asked him if he would be willing to help me figure out where and how to distribute any backpacks that I was able to collect. He told me "run with it" – he and a woman he had convinced just hours earlier to help coordinate

Stephanie's Story (cont'd)

efforts in other cities would do the best they could to help me make it work. It was a “make it happen” effort, and together, we could make it happen.

At this point, the Red Cross again sticks out in my mind. I had called both local and national hotlines to ask for help distributing backpacks, and was again turned down. They politely said they are not set up to handle any donations other than cash. In my frustration I wondered, does this mean they couldn't pay their executives with anything but cash – and certainly not backpacks? Anyway, I soon learned that it truly is a lot of work for anyone on the receiving end to accept a truckload of donated items, and that the people in the affected areas were already stretched beyond their means. However, I knew this didn't negate the need. The need was there, just not the ability to accept the help.

Enter, Harley Brattain of Brattain Idealease! This very generous and good-hearted man owns a trucking dealership and rental company here in Portland and had decided to donate three, 50 ft. trailers and the drivers and the gas to deliver donated items from Oregon to anywhere they were needed in the south. He was not prepared to do the sorting, boxing, and organizing of the donations, nor did he have contacts in the south who could accept them, but he was willing to be the “how.” Enter, the “who” – Nora Wilson of Southlake Foursquare Church in West Linn, OR. Nora is also a very good-hearted, energetic person who felt a strong need to collect items and deliver them to those in need. She has a very close friend who lives in Abbeville, LA, who she had an idea might be able to help her figure out how to distribute the goods. So, Harley gave Nora control of truck #2 – letting her organize all of the donations and get them where they needed to be. Nora made plans to fly to Abbeville and meet the truck when it arrived to help with the distribution and to research other possible ways to help.

To backtrack a little, I had heard Harley Brattain on a local radio station as he was announcing that he was going to send these 3 trucks. He was, in a way, advertising for donations, so I immediately called and asked if they would take my backpacks. I will never forget the answer from Sue, the receptionist at Brattain Idealease! She, without hesitation, said “yes,” we would love to take your backpacks! Rejection after rejection made this reply such an incredible relief. I almost couldn't believe my ears! After calling Nora and hearing the story of Abbeville, I knew it was time to start collecting backpacks. I was too chicken to collect anything from anyone until I knew how and where they were going. Problem solved – now it was time to spread the word.

This part of my story was the smoothest. People in this part of the country were so eager to do something to help, and word spreads fast! I had originally thought I was just going to do a small collection amongst my friends, coworkers, and kids' classmates, but a certain NPR story changed all that! I started receiving so many emails from the parents of children who had heard the story of Steve Kantor and his 3 girls. Their children were insisting on filling backpacks and they needed someplace to send them. I was listed on the national website as the contact for Oregon but was receiving emails from people in Washington, California, and Idaho. There was so much interest on behalf of the children, I knew I had to take it a step further. All it took was an e-mail to everyone I knew, and

Stephanie's Story (cont'd)

the power of the internet did the rest. Thanks to the help of another passionately giving individual, Kathleen Holley, we were able to secure public drop off sites and corporate donations in no time at all. Things were going so smoothly in the collection department, I should have known something was about to happen.

It's time to give you the story of Abbeville. Abbeville, is the seat of Vermillion Parish in southern LA. It is a town of 15,000 people, with 75% of the population at or below poverty levels. The average income of much of the parish is \$19,000. When I first made contact with them they were in desperate need of 400 backpacks for the children of the 1500 evacuees that they had taken in from Hurricane Katrina. They are a small, poor town with no resources for those kinds of numbers, and because they were not an official shelter site, they were not receiving aid from any outside organizations. When I made the call to Miss Dianne (Brussard), the Clerk of Courts of Vermillion Parish, she was at first very short with me. It was obvious that she was a very busy woman with no time for do-gooders who couldn't do her any good. However, when I told her I was going to be sending backpacks to her on a truck that would leave Portland in a week, she "God blessed" me 3 times and asked me how many backpacks I could send her. I asked her how many she needed, and with a voice of hesitation she asked me if she could have 400. I told her it was a done deal. I would get her the 400 backpacks and they would be there by October 1st.

