

ECHOES



THE H.E. BUTT
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HOUSTON CAMPERS AT BLUE HOLE
AFTER HURRICANE HARVEY DERAILED
THEIR INITIAL CAMP WEEKEND

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LLFC PARTNERS WITH
HOUSE OF FAITH IN
SAN ANGELO
TO FURTHER THEIR MISSION

LLYC!
CREW!

OBSCURED BY CLOUDS: ARTIST
JIMMY ABEGG
SHARES HIS VISION
EVEN AS HE LOSES HIS SIGHT



UNDETERRED

HOUSTON NONPROFIT SHOWS HOPE, DETERMINATION, AND GRIT AMIDST HURRICANE HARVEY'S AFTERMATH.

When Frances Freeman packed the pantry of her Houston home with snacks, loaves of bread, soda, juice, and ample breakfast cereal during the third week of August, she thought she was preparing for her first trip to the Frio River Canyon. The H. E. Butt Foundation Camp excursion would be a new adventure for the youth who participate in her growing nonprofit, **By Our Hands**. But she had no idea that she was in for a different adventure that weekend—one that would trap her in her own home at the mercy of Hurricane Harvey.

Instead of feeding her group in the Canyon, Frances spent the next five days feeding teenage boys who waited out the storm in her house, stuck inside for five days. Together, they played games, ate much of the cereal, and anxiously watched the water rise throughout Acres Homes, their historic neighborhood on the northwest side of Houston.

Acres Homes was developed after World War I as a rural outpost of African American land ownership on the edge of a growing City of Houston. Frances describes the community as a taste of "country in the city," a "caring community that is also a poor community."

So, as the rain descended in record amounts, Frances knew Harvey would only exacerbate the housing issues her neighbors were already facing. There were those who still had blue tarps draping their homes from unfinished repairs after Houston's last major storm, Hurricane Ike, in 2008. There were those who were living with accumulated roof damage, whose ceilings caved in from the weight of the water. And while Frances' home was spared from the floodwaters, they emerged from their five-day vigil to see families whose homes were destroyed, "their whole lives in their front yard" as they attempted to salvage any dry possessions.

Their first trip to the Canyon interrupted, now would be the time to clean up, recover, assist neighbors, and mobilize those teenage boys to rebuild. Yet, Harvey and its aftermath did not deter Frances and her young friends for long. After resuming normal rhythms of life, returning to work and school, Frances restocked her food supply and planned another trip to the Canyon during the second weekend of October. This time, they made it.

Arriving late that Friday night, the group woke up Saturday morning to their first glimpse of the Frio River and the majestic Canyon wall. Even before breakfast, the younger kids crowded the older kids and parents, begging to be allowed to swim, and before anyone could blink, a line of girls, aged 6 to 9, were all wearing bright bathing suits. With the high school and college-age boys leading the way as lifeguards, the kids ran-walked to the waterfront, cooing at the blue-green colors before launching their bodies into the river.

In many ways, though delayed, Frances' journey to the Canyon had begun four years prior, in 2013. She lost her mother that year, and Frances sank into an extended period of darkness. She felt adrift in survival mode for two years, grieving over her mother, facing other personal losses, and hoping to provide something more for her two children.

In the midst of her pain, she found new perspective from an unexpected source. Her teenage son, Tremaine, on his own initiative, trained to become a lifeguard at the neighborhood pool. Through his training, he began teaching younger children in the neighborhood to swim. Quickly, Frances watched her son become a leader in the community, an example to his friends and the younger kids around him. And one day, an elder at church approached Tremaine and said he would like to "tithe into his life."

As Frances saw the impact of an alternative outlet and the investment of elders in her son, she began to ask how she could also invest in the youth around her. She wondered, how could she pass on a vision for the future to the youth from low-income families in her community? How could she teach them to aspire to something beyond becoming a basketball star or a movie star?

Now, Frances uses By Our Hands to provide a number of opportunities to kids from low-income families. If she had not lost her mother, she never would have imagined doing this work.

Frances wants to "get them in middle school, at age 13, then carry them all the way to 25," because she sees kids of Acres Homes thrown into the world without skills like financial literacy or an awareness of how to take care of themselves and their families. By Our

Hands has a relationship with Texas Parks and Wildlife, arranging for youth to learn everything from the names of local plants and animals to how to hunt and fish properly. They are also working with YouthBuild in Acres Homes to begin mobilizing her young neighbors to help with home repairs in the aftermath of Harvey.

Travelling to the Frio River Canyon, she said, was all part of the plan to expose the kids to something new, outside the norm of what they see in their neighborhood on a daily basis. "This is about these kids experiencing something different," she said. I want "to give our kids another opportunity to see something outside of the cement walls they would normally [see]."

And the Canyon walls are certainly not cement. As she spoke, her daughter, Royal-Tea, studied a chalky hunk of limestone rock, and her son, Tremaine, casually let an enormous tarantula crawl all over his head and neck while the other kids screamed.

"Can I take it home?" he asked.

Frances plans to return to camp next year, her growing group of youth in tow. Her tithe into their lives is already paying dividends, as they discuss aspirations to be lawyers and astronomers and chefs. For now, following Frances' example, they are learning to push beyond the walls they've always known, even when a hurricane keeps them stuck inside.



» **Help Other Hurricane
Harvey Victims**
See how on page 18

