Life on the Pamlico

Mitchell Warren to the Rescue of Disaster Victims

By Mendi Warren and Belinda Edwards

Introduction

By Mendi Warren

Hurricane! Flood! Disaster! These seem to be words that strike fear in the hearts of many coastal Carolinians. If you live on the water as my family does in Chocowinity, N. C., you can relate to this feeling. Perhaps that is why my father, Mitchell Warren, feels the need to help victims of these forces of nature, in Florida, South Carolina, Georgia, and the outer banks of North Carolina. An active member of and deacon in the First Baptist Church of Washington, N. C., and an electrical technician at Texasgulf, he still gives his time to help those in need. Mr. Warren is one of those people who get a great joy from making others happy.

To be more effective in his efforts to help victims of disasters, he joined the Baptist Men’s Disaster Relief Team in the early ’80’s. He was anxious to be as involved as he could be, so he went to Asheville, N. C., to become a certified member of the team. He then became certified to drive the Disaster Relief eighteen-wheel tractor-trailer as the Baptist Men work with the Red Cross to feed
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victims of disasters. They go out “to witness” while they feed people. They also fix houses, roofs, and do whatever jobs that need to be done. Mr. Warren also uses his profession to help victims with electrical wiring problems.

Those who know my father refer to him as “just a good man.” He justifies his actions with one belief. He believes that living on the Pamlico River and being exposed to the same dangers as those he helps give him the insight to sympathize with victims of disasters. Mr. Warren also believes that the Lord looks out for those who do good in His name and that maybe one day if he is the victim, the Lord will take care of him. And so our interview began at my home, the home of Mitchell Warren, one cold night in December, 1994.

Life: [Mr. Warren first showed us a T-shirt.]

Mr. Warren: This is the official shirt that we wear and the official hat, our uniform when we are at a disaster, so people can recognize us. We’ve got the big Southern Baptist Convention Disaster Relief emblem on the back.

Life: So this is from the Baptist church?

Mr. Warren: The North Carolina Disaster Relief team is a division of the North Carolina Baptist Men, which is an auxiliary to the North Carolina Baptist Convention. The North Carolina Baptist Convention is broken down into North Carolina Baptist Men, and then this is a division of and a ministry of the North Carolina Baptist Men. It’s all volunteers.

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Life: How many are in it?

Mr. Warren: It’s broken down. We’ve got ten regions all over North Carolina. And each region consists of men that volunteer from the Baptist churches all over that particular region. I’m in region two, which covers from Elizabeth City to Fayetteville, from I-95 to the East Coast. That’s the way they’ve got it broken up. And then region one would be from Elizabeth City to the Virginia line from I-95 to the East Coast. And then region three would be from Fayetteville on down to the South Carolina border from I-95 to the coast. Then there are seven other regions scattered all over North Carolina. I don’t know where they are. I know there are three on the East Coast. We’re in region two.

Life: When did this relief effort start?

Mr. Warren: I don’t know the exact year that it started. Disaster Relief has been going on, I know, since the early ’80’s. I really don’t know when it actually got started.

Life: How long have you been in it?

Mr. Warren: I’ve been in it for probably seven years.

Life: How did you decide to get in it?

Mr. Warren: Well, I’ve always liked to do missionary work for the church. And living by the water here, like I do, I know what a hurricane can do, and I know that if we ever had a hurricane
come through here, I’m going to want someone to help me. So I just feel kind of led to go and help people when disaster strikes because I feel for them, and I feel I can relate to them, because we’ve had water in this house here three times. And then, also, I got a burden on my heart. I feel that if I go and help someone else, well, maybe the good Lord will bless me and shed mercy on me when it comes time for me to get flooded. And then, too, I just love to do it. I love to help people that are really in need of help. And when it becomes available for me to go, I just jumped on the bandwagon. I was thrilled to go! They’ve called me four times, and I’ve been all four times.

Life: [Mr. Warren told us of his volunteer efforts in South Carolina in the aftermath of Hurricane Hugo.]

Mr. Warren: We went to Isle of Palms, South Carolina, and Sullivan’s Island. They gave all the volunteers that went a hat. It says, “Sullivan’s Island and Isle of Palms Volunteer—Hugo Relief”.

Life: Is that near Charleston?

