

Volunteers help displaced Louisianan contact his wife

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Ann
Frances, a
volunteer
at the
Baptist
Child &
Family
Services
special
needs
shelter at
Churchill
Baptist
Church in
San
Antonio,
celebrates
with
McKinnley
Pittman
just
moments
after he
talked to
his wife at
a shelter
in Baton
Rogue,
La. (Photo
by Craig
Bird)

Volunteers help displaced Louisianan contact his wife

By Craig Bird

Baptist Child & Family Services

SAN ANTONIO—McKinnley Pittman lost all his phone numbers in the post-Katrina flood. For eight days, he didn't know if he also had lost his wife.

Pittman took his wife, Geraldine, to a niece's house outside of New Orleans Aug. 28 to shelter her from the incoming hurricane, and then he returned home to ride out the storm.

“Monday night I went to bed, and everything was OK. We had survived, and there was no water on the ground,” he recalled.

But the next morning, after the levees began giving way, he awoke to find his van already under water to its tailpipe. He moved to a neighbor's house that had a second floor, but the water kept rising.

Finally, after five days, he was rescued by helicopter, “but I didn't have any of my papers with me,” he said.

Pittman was moved to a shelter at Churchill Baptist Church in San Antonio—one of a half-dozen shelters for people with special needs operated by Baptist Child & Family Services.

At the shelter, he mentioned his concern about his wife to volunteer John Nelson.

“He couldn't remember the name of the town near Philadelphia where his daughter lived, only that it had five or six letters and was north of Philly,” said Nelson, a member of Churchill Baptist.

Nelson went home and brought back maps for Pittman to look at, but still no luck.

But Pittman remembered his son-in-law's name—Edward Lebreaux. That was enough for Nelson, who used the Internet to locate a phone number.

“I called and asked the woman who answered if she knew a Mr. Pittman. She did; it was her daddy,” Nelson said. “And her mother had called her from a shelter in Baton Rouge just 15 minutes earlier, so I was able to get a number to reach her.”

Back at Churchill Baptist, Nelson handed Pittman the phone after Mrs. Pittman came on the line.

Grinning and weeping at the same time, Pittman said: “Hey woman, where have you been hiding? I've been looking all over the world for you.”

After hanging up, with a promise to call back soon, he kept repeating: “Thank you, Lord. Thank you, Jesus.”

Moments later, Pittman's daughter called the shelter. Flights to get her mother out of Baton Rouge were impossible for several days.

“If we have to, I can drive and get her and bring her here,” Nelson told Pittman. “But let's see if we can get her to someplace else where she can get a flight, and we'll get you on a plane to her and you can reunite in Philadelphia.”

But in the middle of the celebration, Pittman mentioned he still had a daughter and granddaughter unaccounted for. Nelson got their names and started trying to track them down.

“I didn't do this, and the Internet didn't do this,” Nelson said. “God did it. We're just doing what we should be doing to help these people.”

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