

# Eagles Wings Publications Press Kit

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## ANGELS AND QUILT PIECES... Our Journey with a Katrina Family

By: Stephanie Ehmen

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### PRESS RELEASE - FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Angels and Quilt Pieces...Our Journey with a Katrina Family is a newly published book that chronicles the extraordinary and heartwarming story of the Thornton family from New Orleans, their experience during the catastrophe and their post Hurricane Katrina struggles and triumphs. Meet all the Angels who came to their aid and in the process gave them "pieces for their quilts." (233 pp., \$18.95)

The author introduces the reader to the Thornton family, and then follows them as they evacuate the flooded New Orleans. Stephanie and her husband meet the Thornton's at a church sponsored shelter near San Antonio, Texas. They continued their volunteer service as "Sponsors" for the Thornton family, helping them navigate through the tangles of red tape of FEMA and other organizations and eventually getting settled in a new home in San Antonio. Written in a diary format, you will live the live the journey with them as the days, weeks and months unfold. Learn with the author as they struggle through the nightmare of agencies, the shock and on-going trauma, and the struggle to build a new life. This book has a two-fold purpose: 1) to tell the story of the Thornton's, their evacuation and struggles to start a new life, and 2) to help us understand how to help people without causing more hurt and trauma in the process. The author invites you to:

*Come on a Journey with us . . .* "September 2005, in the after-math of Hurricane Katrina, we had no idea that we were about to embark on an unexpected journey. Wanting to help in a hands-on way, we volunteered at a church sponsored shelter. Here we would meet Mr. & Mrs. Thornton and their seven precious children. By the end of our volunteer week, we had earned the trust of Mr. Thornton and the children had found a place of refuge in our arms.

Our journey over the following months has changed our lives forever. As the days, weeks and months progressed, the Thornton's told us their story in bits and pieces. We are telling our story through our own eyes, what we saw, heard and witnessed. It will make you laugh and cry; it will make you angry and warm your heart. We will be eternally grateful to all the "Angels" who helped us out along the way by giving this family 'pieces for their quilts'."

ISBN: 1-4196-6990-7

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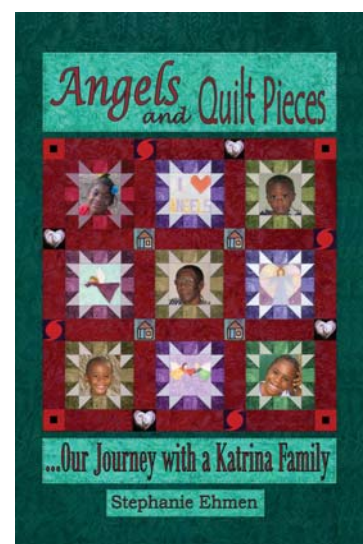
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### ABOUT THE BOOK

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An extraordinary and heartwarming story of the Thornton family from New Orleans, their post Hurricane Katrina struggles and triumphs. Meet all the Angels who came to their aid and in the process gave them “pieces for their quilts.”

#### *Come on a Journey with us . . .*

September 2005, in the after-math of Hurricane Katrina, we had no idea that we were about to embark on an unexpected journey. Wanting to help in a hands-on way, we volunteered at a church sponsored shelter. Here we would meet Mr. & Mrs. Thornton and their seven precious children. By the end of our volunteer week, we had earned the trust of Mr. Thornton and the children had found a place of refuge in our arms.

*“ . . . when a traumatized little girl threw herself into my arms there was no way that I could sit back and let this little girl and her family fend for themselves. We could have finished our week of volunteer time and gone back to our daily routine, but we chose not to walk away when this family needed someone to help them. We have reminded ourselves over and over that God led us here for a reason.”*

Our journey over the following months has changed our lives forever. As the days, weeks and months progressed, the Thornton’s told us their story in bits and pieces. We are telling our story through our own eyes, what we saw, heard and witnessed. It will make you laugh and cry; it will make you angry and warm your heart. We will be eternally grateful to all the “Angels” who helped us out along the way by giving this family “pieces for their quilts”.