Mr. Warren: Yes.

Life: What kind of shape were they in?

Mr. Warren: [Mr. Warren showed us pictures of the Hugo disaster.] For instance, an entire house was moved into the highway. There’s a picture of where we stayed at the local church’s fellowship hall. There’s us working on the roof of a house. There’s a house right in the middle of the street. The
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ocean came in and just picked the houses up and washed them away from their foundations.

![Image of a house moved by Hurricane Hugo](image.png)

*The Force of Hurricane Hugo moved this house into the street.*

Life: When you first got down there, had anybody else been down there to help them?

Mr. Warren: Oh, yes! It was approximately two and a half months after Hugo hit that we got down there.

Life: Oh, I see. But it was still pretty messed up.

Mr. Warren: Oh, yes! And then of course, Hurricane Andrew [in Florida], North Carolina Disaster Relief went down there right immediately after it happened. My group didn’t, but
another group did. The way it normally works is when a disaster strikes, the American Red Cross is the first ones on the scene. They will go in and assess the damage and the needs of the people. And they will begin to get the food allocated and purchased. We don’t buy the food. The North Carolina Baptist Men proudly prepare it. The Red Cross makes the arrangements for the food, and you’ll see tractor and trailer rigs full of food back up there, like Monarch. Are you familiar with the Monarch food producer? They donate entire tractor-trailers full of food with their big sign on the side. Of course, it’s an advertisement for them, too. And the Red Cross will make food available, in cases like you see in the grocery store, big bags of potatoes and everything. And what we do is take our cooking unit, which is an 18-wheeler tractor-trailer rig, which we no longer have. It was getting pretty old, so we gave the rig to the Michigan Baptist Men. They didn’t have a disaster vehicle, so we gave them the entire tractor-trailer rig. What we have now are the smaller units you can pull with a big pick-up with duel rear wheels. You can pull it into less restricted areas. You don’t have to have so much room to set it up, and it’s not so complicated to set up. That old big tractor-trailer rig was really a mess to get into tight places and all. And it was getting to where there was a lot of maintenance upkeep on it.

Life: So when you go down, you cook?

Mr. Warren: Yes, we take the food that the Red Cross provides, and we prepare it. The way it normally works, the people will come to our location. We will set up at a church or school or wherever the Red Cross and the North Carolina Baptist Convention makes the arrangements.

The Red Cross will go in and assess the damage, and then they’ll come to some conclusion: whether they can handle the problem or whether they need some help. If they need help, they will call and make contact with the North Carolina Baptist Convention and the North Carolina Baptist Men’s department. They’ll say, “We need some help. The people have lost their homes; they can’t cook. They can’t go to the grocery store because the grocery stores are out of commission. And we need someone to help feed these people.” Well, that’s the initial call for help from the Red Cross. We don’t normally go until the American Red Cross asks us to help. They’re the ones that usually assess the damage. All right, when that happens, our leaders up in Cary, North Carolina, will immediately start getting groups organized. The way it works is a group will work approximately three, maybe four days, not over four or five days because you work 18 and 20 hours a day. So after you spend about three or four days getting up at four o’clock in the morning and start cooking and get in bed at 10 or 11 o’clock that night if you’re lucky, you can’t stand much of it because those are hard days. You’ll stay three or four days cooking and preparing; then another group will come in and relieve your group. There are ten groups across North Carolina, and that’s the way we’ve always worked it. It keeps from burning one group completely out. Then if necessary, according to the availability of the groups, you may go back again. But you’ll get several days of rest before you have to go back a second time. In Florida we did that. In Florida, there was such devastation and it was so prolonged and the people needed so much help, that some of the groups rotated around and went back a second time. That’s kind of unusual.

Life: Did you do other things besides cook?
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Mr. Warren: Yes. Sometimes you’ll go out and ride with those little Red Cross vehicles that carry and deliver the food — RV’s, I think they call them. You’ll ride with them and meet the people and introduce yourself and let them know that your group is handling the preparation of the food. You see, a lot of times, the people only see the Red Cross. And they think the Red Cross has done it all. This is fine; we’re not trying to get credit or anything. [But] it just gives us a chance to witness to the people and share with them, and it also gives us a chance to see the damage and talk with them on a one-on-one basis. We did that in Georgia [for the flood disaster]. We rode with the little Red Cross vehicles to carry the food around to the people.

