

Happy to Be Home

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BATON ROUGE, La. – Sandra’s voice smiles as she says she is “so comfortable now” living in a FEMA temporary housing unit on her own property in a remote area of Calcasieu Parish. Her trailer sits on a concrete slab that used to hold her carport. Next to it are the remnants of her old home, destroyed by the two hurricanes. She says, “FEMA saved my life” by helping her return to her own yard. Being forced to live with friends and relatives had left her depressed. Now she feels settled and moving forward with her life.

Sandra is also grateful for the many Samaritan’s Purse volunteers who helped remove a tangled mass of broken and toppled trees. Being at home and being safe are the most important things in her life after her ordeal.

Although some 80 miles from the Gulf of Mexico, first Hurricane Laura and then Hurricane Delta struck this little northeast Calcasieu Parish town of DeQuincy with all their fury. Heavily forested, DeQuincy was founded as a railroad settlement to serve the timber industry, which has long been a vital part of the local economy. Now the twisted and uprooted trees have become part of the problem since they need to be cleared as rebuilding slowly begins.

As scores of trees came down, Sandra’s roof was smashed and in poured the driving rain. Everything inside her house was destroyed - her curio cabinets holding her most precious belongings, her clothing, appliances and ultimately the house itself. Today the building lists to one side, its empty interior covered with mold. She hopes to have it “pushed over flat” in the spring.

Sandra describes having to evacuate when the storm was coming. She joined her daughter in a motel to wait it out. Afterward, she returned to find her house demolished. She stayed with a son, then with friends, then with her brother, never knowing where she would end up. Disabled with impaired vision from birth, she relied on others for transportation and now for housing.

It was a great joy to get a call from FEMA to tell her she had been approved for Direct Housing. It was even better when an evaluation of her property revealed a



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temporary housing unit could be placed on her own site.

In contrast with Sandra's situation, she reports that DeQuincy still looks like the hurricane just hit. Many people are still living in rented properties or hotels or motels, their homes still in their post-storms state while they wait for insurance settlements. Her community lost a local grocery store, leaving just one place to buy food. And that often has empty shelves since everyone shops there and provisions are low. Other businesses have not reopened. Another problem is a lack of contractors and building supplies.

Sandra was happy to share her experiences with FEMA as we near the six-month anniversary of Hurricane Laura. While she is settled for the moment, she talks about life in her single-bedroom unit and her hopes for the future.

The unit makes her feel comfortable and she would like to put personal decorating touches in it after she checks with FEMA. As part of her plans for the future, Sandra is hoping to buy the unit and make it her permanent home. She wants to put up a shed outside to hold the washer and dryer. That will give her more space for what she dearly loves: sleepovers with her grandkids. Sandra hopes to have all this in place within the usual 18-month FEMA limit for occupying the unit.

The visit with Sandra drove home the realities of recovery at the six-month level. She says, "I just want to thank FEMA."

The system of individual assistance for people is working. Case by case, people are being helped to find safe housing. But there is a long way to go before most of the more than 200,000 residents of Louisiana affected by the hurricanes get used to a comfortable "new normal." Finding sites for housing units and then putting in the infrastructure to support hundreds of spots will be a lengthy task.

A video link to Sandra's story can be found at <https://youtu.be/Czw39Z723dE> .

For the latest information on Hurricane Laura, visit [fema.gov/disaster/4559](https://www.fema.gov/disaster/4559). Follow the FEMA Region 6 Twitter account at twitter.com/FEMARegion6.