However, this is where things didn't go as planned, again. Less than one week before our backpacks were due to leave Portland, Hurricane Rita arrived and wiped out much of Vermillion Parish. Abbeville, itself, didn't have a lot of damage, but every town to it's South was either destroyed or suffered a great deal of flooding! I found myself glued to the tv, trying to find out what was going on in this town I had suddenly cared so much about. I was incensed at the fact that hurricanes were now old news, and I had to try so hard just to figure out who was above water or not. Nora was able to reach her friend in Abbeville who told us that, yes, they had a great deal of damage, but they were OK, and that she should still come. Now what they had was what they are calling "Operation Katrita" -- a mix of evacuees from both hurricanes.

During this time of uncertainty and commotion, my lovely husband looked at me and said, "you should go." He said that since day one I've talked about nothing but going down there and helping, and now they needed me more than ever, so I should go! I wasn't as confident in this decision as he, but I started to think very seriously about it. The one thing that I had heard from everyone down south was that there was very little manpower to help with distribution. So maybe my husband was right -- maybe helping to unload the truck and distribute the goods was as good as going there to be a nurse. Even if it wasn't as good, it was the only option open to me. I realized that my original idea of jumping on a plane and going down there to rescue people myself wasn't so crazy after all! So, just when I was sure that this was the right decision for me, I sat down at my computer to buy an e-ticket, and found an e-mail from FEMA. I had enlisted with them, too, when I was trying to get down there as a nurse. They had told me that they received way more applications for volunteers than they were going to need, so, thanks,

Stephanie's Story (cont'd)

but no thanks! I had all but put them out of my mind, when now they suddenly changed their tune, thanks to a lady named Rita. They said there was an urgent need for nurses and they wanted to send me asap. Now I had no idea what to do! After a long "family meeting" with my husband, we decided that 4 days in Abbeville was going to be easier on the family than 2+ weeks in who-knows-where with FEMA. Again, I wasn't sure of the decision. But I took a leap of faith, and on September 28th, Nora, Kathleen, and myself loaded that truck with as many pallets as it could physically hold and onward we went. We finished with 700 backpacks, and Brattain and Southlake Foursquare collected more than 50 ft. of donations. I bought a ticket to Abbeville, and Nora's friends graciously offered me a place to stay (an offer whose importance I didn't realize until I got down there and learned there are no places to stay!)

What a great decision I ended up making! As we were packing the truck and I was looking at all the essential items (diapers, bedding, new clothes), I began to think that maybe backpacks weren't what they really needed right now. I began to feel guilty for taking space on the truck. But I can't tell you how wrong I was! It turns out, they had not received any donations of school supplies or "backsacks" (that's what they call them in the south), and school was due to start up again the next week. Seven of the schools in the parish will not reopen, so the remaining schools have to absorb all those from their own parish who are without homes and schools, as well as all the Katrina evacuees that are still there. Needless to say, there was great need for what I had collected! What I didn't anticipate, however, was their complete shock at the idea that we would fly all the way down there to meet a truck that we had filled with donated goods. It seemed so obvious to me, but so extraordinary to them. I guess that just shows how little they had received from anyone at that point.

The backpacks were a huge hit! We handed them out, along with all the donated items from Oregon, at the donation distribution center that was run by Miss Dianne and funded by FEMA. All people in need in Vermillion Parish were allowed to come to the center once a week to receive one shopping cart full of donated items such as toiletries, food, cleaning supplies, bedding, diapers, toys, etc. Ironically, one of the people in line at the distribution center early the morning that our truck had arrived was a man from New Orleans who had been forced to live with his wife's family in Abbeville after hurricane Katrina destroyed his home. He saw what we were unloading and asked who we were and how we came up with the idea of backpacks. I told him it was the idea of 3 girls from Washington D.C., and that they had heard of backpack collections for other causes such as the children in Iraq and thought it would be a great thing to do for Katrina victims. He was blown away as he told me that just that morning he had written an article discussing the effect that Katrina had on his children. He said that the one image he couldn't get out of his head was of their backpacks hanging on the wall in their now destroyed home. He talked of what they, and their contents, meant to his girls and how much of a loss that was for them. Then he said, "and now you show up with these... I can't tell you what something like this means to us!" Those words were followed by tears, both his and mine.