Life: These people couldn’t get to the location?

Mr. Warren: No. You see, it works different ways. In Georgia, the Red Cross took the food that we prepared out to the people. It’s all according to the situation; those people couldn’t get to our location at the church. Now normally, like at the Outer Banks of North Carolina, when Hurricane Emily went through there last year, the people came to us, you know, at breakfast, noonday meal and supper. They will come to the setup, file through by our feeding unit, get their plates and that gives them a chance to see our cooking unit and our disaster relief emblem. Normally this is the way we like to work a situation.

Life: How many people a day do you think you would feed?

Mr. Warren: That big tractor-trailer unit would feed approximately two to three thousand people a meal.
number of people per meal we’ve got to feed. They’ll come back and say, “Okay, we’re going to have 2500 people for breakfast this morning.” So we’ll begin to figure how many people we can feed per case. And sometimes we’ll even get down to the can. Most cans will have written on them “This can will feed five servings of a typical serving” and we’ve learned to add to or take away from these so-called little servings because most people will eat more than a regular serving. So it’s a matter of feel and experience.

Life: Are you pretty good at it?

Mr. Warren: Yes, we’ve gotten real good at it. Now, some of the guys are better than others because they have more experience. Some of the guys will say, “No, you need another case. We’ve got 3,000 people to feed dinner today; you need six more cases than we used yesterday.” It’s just a matter of experience. It really is.

Life: What typically would you have for lunch and supper?

Mr. Warren: It varies, sometimes stewed beef and mash potatoes and field peas or snap beans. Then again we may have chicken pastry with sweet potatoes, and we always have your basics. They have a choice of loaf bread or corn bread, and sometimes we cook the corn bread sticks. We really try to have a well rounded, varied meal. There is always a variety of juices and liquids to drink.

Life: Is most of it canned or fresh?

Mr. Warren: The non-refrigerated food is canned, like for instance, the chicken pastry. It’s from Monarch, and it’s in the big gallon cans. It’s supposed to be pre-cooked, but we cook it again just to make sure [in the big pots]. The way it works is, we’ve got a burner arrangement probably 15 feet long. It’s just a continual row of big burners, like a big Boy Scout camp or a big Army setup—if you can visualize that. And we’ve got lots of big pots, and we use what we need according to the meal. They’re gas burners. And we’ll have four or five pots cooking at the same time. You’ve got two or three people that will cook out of the group. You’ve got two or three people that will wash up. You’ve got some that are continually washing, you’ve got some that are continually serving on a serving line, you’ve got some that are opening cans, and others that are preparing tea. Everybody has a job to do.

Life: Sounds a lot like the Army.

Mr. Warren: Yes, it is. But our leader usually lets us work where we feel most comfortable. If you like to cook, you can cook, if you’re good at cooking. Of course, everybody can’t do the same job. All the different areas of camp have to be manned.

Life: Do you cook some fresh things, like meat or potatoes?

Mr. Warren: Oh, yes! We always cook our sausage, and our bacon and our eggs, they’re all fresh or uncooked.

Life: Do you feed people other than the disaster victims?

Mr. Warren: Yes. When we were at the outer banks of North Carolina when Hurricane Emily went through there last year, we had to feed several different groups. We fed not only the victims of Hurricane Emily, we fed the National Guard, the Highway Patrol, the Sheriff’s Department, and local outer banks police because things were devastated. There were few fast food restau-
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rants opened or anything like that because they didn’t have any power. And the school was devastated. In fact, we set up at the school. So we were feeding a lot more people in that disaster, a lot more people than the victims of the storm.

Life: Does your church buy the cooking equipment?

Mr. Warren: No, the North Carolina Baptist Convention will.

Life: So that’s one of the things they do is buy the equipment.

Mr. Warren: Right. Of your offertory money of all the Baptist churches, a portion goes to the North Carolina Baptist State Convention. They’ll take that money and split it up into foreign missions and local missions, and Baptist Men get a portion, the WMU—the women’s division—gets so much, and it’s broken up into numerous other missions as well.

Life: How about your jobs? Are your employers pretty understanding about letting you go?

