



In their words: Reflections on NAU's Alternative Spring Break

Waveland, Miss.

Upon returning from their trip this past weekend, a number of students participating in NAU's Alternative Spring Break wrote their thoughts about the experience to share with others.

Kristin Morrison's reflections typify the experience as many NAU students saw it. Her writing appears almost in its entirety. Excerpts from other student reflections follow.

Kristin Morrison

On arriving at the ICare village camp the bus sat in silence, no one spoke. It was as if all of our energy and smiles were hit by the reality of the situation. We had just driven through complete devastation. I had not expected to find Waveland, Mississippi, completely wiped out. Houses are gone; forest trees are falling precariously over on top of one another. It was as if we had arrived the day after Hurricane Katrina. The land is ravaged all is lost and the peoples hope and spirit is gone. What we saw cannot be fully justified through words.

The leaders of the camp told us first off that this was a week about being flexible. I now have a new understanding for the word flexible.

Not only is it being responsive to change, but it's putting your needs after everything else. If one person needs help, humanity should be there to provide it. The people of Waveland, Mississippi, have been forgotten if not for the cavalry of students who gave up their spring breaks to provide what little relief we could. Citizens would stop on the side of the road on whatever sight you were at to say thank you, and that we were saving their lives. Homeowners greeted us with tears of thanks and appreciation. Most citizens are living in FEMA trailers, but some still have tents up. Six months later people are still living in tents. This is flexibility.

My most fulfilling experience was working on Robert Brauman's home. A group of 10 students and I from NAU and Columbia College in Chicago arrived to gut his home that had not been touched since Hurricane Katrina. Black mold, mud, and Katrina water were residing in his small two-bedroom home. We began by pulling out couches and mattresses. Every worldly possession he owned drenched in mud needed to be removed and trashed. We could salvage nothing. It smelled of six-month-old rot. In just an 8 hour work day my group was able to completely gut Mr. Brauman's home. We cleaned it down to the foundation and studs. His look of incomprehensible gratitude was invigorating. His awestruck face left me feeling as if I had made a difference for his family.

This was an intense adventure. I have never been exposed to the devastation after a natural disaster. I learned what it means to truly give of yourself for people who have no material possessions left in the world. To come back to NAU, our world unchanged and untouched is a culture shock. Our lives have not changed we have functioning streets and every item we need right at our fingertips. It is important that we continue to support the south in their efforts to rebuild their lives in whatever ways possible. The trip may be over but the need for giving is not.

Candace Linn

We all came back with bruises, scratches, and bug bites but our spirits grew in Mississippi. In the face of all of the destruction, there was hope and rebuilding. I learned that college students can change and impact anything that they decide to

change.

Jessica Fasburg

I was amazed at their positive attitude and their sense of humor. I would certainly not be in such a good mood if I'd lost my home and been living in a tent or a trailer for months. I learned how badly these people's lives have been devastated by the hurricane. It makes me really appreciate what I have.

Amanda Kenmore

The people we met will always be in my heart and prayers. The memories of my new friends and the overall experience will last forever. Whether we stay connected through photographs, through Facebook, or even through our new friendships. I think we will all remember our spring break in Mississippi.

Katy Culley

Stuff like not having the right shoes to match my new top or the Union serving the same batch of potato salad for the past three weeks now seem totally irrelevant and silly. I honestly believe that the trip that I have taken has changed me as a person for the definite better...Every day that I was there, I ended the day completely exhausted, dirty beyond belief, eaten alive by mosquitoes, and eating stuff that should only be served to prisoners...but I also walked away with a warmth in my heart that I can't even describe that made it all worth it.

Amy Orr

This trip was an unbelievable experience and I'm grateful to all the sponsors that made it possible for us to go. Both the lives of the victims and all the students that went out there were affected and I know this will be a spring break that I never forget.

Tyanna Burton

The trip was so overwhelming that I can't begin to describe the most memorable aspects. Seeing the destruction first-hand and being able to meet so many wonderful people tops the chart. The last day that we were there, I was putting gas in one of the work vehicles and a complete stranger approached me and told me how wonderful it was that so many students gave up their vacation to help. Then he gave me a hug and told me to send it along to the rest of my group.

Joanna Schipul

When I was on a job site a man driving by in his car stopped to ask me where I was from. He had a tired look on his face as he expressed to me how much he appreciated that we came to Waveland to work instead of partying and relaxing on spring break. He was almost moved to tears as he said that we all have a special place in heaven and our families must be so proud. Just seeing the complete gratitude of a complete stranger whom I didn't even directly help made everything worthwhile...If I had to do it all again, I would in a heartbeat. Turns out that sleeping in tents, eating PB&J every day and riding in a bus for 30 hours is actually kinda fun! None of it would be possible without the overwhelming support of those who donated for the trip. To those awesome people all I can say is thank you sooo very much!