Many of the people I handed backpacks to asked me "why are they so heavy?" I told

Stephanie's Story (cont'd)

them it was because they had stuff in them, and they laughed with disbelief! One little boy was looking through his backpack and pulled out a new treasure to show his mom: he said "mom, look at this..." She said, "that's good, son," and he said "that's real good, mom!" What he was showing her was a pile of envelopes and stamps! Some people who stood in line for backpacks asked me if they were for college kids, too. They had children who were trying to get back to college and didn't have any supplies to get them there. I, of course, gave them what I could, whether it was school supplies or just a backpack. I had thought that all the goodies inside the backpacks were what would really excite people but was humbled to learn that just the backpack itself was so needed and important to them. But the gifts inside were, indeed, well-received. One boy who is living in a shelter in Abbeville received a good luck charm that one of my daughter's friends had tucked in a pocket for him. He was so excited about his new treasure – you would have thought someone just handed him gold! We actually created such excitement with the arrival of the backpacks that things got a little out of control. A little help from the National Guard calmed things down, but the lines never ceased!

Besides handing out backpacks and filling people's carts, the other important thing I did in Abbeville was listen. I listened to story after story of devastation and destruction. Everyone wanted to tell their story. Some had suffered losses themselves – loss of family members, of homes, of property, of jobs, of community. Others were there because their family members lost everything but were too proud to come ask for help. Others had not lost anything themselves, but had gotten in boats when Rita hit to go rescue anyone they could. Their were stories every where you turned, and I got the feeling they had not had anyone there listening to them but us. As we were "touring" some of the area most devastated by Rita we ran into a sheriff's deputy who was serving as a traveling gas station for land owners who were out trying to rescue their livestock. He stopped to warn us of the dangers that still existed in the area, and I asked him, "Sheriff, where are these people going to go for help?" He looked at me with a slight smile and said, "Honey, 'aint nobody helping these people. They's cajun people -- they's doing it themselves!" And that's exactly what we saw. House after house was completely destroyed, but their owners and neighbors were all out helping each other. There was no Red Cross, there was no FEMA. Only people helping each other.

Actually, saying there was no Red Cross isn't exactly true. We saw them – there were 2 trucks at 2 different locations, handing out ice and water. Besides that, the only sign of them we saw were the signs on all the government buildings that said "no Red Cross here. Call 1-800-... for help." I even had people ask me if I knew where they were.

Now, I realize they can't be every where at every moment, but I was at the very site where Hurricane Rita, one of the most powerful hurricanes ever to hit the US, had made land fall just one week prior. Some parts of the parish were still under water! Yet, no one seemed to be helping. The National Guard was present in pretty decent numbers. However, when you asked them to help, they politely said, "sorry, 'mam, I'm only here for security." Not that they didn't want to help – they were just following orders.

Stephanie's Story (cont'd)

The situation in Vermillion parish is not good. The hurricane victims are receiving emergency food stamps weekly and \$2000 from FEMA to rebuild, but beyond that, they are on their own! Their homes are destroyed, as is everything they owned, and the cost of rebuilding is beyond their means. We visited the home of Ernest – a hard working 70 year old man in Erath whose house was “totaled” by flooding. It was only 3 feet of water, but enough to ruin every wall, every door, every appliance, every floor cabinet, all the insulation, all the electrical, and most all his possessions. The contractor we met told us it would take \$40,000 to tear down and rebuild the damaged pieces of his house. Ernest makes \$14,000 a year! And this is just one, very small piece of the puzzle!

The biggest lesson I learned through this whole experience is this: I live in a country where I have always thought that if some disaster strikes me and my home, there will be organizations who will come help. I will be able to depend on those who's job it is to help. But what I saw is that it's not the government or organizations on whom I will be able to depend. It's people. The only thing we have when disaster strike is each other, and it is each other who I saw making a difference in Vermillion parish. It was the neighbors, families, and friends. It was the random people who got on planes and flew down there to do what they could to help. It was people like me and Nora and the Scientologists who were organizing small efforts to bring help. It was make-it-happen groups like Project Backpack. And I, for one, feel privileged to have been a part of it!

The Domino Effect

If you give a mouse an airplane.....