Mr. Warren: Yes, [but] a lot of the guys are retired, and some are self-employed. I’d say probably half are retired.

Life: So they don’t have a problem?

Mr. Warren: The retirees don’t have a problem. You’ve got another 10 percent, maybe 15 percent, that are self-employed. Then, the rest of us are people that have to burn our vacation.

Life: You work for Texasgulf?
Mr. Warren: Yes.

Life: So when you go, you have to take vacation?

Mr. Warren: Yes. I have to take vacation. I’ve been on four trips, and I’ve had to take vacation every time. If I don’t take vacation, I don’t get paid from the company because the way the company looks at it is that I don’t have to go. It’s voluntary. Now, if a disaster happens to where the government of North Carolina mandates that the National Guard’s has to go, then Texasgulf will pay their employees who are members of the guard that have to go.
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Life: So you usually use up a week or so a year?

Mr. Warren: More than that.

Life: Are there other church groups that do this sort of thing that you’ve encountered?

Mr. Warren: I’ve seen others in Florida. We’ve seen other church groups there, but I think it was probably local church groups. I think it was like a big Presbyterian Church state-wide that was supporting a group or another Christian Church. I don’t know, I may be telling you wrong, I’m not real sure. I think the North Carolina Baptist Disaster Relief group is really the most fully organized, actually funded and organized relief team that’s out there. We’ve been doing it so long that we’ve gotten really proficient at it. I’ll give you an example. The officials at the American Red Cross say that we [the N. C. Baptist Disaster Relief Team] know what we’re doing. That’s the way they respond.

Life: What are the four disasters that you’ve worked?

Mr. Warren: In order, when Hugo went through South Carolina at Isle of Palms and Sullivan’s Island, we were there. When Andrew went through Florida, we were there. When Emily hit the North Carolina coast last year or the year before at the outer banks, we were there. And then the floods in Georgia.

Life: What’s the worst you’ve seen?

Mr. Warren: Andrew was the worst I’ve seen. We were down there in Homestead, Florida.

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Life: Oh, that place just got blown away!

Mr. Warren: Yes, it did. There was nothing left you could see. It was just devastated. It was like a war zone. And that’s the typical response. It looks like a war zone. Now, this particular shelter was already at a damaged church where we stayed. We put our little sign up. That’s the damaged church that we slept in [showing us pictures].

Life: You usually sleep in a church?

Mr. Warren: Normally they try to set us up in a church. When we went to the outer banks, we stayed at the Hatteras School.

Life: Do you take sleeping bags or something to sleep on?

Mr. Warren: You take your sleeping bag and your own pillows and sheets or whatever. The only thing that you probably can expect when you get there is a fold-out cot. And you put your sleeping bag on the cot. They don’t always have cots, but most of the time they do. One time we had to sleep on the floor on our sleeping bags. You take your sleeping bag with you just like you do your suitcase.

Life: And you say Andrew was the worst?

Mr. Warren: That’s the worst I’ve seen.

Life: What about the floods in Georgia?

Mr. Warren: The difference between the devastation of Hurricane Andrew and the floods in Georgia was simply that the winds from
the Hurricane just devastated everything. In Georgia, the houses were still in tact; they were just ruined by the water. Like the floors were buckled and the carpet—you couldn’t stand the smell. It was water damage. [But] you didn’t see trees down, maybe one every now and then where the ground was so soft. But you didn’t see the massive wind and force damage that you saw with Andrew. It was, like I say, just personal property damage from the water. People had all of their furniture outside and it was all ruined, couches just ruined. Their carpet was just pulled up and thrown outside.

We went in some houses down in Georgia while we were there, and on average the water had gotten up to about ten feet high. It had remained at that level for as long as two days and some houses three days before it went down.

Life: Were they able to repair most of the houses or were they totally ruined? [Here Mr. Warren showed some pictures of water levels on houses in Georgia.]

Mr. Warren: The flood insurance adjusters and the U.S. Flood Programs were there assessing the damage from house to house. In fact, we even fed some of the insurance people. What these people would do was determine whether the house was worth investing the money in rebuilding, or whether it was more feasible to tear it down and rebuild. Most of the time they were salvageable. They went in and tore the paneling and insulation out right down to the outer wall. A lot of the homes were nice brick homes. So the brick really wasn’t hurt and they would go in and put all new paneling, insulation, carpeting and new wiring and work from the hull of the house. Now, if it was a wood-frame house, they would try to assess the future damage, such as rotting, but most of the time the houses were repairable.