Trent Shumway

The main thing that I got out of this trip was "truth." I didn't get a media-induced image of what the hurricane did; I got the truth. I saw truth in the human spirit. I saw people uniting together for the brotherhood of man. I saw the truth in these volunteers. There was no sex, no class, no race, no creed, and no religion. I saw people helping people. And in this, I saw truth that this was a foreign idea. The city of Waveland had so much respect for us because we came to help clean up a community, even though it was my pleasure to do so.

Stacie Leach

The most amazing part of the trip was to be able to interact with the victims of Katrina. I was constantly amazed at the hope and generosity these people showed. They had next to nothing, yet they went out of their way to make us feel comfortable and loved. It was impossible to not love them in return.

Adiam Tesfay

People would stop us randomly on the street and shake our hands or hug us. Some would stop driving and talk to us and thank us and some even hugged us. We were given food and drinks and gifts from people's homes. We were cried to and we were laughed with. We were added to people's families within a day because of our shared goal to help others in need.

Julie Misiaszek

I have realized that it wasn't how much trash I picked up or how many walls I tore down. It was the fact that I made an impact on people's lives. I would see families cry with gratitude and tell me that I have given them hope again. This feeling was truly amazing, I had given up a week of my life to help other people and with my time I had changed people's lives.

Dulcy Docken

It's incredible to be back in Flagstaff now and think about what we have here and all that they lost there, and to think about how many of those people's lives were ruined, yet they still laughed and joked with us, and told us their stories. I feel that I should have as great an attitude as they have all the time in my normal life. I think that however discouraging and saddening it is, there is still hope and if they keep the community together and if people like us continue to show up in Waveland, things will improve.

Krystalynne Shojinaga

We came as volunteers to help and encourage them, but I don't think we expected to be so inspired by the endurance of these wonderful people who have learned through the storm what sticking it out and loving your neighbor really means. The trip was altogether incredible, and I am so glad to have had the opportunity to meet Waveland, Mississippi, the beautiful town of hope.

Michael Brewer

After this experience, my passion for pursuing a career with humanitarian intentions has definitely grown much stronger than I ever could have imagined. I hope to spend more of my life helping people in the way I helped them over this spring break.

Mike Davis

The things that I remember most would be talking to the homeowners and how the storm ruined their lives for the most part and how far behind clean up in that area was. Also seeing the city for a whole and how everything was so dirty that it almost seemed like a third world country.

Sarah Wendel

I didn't have many expectations going into the trip, I try not to expect anything going into a new experience so that I will get the most out of it. The best things I got out of the trip were 36 new friends and an experience that I will have forever. My favorite day of the trip was when I went to work with the ex-mayor of Waveland and helped her move furniture and hear her story. She is an amazing, strong woman and spending one day with her made my experience really great. My least favorite day was when we went to a house that had not been touched since the hurricane. We were pulling out couches and refrigerators and the family's belongings. It was really emotional for me, to take to the trash all of the memories and belongings of this family. All in all, the experience was one that I will remember forever. I will spread the word about Waveland, and hopefully some day their lost community will be restored once again.

Wesley Begay

One of the things I'll remember the most is when the home owner came up and thanked us; it makes the work done rewarding.

Lauren Jones

As my last real spring break, it was fitting that it was by far the most interesting one I've ever had. It consisted of 70 hours on a charter bus with 35 people I didn't know, five days of physical labor in 80 percent humidity, endless amounts of peanut butter and jelly, and swarms of mosquitoes and gnats. Although this may not sound particularly fun, it was one of the best experiences of my life.

Thirty-seven people from my school took a bus to Mississippi to demolish houses, pick up debris, and simply provide a smiling face for many people who lost everything they owned (as well as loved ones) in Katrina. Just talking to the residents about their experiences during and since the hurricane was amazing. I had put Katrina in the back of my mind, but seeing the devastation firsthand was indescribable. Many of the houses in the small town we were in hadn't been touched since the hurricane. Some residents had been living in tents on their property without running water until a month ago. Insurance companies aren't paying many of the residents what they should; and to add insult to injury, the residents still have to pay mortgages on uninhabitable houses.

I was amazed by how incredibly grateful everyone in Mississippi was. I didn't think giving up a week of my life was that big of a deal, but to them it meant the world.

Allison Urbatchka

Aside from meeting a countless number of wonderful hardworking people whom I will never forget, the gratitude I felt the moment we stepped onto the first job site will stay with me forever as well. Every single person we helped, even though they had less than nothing left, held onto a hope that can only be born from tragedy and the will to live on. We were fed, confided in and put to work and the thanks just kept on coming. I hope to return sometime in the near future to revisit the people I helped and strengthen the already impenetrable bond we formed.

Michelle Hogan

I have been very blessed to have experienced the Katrina Relief trip with NAU students. I felt a double blessing, because I was able to return to Mississippi; my parents and grandparents were raised in Brookhaven and Jackson, Mississippi and I spent the first five years of my life there. My personal goals and expectations were met from the trip.

The deadline for the Wednesday newsletter is Monday at 5 p.m. [Click here](#) to submit your story ideas.