Hello everyone,

My name is Sarah Schain and I live next door to Steve Kantor. I received one of the first emails he originally sent out about [Project Backpack](#). I, like all of you who are reading this, immediately jumped on board. To make a long story short, I asked Steve how I could help his family with their effort and he thought I should “launch this effort on a national level”. Needless to say, I ran with it. It was not difficult to launch this effort, people across the nation were excited to create backpacks with their kids to help the victims of Katrina. My first big obstacle was getting the backpacks to the appropriate destination! My first state was Florida. The project manager in Florida collected almost 1,000 backpacks and her school needed the backpacks off the property asap. At this time, the highway connecting Florida to the southern states (I10) was destroyed from the hurricane. Going by road was out of the question. The only way to get the backpacks to Houston was via airplane. I was stressed. It was past 10pm and my phone rang. It was my friend Robin Rosenblum who casually asked, “Is there anything I can do to help you?” and I replied jokingly, “yeah, get me an airplane” and she stated, “OK Sarah, I’ll get right on it”. We laughed and said our goodbyes. The next day the third person in charge of UPS called me at my home and addressed me by my first name. I was floored! He said, “I got your name and phone number from Robin and Jay Rosenblum, I heard you might need some help and I can get you an airplane in Florida”. After I picked myself up off the floor from a state of shock and surprise, I ran next door with the great news! We had a shipper!

Thank You to Robin and Jay Rosenblum for putting [Project Backpack](#) in touch with UPS.

Thank You to UPS for Saving the Day!

Time for Kids

letters from kids about [Project Backpack](#)

It's cool that the Kantor sisters are collecting backpacks for kids who were in the hurricane. 1,000 backpacks - that's a lot! If everybody did something for the people who were affected by the hurricane, New Orleans would be repaired a lot sooner. This article inspired me to help people in need.

Regan E., 9, Texas

What the kids are doing for the Hurricane Katrina victims is awesome! These kids are an inspiration to all the kids across America. I know they inspired me. I wonder how the Kantor sisters thought of doing the book bag drive? It was a great idea! I think that each and every one of these of kids deserves an award.

Samantha J., 12, Ohio

When I read that the Kantor family's goal was to collect 1,000 backpacks full of school supplies, I was amazed. I think this is a wonderful thing to do for the kids who had to deal with the hurricane. I wish my school would do something like this. I would definitely make a donation.

Jacob C., Ohio

I enjoyed reading about what kids all around the country are doing to help Hurricane Katrina victims. I especially liked reading about the Kantor sisters who sent backpacks to the victims.

Matt G., 12, Ohio

The Kantor sisters are doing a very good thing. If everybody did a little bit for the victims of Katrina, the world would be a better place.

Katie B., 10, Georgia

Wow! I was amazed that so many kids across the United States have worked so hard to earn money for the hurricane relief. I think the Kantor sisters are role models. Their truly amazing story should be spread across the world. So many kids have dedicated their time to help others and that's wonderful.

Cara H., 11, Illinois

It's great that the Kantor sisters are giving all the book bags and school supplies to Katrina victims. Hopefully our school will be able to do something just as great. It's amazing what kids can do to help other kids!

Brendan O., 11, Ohio

It's amazing how much money kids can earn in one day to help the hurricane victims! I hope the Kantor sisters got enough book bags for the victims of Hurricane Katrina!

Matthew B., 10, Ohio

Time for Kids

letters from kids about [Project Backpack](#)

It was really nice of the Kantor family to collect 1,000 backpacks full of school supplies for hurricane victims. If Hurricane Katrina affected me, I would really want to have a backpack with stuff in it for school. I mean, 10,350 backpacks! That is a great local project to have.

Cassie C., 9, Texas

It was great how the Kantor sisters filled backpacks with pencils, paper and other supplies for the hurricane victims. It was very kind and thoughtful of them to do this. I think this was the best program for the Hurricane Katrina victims.

McKenzie B., 9, Texas

I'm so proud that the Kantor sisters from Bethesda, Maryland, collected 1,000 backpacks for the people in Hurricane Katrina. I would like to do something like that to help the victims of the hurricane.

Taylor C., Kentucky

Story of Project Backpack

10/18/2005 version - by Steve Kantor

This is the story of Project Backpack, as told by Steve Kantor the father of the three girls and one of the coordinators of Project Backpack. This was written on 10/18/2005.

On Monday, August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina struck the Gulf Coast and New Orleans. The destruction was tremendous. One great fear was that New Orleans would be swamped by a storm surge which would flood the city under 10-20 feet of water for weeks or months.

When most people went to sleep on Monday night, it appeared that New Orleans had been spared the worst. However, by Tuesday morning, the news reports showed the flooding of most of New Orleans. The worst fears had been realized.

The Superdome, which had been the primary shelter for those people who could not or did not evacuate, became filled with more and more people on Tuesday and Wednesday.