Life: What do you think is the most touching little thing that happened that you remember?

Mr. Warren: Probably during Hurricane Andrew relief work in Florida. Where we were in Florida was a poor Black and Hispanic section. They didn’t have a whole lot, and they were just living in shacks. And we put roofs on and repaired several roofs. Every time we got through working on a particular house, we would give the victims a Bible and all of us would sign our names in it. And it was a pure tearjerker. They were crying and so thankful that someone was there to help them. They had lost everything. So I think probably that week in Florida meant more and touched me more because it was such devastation and the people were so poor.

Life: I remember reading in the paper about some problems with the insurance companies. But I guess y’all didn’t get involved with that?

Mr. Warren: No, we didn’t. We saw some of the stuff going on. Like the people down the streets in Florida would have the names of the insurance companies on the side of their house, because it got pretty complicated, or so we were told. There was so much devastation and so many houses and so many different insurance companies where people had their insurance. And there were so many insurance adjusters down there. That place was flooded with insurance adjusters, and it really got pretty confusing as to what insurance company would go to what house. I think some of them even formed little insurance pools because the federal government got into it and it got to be such a problem and days were going by and people weren’t being contacted and they didn’t have anywhere to stay and one thing led to another. The govern-
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ment pulled trailers down there and tried to set them up. It was just pure devastation; the people didn’t know what to do. The federal government, I think, came in and set up insurance pools and said, “Don’t worry about who’s got what; let’s just go to a house and assess the damage and we will settle all that later.” It got pretty hairy there.

Life: When you would repair the roofs on these houses down there, would the insurance company get the materials?

Mr. Warren: Yes. The houses that we worked on were houses that had already been assessed by the insurance agents. Remember, now, we were down in relief to Hurricane Andrew probably two months after the hurricane. Now, another group, the initial group, was there when the hurricane hit. As a matter of fact, the eighteen-wheel tractor-trailer used by Disaster Relief was on the way to Florida when the storm was still out in the ocean. They had predicted that it was going to hit Florida and were sure it was going to hit, and another group was already activated and on the way to Florida before the storm ever even touched land. They were there and almost set up when the storm actually made land fall.

Life: What do you think could be done to make relief work more effective? Some kind of coordination with the government? Do you have any ideas about that?

Mr. Warren: Coordination is a good starting point, a very good starting point.

Life: Does the American Red Cross do a good job?
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Mr. Warren: Yes, they do. The American Red Cross does an excellent job. People can be proud of the American Red Cross. They really do a good job. Some of those drivers on those little Red Cross vehicles put all kinds of hours in, and it is all volunteer. In Georgia, some of those drivers were from the Midwest. They put a call out, and some of those drivers came all the way from California. They came from all over, like Missouri and Arkansas. I talked to some of them and they volunteered their time. Of course, most of them were retired, but they do a good job. The American Red Cross is a good outfit.

A church provided Hurricane Andrew relief volunteers lodging.

Life: How about the government?
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Mr. Warren: Well, you know, I’ve got my personal opinions about that. The government seems to complicate things more than they solve when they get involved. I think that personal touch is better than the government coming in with their big guns and everything. You know, personal people like us going down and volunteering our time and getting right in there and working on a one-to-one relationship is better. The government wants to come in, and they think dollars are the answer to everything, but they’re not. When someone is hungry, they don’t want a dollar; they want a good hot meal.

Life: So would you have any forms to fill out, or would people just show up to eat?

Mr. Warren: No. We didn’t fill out forms because most of the time the Red Cross would go out and get the numbers. They will go out and get the numbers to be fed and talk to the people. And they have their own way of getting that done. They will come back to us and tell us how many people that we need to feed per meal. To give you an example, when Emily went through the outer banks of North Carolina, in one day at dinner time—I won’t ever forget it—we fed approximately 3,600 people for that one meal.

Life: Is that right!

