

We have never been involved in something so wonderful, eye opening, and satisfying as our week in New Orleans. Since we are on fixed incomes, Jeanne and I had to earn our way. With the help of many members and friends, we made and sold 100 solid chicken pies and we made a patchwork quilt which we raffled off. We raised not only our fare but had extra to help others earn their way. As cooks we were responsible for the main meal each day. The workers got their own breakfast and packed their own lunch. We were responsible for the shopping and we did it with Antoinette (Nette). Our grocery bills usually ran about \$200.00.

When we were not shopping or cooking, we went to schools. We went to Wilson Charter School, and helped the first and second grade children in their reading. Another day we went to a nursery school (one we had made pillowcases for their mats), and enjoyed helping make Indian corn with the children, singing and just having fun. Children in some areas have to have triple sessions due to lack of schools. Junior High students go to school from 4 p.m. to 9 p.m. Some children have had no schooling in a year and a half due to lack of schools being open and lack of teachers. The Wilson school has retired teachers, principals and superintendents being recalled to help out. The classes are really too big for one teacher as well.

Our week seemed easy compared with the workers. We helped to sort books and label them by grades, but the workers not only put in a full day on homes, but at night they painted some of the rooms in fellowship hall for the Church that was allowing us to use their facilities. The men started on Sunday to build some bunk beds for use with future groups, and by the end of the week, they had built ten bunk beds for the two modular buildings behind the church. The men had slept there with cots or air mattresses while the women used the fellowship hall to sleep.

We had Wednesday afternoon off and we went on a tour of the area. We saw many places still boarded up, trailers still in front of homes, and we saw the homes that the team was working on. The devastation is still prevalent in many places. We visited a pre-school (HUME) that had three little children but hope to have many more. We gave them each a smiley pillow and saw the beautiful rooms that had been all renovated, thanks to another group who had been down from Massachusetts. They had gone home and a short time later, a trailer truck show up at HUME and unloaded a great deal of equipment, and supplies for them. The staff had been working without pay and just received a grant that was going to have their first paycheck the

next day. While in this area we saw a drug bust going down. We also went to the Beecher Church, which we had heard about from the group who went down in January, and we drove by the musician's village, which was very colorful. Each house was a different color – a bright spot in a bleak area. After the tour, we went to Café DuMonde for coffee and beignets, which were delicious. We later went to a seafood restaurant, which was also great. On Friday evening, after our last day of work, we went into New Orleans to hear Ellis Marsalis, Jr., a jazz musician. Along with three others, one his youngest son, we enjoyed a great evening of music, knowing we were heading home the next morning.

We met and spent a wonderful week with such enjoyable folks. We could be a mother to many, but never felt that they looked on us that way. We had morning and evening devotions and it made a nice beginning and ending to our days. One night, someone suggested we each tell about our families and that made us seem like one big family. Many evenings we would sit around and visit with our new and old friends, listen to Rich pick away on the guitar, write in our journals or call home. We are very grateful for having had the opportunity to go to New Orleans, to have met some wonderful people whom we will never forget, and to feel, in some small way, that we made a difference.

The Cooks
Jeanne & Jane