On the night of Wednesday, August 31, 2005, two full days after the storm, the evening television pictures showed tens of thousands of people stranded at the Superdome with reports of no food, no water, no sanitation, and no help coming from FEMA or other government agencies. The story was that buses would come 'soon' and take those evacuees to the Houston Astrodome and other shelters. The news reports said that people may be in shelters for months.

On Wednesday night, our three daughters were watching the television news and reading the newspaper in our family room, with Aileen, their mother. I was in downtown Bethesda, MD, where I had gone to the gym to workout and was at a book store buying and reading a book called Pyromarketing. Since it was the last day of the month, I was also writing my monthly goals and plans for September. All of which would be tossed out the window one day later.

Jackie started drawing a sketch of New Orleans flooded with a 'toxic soup' and how the children have nothing left and would be moved to the Astrodome. Jackie was 14 and had just finished her third day of high school, grade 9, at Walt Whitman High School in Bethesda, MD. Bethesda is a suburb of Washington, DC, about 30 minutes north of downtown DC. She started to talk with her sisters about how the kids would have nothing and how it would be a good idea if the kids had backpacks filled with good stuff to help them when they got to the Astrodome. Melissa, 11, who had recently started grade 6 at Pyle Middle School, and Jenna, 8, who was in grade 4 at Bradley Hills Elementary School., joined with Jackie in talking about the idea. Aileen then joined the discussion. Once I got home around 10pm, everyone was talking about how it would be a good idea. We all went to bed that night sad and worried about the people in the Superdome, but with no decision to try to collect backpacks.

On Thursday morning, we got our three girls off to school, and then Aileen and I sat down and chatted for a few minutes about the idea. All I recall is that both of us thought backpacks for the kids sounded like a good idea. We asked each other if we wanted to

Story of Project Backpack (cont'd)

possibly do such a collection as part of a family charity project. We decided that if we could confirm a dropoff location, a perceived need, and a possible destination in Houston, then we would give it a try.

For background, our family has never been involved with such a large charity event. A few years ago, Aileen organized a Dance for the Children fundraiser for a local children's hospital. We are a pretty average upper-middle class family with three kids, a dog, a SUV and lots of sports activities for the kids on the weekend.

Both of us are entrepreneurs. Aileen has run her own one person public relations firm, with a focus on health care, for over 15 years. I had run a software company for over 15 years and recently sold my company in November 2004. I was towards the end of a one year sabbatical, enjoying life, spending time with the kids, and reading and thinking about new business ventures. My plan was, and is, to start a new business by the end of 2005. By coincidence, I was about to step up my new business efforts in September 2005, until Project Backpack happened. So, both Aileen and I are used to doing things a bit differently, taking some risk, and thinking out of the box.

Aileen started the morning by calling about 5-10 locations in Houston, such as the Astrodome, the police department, various shelters, Salvation Army, and other groups. All of the places she called like the idea of backpacks for the kids, had not heard of that from anyone else yet, and had no idea who would be 'in charge' of the Astrodome. Aileen made a connection to one shelter, which was one of the first to receive backpacks from our effort.

I checked the FEMA and Red Cross websites to see if they had 'backpacks' as any standard issue item for evacuees or any requests on the website. I could not find any reference to backpacks, so I believed we would not be duplicating FEMA or Red Cross efforts. Plus, we clearly decided to encourage people to give money first to charities such as the Red Cross, and then to do something extra, such as backpacks.

For a dropoff location, Aileen wisely declined my idea of our house and garage serving as the dropoff. I came up with a goal of 1,000 backpacks in one week. I felt that 100 was not really a big enough number to send anywhere, and 10,000 was not within the realm of possibility. I decided that it was more important to move fast while the story is in the news, with a one week deadline, rather than making it a few weeks. If it worked, it would either work in a week or not.

We emailed Alan Goodwin, Principal of Walt Whitman High School, Dan Bennett, Principal of Bradley Hills Elementary School, and Rabbi Bill Rudolph, Rabbi of our synagogue, Congregation Beth El. Dan Bennett was supportive and could serve as a dropoff over the weekend and distribute flyers to kids, but not serve as processing facility. Rabbi Rudolph also offered to have the synagogue serve as a dropoff. By coincidence, the temple was having a staff meeting on Thursday afternoon about how the temple can support the relief efforts. It turned out Project Backpack was a good idea to pursue. Dr.

Story of Project Backpack (cont'd)

Goodwin at Walt Whitman offered the high school as a dropoff, and more importantly, as a processing facility to take all incoming backpacks, process and pack and ship. We had use of the full auditorium for a good 10 days.