Mr. Warren: We almost ran completely out of food. But we were feeding the National Guard, the victims of the storm, the sheriff’s department, the local police department, the forestry; there were a bunch of the forestry people there to cut trees off of houses, and we just fed all of them. The outer banks is kind of out there isolated, and they couldn’t run to Hardee’s and get anything to eat because Hardee’s didn’t have any power. So they came to us. In other words, all the workers on that island came to our feeding unit.

Life: I bet if something like Andrew hit the outer banks, there wouldn’t be anything left.

Mr. Warren: There wouldn’t be anything left there, and there wouldn’t be anything left here, which is the south side of the Pamlico River, either. All it has to do is come up the Pamlico Sound and up the river, and it gets us.

Life: We’re really vulnerable, aren’t we?

Mr. Warren: We are. the whole East Coast. from Florida all the way up to Maine and the New England States. Last year they had those nor’easters that tore them to pieces. The entire East Coast is vulnerable. We have lived down here for 22 years and the good Lord has blessed us so. We have been right here since January of 1973. Knock on wood and thank the good Lord, we have not been through an actual hurricane in all those years. We have been through nor’easters and had water in this house up to 10 or 12 inches three times, but it wasn’t a hurricane. It was just a freak depression off the coast. If we were to have a hurricane of the magnitude of Andrew to hit the outer banks and come through the Pamlico Sound, there is no telling what the amount of damage would be to property and people.

Life: What is the most frustrating thing you have encountered?

Mr. Warren: Probably the outer banks of North Carolina when we had so many people to feed that one particular dinner time meal. We were just scrambling for food, and there they were out there
and had to be fed. The only other alternative they could do would be to drive all the way back off the island, back to the main island to get food.

Life: The Red Cross provides the food?

Mr. Warren: Yes. The food comes in on tractor-trailers. The American Red Cross makes contact somehow with these food distributors, like Monarch, and they will pull entire tractor-trailers down there. You will see several Monarch trailers level full of food. They have rice and snap beans, peas, chicken dumplings and fruit cocktail and all kinds of food.

Life: Do the companies like Monarch sell the food to the Red Cross?

Mr. Warren: I don’t really know how the Red Cross handles that, but I have heard that those big corporations donate the food. I can’t verify that. I really don’t know. Our main thrust is not worrying about getting the food but to prepare and serve the meals. We cook them and serve them. In Georgia, the little Red Cross vehicles took the food out. We would prepare it and put it into the white styrofoam plates and load it into containers to keep it warm, and they would load these on the Red Cross vehicles and distribute them. Each vehicle had a certain area that they were responsible for. Each one of us went one meal, to meet the people and see what was going on. The way it would work is, the little Red Cross RV would pull up to a community, and you would see the people come out from what was left of the houses. Well, in Georgia the houses were still there but just flooded. The people would come out and gather and come to the Red Cross vehicle and get their plate. Then the Red Cross vehicle would pull down the street a ways and do the same thing. You can visualize it like an ice-cream truck going through the neighborhood, all the kids running up and he would pull down a bit and stop and then some more and stop. The driver of the Red Cross RV was responsible for a certain area of a certain community. There were probably twenty-five of these vehicles, and they would just scan the area.

Life: I guess this brings out the best in people, both the one’s getting relief and the people like you, doing this. I’ve heard that people kind of come together.

Mr. Warren: Yes. You forget about barriers. You forget about where you come from or who’s who, and you don’t worry about whether someone is a diesel mechanic or the president of a corporation. It doesn’t make any difference. Everybody is there for a purpose, and you just go ahead and do your job. For three or four days that you are there you work your tail off and get the job done.

Life: Are the men that you work with on these trips a fairly consistent group?

Mr. Warren: It varies. There are certain ones that are dependable and there most of the time, but there are always new faces. There have been several articles written about us. I have done interviews with the newspaper in Washington and an article was written about me in my work newspaper, the Texasgulf Times. I was trying to drum up interest, and I wanted the members of our church to see what we do. You would be surprised at the Baptist people that don’t even know what the Baptist Men’s Disaster Relief Truck is all about. They have never seen it or asked about it. So I decided that I would go get that truck during a period when
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it wasn’t being used, and it just happened to be in Wilson. So I drove to Wilson and drove the eighteen-wheeler back to Washington to our church, the First Baptist Church of Washington. I left it there for a few days and let people tour it and answered questions about it. After that, I took it to Chocowinity Baptist Church and gave a little demonstration there about how we cook and showed our cooking units. During the periods of time that it is not being used, it goes from church to church for demonstrations to try to get people interested and involved. And then about two or three months out of the year it is in for repairs. But we don’t have that unit anymore; we gave that eighteen-wheeler to the Michigan Baptist men. They did not have a unit, and we convinced ourselves that the smaller units are more efficient. You can work around them better, they can be pulled by a dolly, and you can do the same job. The only difference is that the eighteen-wheel unit had beds where the disaster relief people could rest. We had six beds in the big unit, and it had its own kitchen where the workers could eat and it also had a shower.

Baptist Relief Unit eighteen-wheeler.
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Life: When do you eat when you go out?

Mr. Warren: What we normally do is eat right after we feed the people, or whenever we get the chance to grab your meal.

Life: Mendi [Mr. Warren’s daughter] was saying you did some electrical work when you went on these trips.

Mr. Warren: I did electrical work on the eighteen-wheel unit. Two and a half days of the Florida mission trip I did electrical repairs to the big unit. Then I went out and helped put roofs on houses. When they found out that I did electrical work and was capable of doing it, the leader said, “I got a job for you.” And he put me to work on the truck. So I was using my trade to help repair the unit. And that is really the way I got interested in the unit. Then I became a certified driver for it and went on to complete the disaster relief training for the unit.

Life: How many men from your church are in the group?

Mr. Warren: In my particular church, First Baptist Washington, there are only two of us, myself and Woodson [Woody] Furlough. He works in Greenville, and he and I are the only two official members of the Disaster Relief team, in our church. We have other people that go as sponsors from our church but Woodson and I are the only two officially trained members from our church on the Disaster Relief team. The North Carolina Baptist Men give this training once a year, most of the time in April.

Life: Where do they do that?
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Mr. Warren: It varies. The last training session was up in Asheville. And then they gave another session of training at the Cary office in Cary, North Carolina.

Life: Who does the training?

Mr. Warren: Senior members of the North Carolina Baptist Men, people who have been involved in it since it began. [For instance], you will have one guy who is an experienced truck driver that will teach a course on truck driver training. Another group will set up burners and teach cooking to those interested. Another group will teach how to go out and minister to the people. It is people like me that teach the newer guys what we have learned through experience.

Life: Have you taught at one of these?

Mr. Warren: No, I haven’t actually taught at one, but I go to them. There are so many people more experienced than me. I have only been on four mission trips. Some of those guys have been there since it started. Some of the people that teach the courses are officials of the North Carolina Baptist Convention.

Life: You must get a lot of satisfaction out of this.

Mr. Warren: I do. It just makes you feel so good that you are doing something that really needs to be done.

Life: Have you heard from any of the people you have helped?

Mr. Warren: Oh, yes! I got a letter from a couple in Georgia, and I intend to answer them. It was from a mother and young son. In
fact they even came and worked with us and helped us cook.

Life: Is that right!

Mr. Warren: Yes. Most of the people you go help don’t really get to know you on such a personal basis that they get your address and all and write you letters. because what they see is the group; they see all of us. I guess you don’t really get that personal.

Life: But you have got a couple of letters?

Mr. Warren: Yes. I got a couple through working with people that I got close to.

Life: Do you plan to keep on?

Mr. Warren: Oh, absolutely! Absolutely! I have no intentions of quitting as long as I am able to go and do the work to help people when disaster strikes.

Mr. Mitchell Warren, with daughter Mendi (left) and Belinda Edwards.
Life on the Pamlico

Conclusion

By Belinda Edwards

Mitchell Warren is a man of determination who has a strong compassion for others, especially during times of natural disasters. Many people will sleep better at night just knowing people like him exist. Mr. Warren is ready to leave his family and job at any given notice of a threat from nature to help others even though he must sacrifice his vacation time to do so.

No one can control the weather and no amount of preparation will stop disasters from happening but the Baptist Disaster Relief Organization is there to help repair the damage done by disasters and heal the hurt and grief. Disaster Relief provides food for disaster victims as well as performing various other chores they take on in their free time. The state and federal governments help disaster victims by giving them money, but as Mr. Warren states, "When you're hungry, you don't want money; you want food!"