It was now Thursday early afternoon and we had confirmed we were not duplicating efforts with Red Cross, we had multiple dropoffs and a processing facility, we had a goal of 1,000 backpacks in a week, and we even had a place to send them. The one thing lacking was transport or any notion of how to get transport. We decided that our family would offer to pay for the shipment – although in my mind I sensed that we would likely get some company or person to donate shipping.

Next, I saw an e-mail from Lisa C. on the DC Urban Moms list, DC Urban Moms is an e-mail list of a few hundred moms, and dads, in the DC area. I had actually been reading the postings for a few months as part of some business market research for potential new business efforts. Lisa had posted on Thursday about how we can help the evacuees and looking for ideas. Erin responded to her, as did I with our backpack idea, and Lisa connected the three of us in an e-mail thread. All of Thursday afternoon, we brainstormed the idea and started to think of how to get people involved. These ideas led to the general posting later on Thursday.

Not only was Walt Whitman going to serve as dropoff, but Dr. Goodwin offered to have Jackie introduce the charity effort that very evening to a crowd of 300 parents who would gather as part of Freshman Parent Night at Whitman.

In many ways, the whole effort has been a ‘Perfect Storm’ of good thing happening.

As Jackie came from home from fourth day of high school, we sat her down around 4pm and said, “Jackie, do you know that idea you had for backpacks last night? Well Mom and Dad talked about it this morning and we think it is a good idea. We would like to do it as a family charity project, is that okay with you?” Jackie said “Yes” and then we dropped the news on her that we had emailed her principal, that he had agreed, and that she was invited to speak that night. That was a lot to absorb coming home from school. We gave her the option of her speaking to the parent group or Aileen or I would speak. Jackie decided to speak. I think that a lot of parents got involved based on hearing Jackie. It was 4pm, Aileen and Jackie then spent an hour doing a one page flyer. I went to Kinkos to make 500 copies and by 7pm we were at Whitman.

Many people came up to us afterwards to say they wanted to help.

The idea was ready to launch, via e-mail, on Thursday around 11pm.

One day after Jackie, Melissa, and Jenna had the idea, it was launched with an e-mail sent to only four groups, Bradley Hills, Pyle, Walt Whitman, and DC Urban Moms.

Story of Project Backpack (cont'd)

I think it was a total of perhaps 1,000-1,500 people on those emails lists. We found out the next day, it was a very connected group of people in Washington, DC. In the e-mail, we announced dropoff dates and times, including the next day Friday at Whitman.

Friday morning, I went to Whitman to put up a poster that Jackie created for Project Backpack as a dropoff outside the auditorium. I was there at 7:15am. At 7:30am, Austin K. made my day by dropping off three backpacks for boys, with perfect labels of gender and age, as the first backpacks of Project Backpack. My spirits soared. Thank you again Austin!

Next, Judith A., our first volunteer, came to join me with coffee around 9am and we brainstormed ideas. Most importantly, Judith had her camera that afternoon and took pictures of the first 50 backpacks from the first day. That picture was used on website, survey and many of the flyers around the country.

On Friday, after the Thursday evening emails, I received over 300 emails of support and volunteering. In less than 24 hours, the project and idea had gone viral through the Bethesda community around Walt Whitman and had already gotten to downtown DC people. I knew that we would get 1,000 backpacks and had to move quick to setup a system. We even got incoming emails from Washington Post and National Public Radio who somehow heard about our effort. Saturday morning was the first story in Washington Post, including a website address which was not active until Saturday 12pm. NPR did interviews on Saturday and the story which ran on Tuesday led to the project spreading across the country in one week.

On Friday, Aileen had started to prepare a press release to get the word out. But, because of the success of the e-mail effort and website and incoming press inquiries, we never sent out that first press release. In fact, as of 10/18/2005, we have not sent any press release, nor are there any press released on the website. I think that is one of the most amazing parts of this effort.

Friday night, I was falling behind in responding to the emails, so I decided not to respond to anymore until I had a website operating and a template response. I checked for the domain www.projectbackpack.org on Friday night. It was available so I registered the domain and started a \$25 website. The key part of the website is that it is an open creation effort, involving use of something called a wiki.

On Saturday morning, I crafted a long e-mail letter to reply to the few hundred incoming emails. This would give them info on the website, ask for volunteers, and give dropoff information. I built an online survey using a service called Zoomerang for volunteer signup, spent one hour putting together the website, and created an initial open creation site on something called Seed Wiki.

Story of Project Backpack (cont'd)

By Saturday noon, I was ready to respond the 300-400 incoming emails from Friday. Everyone was sent the same e-mail response, and it took about 1-2 hours since I had to pull up each e-mail, press reply, and then paste in the template text.

Within a few hours, we had 50 people signed up on website. I had offered two times on Sunday morning and evening to meet at our home in Bethesda to volunteer and coordinate the effort.

Saturday night, I got an e-mail from a woman named Diane C. in Massachusetts. Diane wanted to start an effort in MA. Within one hour, we setup her own website page and survey and she had emailed hundreds of her contacts. Diane made the effort go national only three days after the original idea. Diane and her volunteers collected and shipped over 7,000 backpacks and her emails led to other cities starting efforts.

On Sunday morning, about 20 people came to our home for a two hour organizational meeting. The agenda was very direct to cover a lot of ground. People chose their area of interest, such as get the word out, transportation, processing of backpacks, dropoffs, destinations, and other topics. On Sunday evening, a different group of 15 people came. So, as you can see, we never had a single meeting of all core volunteers. From those 35 people, about 25 donated their time and energy over next week or two to make things happen.

By Sunday evening, the effort had grown way past our family to a community effort organized by a core group of 25 people.

We would never meet again as a full group. All coordination was done through the website, the open creation portion, and emails. Some of the groups had in-person meetings to coordinate their own topic. And when we were processing the backpacks at Whitman for the first wave, we had discussions with each other.

By Monday, no one was in charge, but everyone was in charge. We had no idea how we would process the backpacks, box them, ship them, and unsure of final destination. But somehow, 5 days later, we had over 10,000 backpacks being shipped to 5-10 locations.

Monday was spent organizing various aspects. Already the press were making inquiries and Aileen was busy responding to press and organizing interviews for our girls and for the effort at Whitman. The success of the effort was also due to media interest and the stories during the first week which led to more collection efforts.

On Monday, I called for a quick meeting on Monday night at Barnes and Noble in downtown Bethesda. This was an unusual idea, this is a public gathering place at a fountain, not a place for meetings. I brought a card table and a sign and we probably had 10 people

Story of Project Backpack (cont'd)

show up. There were a few new people who were not at Sunday meeting and they became very critical to our efforts. Monday was Labor Day, so there was no school.

Tuesday morning opened with lots of backpacks being dropped at Walt Whitman early in the morning. We already had the first local television doing stories and the numbers quickly kept growing.

We passed 1,000 backpacks probably Tuesday mid-day. By the deadline of Wednesday evening, we had probably 10,000 backpacks. Over the next two days, hundreds of volunteers, including students, helped to process, box, and ship the backpacks to the kids of Katrina.

The effort then went national and on the website over 30 locations got involved in collecting backpacks. This led to over 25,000 backpacks in September which were collected and shipped to the kids.

More of this story later....

The World is Flat –

Backpacks Filled with Love - [Project Backpack](#)

[Project Backpack](#), a hurricane relief effort started by three young sisters in Bethesda, MD, delivered over 35,000 backpacks to children of Katrina. Over 10,000 families and people donated backpacks which were organized and collected by over 100 local community efforts in over 25 states. See www.projectbackpack.org for details.

[Project Backpack](#) demonstrates important themes from “The World is Flat” by Thomas Friedman. Mr. Friedman lives in Bethesda, MD and [Project Backpack](#), by coincidence, started in the community of Bethesda, MD.

This overview presents themes from the book as they happened within [Project Backpack](#).

In the book, there is a reference to Bethesda: “In late 2004, Google began its service whereby if you are walking around Bethesda in Maryland and are in the mood for sushi you just send Google an SMS message on your cell phone that says “sushi 20817.” From the initial idea to 10 days later, [Project Backpack](#) had an information system that could tell you instantly about over 100 dropoff locations around the country for backpacks for the kids of Katrina.

Because of the use of e-mail and a website created for collaboration, it was possible for over 10,000 people who donated backpacks to connect via over 100 volunteers who had never met each other before in their life. And this all happened within 30 days.

The lever that enabled an idea from three young girls, to become one family’s charitable effort, to a wave of charitable effort was the internet and software tools to share information quickly and without any organization. At [Project Backpack](#), no one is in charge. At [Project Backpack](#), everyone is in charge.

Like JetBlue, [Project Backpack](#) used a ‘homesourcing’ organizational model. We estimate that over 70% of the volunteers are SAHMs – stay at home moms. In a few hours each week, whether at 6am or 12pm or 11pm, the core volunteers were able to spread the word of mouth via e-mail and individual websites they created for their community efforts. Each local coordinator recruited more people to help in their community.

Each layer of innovation got built on the next. The lessons learned in Bethesda, MD were written up as a 10 page document of processing guidelines for community efforts in other cities. We shared what we learned, and each other effort passed on what they learned.

[Project Backpack](#) created an ‘open creation’ website. This is a website where anybody can add or edit the pages of the website, as well as make comments on each page. In a sense, the Kantor family started the project and split up roles as follows: the kids (Jackie, Melissa, Jenna) came up with ideas of what should be in the backpacks, how kids could help, and explained the project to press and media who asked for interviews; Aileen, mom of the girls, as an entrepreneur with her own public relations company, served to handle incoming press inquiries and addressing those questions and needs; Steve, dad of the girls, as a software entrepreneur who was on a one year sabbatical from selling his

The World is Flat (cont'd)

software business, served as coordinator of the effort and created the website theme and tools to enable volunteers from around the Washington, DC area and country quickly join the effort and contribute to all aspects. In a sense, the Kantor family was in their house in Bethesda, and hundreds of volunteers were in their homes somewhere else. The project enabled us to create virtual offices and use talents sitting in different parts of the country.

[Project Backpack](#) was an open source effort involving a self-organizing collaborative community. Our community of volunteers shared their insights with one another. During the rush of the first few weeks, many volunteers experienced the psychic buzz of creating a collaborative product of thousands of backpacks to help the kids of Katrina.

The project used the concept of 'emergent behavior' based on whoever showed up, via the open creation website, to volunteer and do something to help.

The fact that [Project Backpack](#) was brand new was a huge advantage. Think of [Project Backpack](#) as a new charitable relief effort stepping onto the playing field legacy free. We did not have to worry about the sunken cost of older systems. We did not have to spend any time or energy on committee meetings, legal organizational issues, fundraising, taxes, office space, accounting, office politics, commuting, hiring, firing, or sales. [Project Backpack](#) could move very fast.

In less than one week from an idea from three young girls, the idea had been implemented with amazing results. From a goal of 1,000 backpacks, over 10,000 backpacks had been collected. The story had reached The Washington Post, National Public Radio, multiple local TV stations, local radio, and CNN came to film the 10,000 backpacks at Walt Whitman High School in Bethesda, MD. To top it off, the White House had called our home to discuss possible use of the project in upcoming remarks by President Bush on a trip to the hurricane disaster area. And we never issued a press release. The core group of 20-40 volunteers in Bethesda had only met for two hours at the Kantor family home, split into two groups. So, reality is that the core group of volunteers in Bethesda, MD never had a group meeting in-person or even a phone conference call.

As Mr. Friedman writes, "In the flat world a lot more people are interacting with lot of other people they don't know and may never meet. Trust is the foundation of innovation and entrepreneurship." Hundreds of volunteers interacted over the website, e-mail, and phone with people they did not know and may never meet. Trust was assumed. No one did employment reference checks on someone who volunteered to run the entire state of Illinois. If a truck driver volunteered to donate his time to drive a truckload to Louisiana children, no one ran a criminal reference check on the volunteer. By assuming trust and increasing the level of trust, [Project Backpack](#) made a lot of good things happen.

The book poses the question "How does one go about nurturing a more hopeful, life-affirming, and tolerant imagination in others?"

The World is Flat (cont'd)

[Project Backpack](#), created by young people, gave young people a context where they could translate a positive imagination into reality. An entrepreneurial idea to get thousands of backpacks to the kids of Katrina could be pursued and achieved by thousands of people and families. Thousands of young children learned personally about charity and empathy.

A creative imagination is inside of each of us and our children. We all can imagine that things can be better and we can act on our imagination everyday.

In the final chapter titled “11/9 versus 9/11”, Friedman asks “What leads one person to the joy of destruction and what leads another to the joy of creation?”

What leads one person to create a backpack filled with hate and another child to imagine a backpack filled with love?

Imagination based on hope created thousands of backpacks filled with love.

Fill the backpacks with love.