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### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Following Hurricane Katrina, Stephanie Ehmen and her husband, Randy, wanted to help those who had been left homeless. When the Thornton family was brought to the shelter where they were volunteering, Randy and Stephanie accepted the challenge of “Sponsoring” the Thornton family.

They spent the following months helping the Thornton’s through the grief of their loss and the further stress and trauma of resettling in a new city. While the parents dealt with their emotions and struggles, Randy and Stephanie spent many hours playing with the children, giving them love and reassurance that they desperately needed.

By utilizing their Christian principals, faith in God, and the support of many friends, Randy and Stephanie have become “co-parents” with Mr. Thornton as he struggles to raise these kids who he loves so much.

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### Common Questions/Sample Interview

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**Q: How did you get involved in this adventure?**

A: The churches in our area joined together to support a shelter for Hurricane Katrina and Rita evacuees. The shelter was housed in a very nice church/retreat facility located about 20 miles north of San Antonio. Each church agreed to provide volunteers to run the camp for 1 week.

**Q: How were the families that came to the shelter selected?**

A: There was a team that went into the larger shelters in San Antonio to find families that would be good candidates. The prospective family was carefully interviewed, and they agreed to a background check.

**Q: Tell us a little about the Thornton family.**

A: When we met them the first day that they arrived at the church shelter, the baby, Alonzo, was 8 weeks old. (He was just 3 weeks old when Katrina hit.) There was Roosevelt and Chantal and 5 children ages 8 weeks to 10 years. We were told that first day that when the shelter directors had discovered that Roosevelt and Chantal were not married, they had been informed that, "this was a Christian place, and they would have to get married in order to stay". We were told that Roosevelt and Chantal had expressed a desire to get married, and that the wedding would be held the next day.

Over time we would learn that Chantal had 7 children in all, two of her older daughters had been evacuated to Houston with their grandparents. Only baby Alonzo was Roosevelt's, but Chantal and her 4 youngest children had lived with him for several years, and he loved them as his own. We would also learn that Roosevelt was almost twice the age of Chantal. At the time he was 67 years old and Chantal was 34.

It seemed to us that Roosevelt and Chantal were still in a state of shock from their experiences. The children were very traumatized. Three-year-old Charlie was really out of control and five-year-old Anthonyone would jump into our arms, wrap her arms around our neck and hang on for dear life. We spent a lot of our time with the kids so that the parents could have time to work through their own trauma and emotions.

**Q: What does it mean that you were "Sponsors" for this family?**

A: The idea of the shelter was to provide volunteers as Sponsors to each family to help them get relocated in the San Antonio area, if that was their wish. When we agreed to do this, we really had no idea how much time, money and effort it would take to set up a house for this family with just the bare essentials.

The best way I can describe it is this: If you had been through this horrific experience, then dropped of in the middle of a strange country, where they spoke a "different language", no money and no way to take care of your family, how would you do? This was how they felt.

**Q: Why didn't they evacuate before the hurricane?**

A: Living all his life in New Orleans, and being very well acquainted with the city leaders and politicians, Mr. Thornton and many like him were very skeptical of anything the government told them. He was prepared to leave anyway, but Chantal would not go and he did not want to leave her and the kids behind. Whether or not they had evacuated, they would have been in the same position, with nowhere to go and no way to start life over.

(Continued next page.....)

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(Continuing from previous page.....)

**Q: How are you involved with the family now?**

A: Chantal (the mother) returned to New Orleans in May, 2006, and has no permanent home. The four youngest children are living with Mr. Thornton and we help him as much as possible. He loves these kids very much and wants to give them a proper upbringing. Sometimes we feel like we are “co-parenting” with him.

**Q: Why doesn't Mr. Thornton get a job?**

A: Because of his age, his Social Security Disability (SSI), and the four young children, Mr. Thornton falls into a crack in our system. His SSI prevents him from having any kind of job, and if he gave that up, he would need to have a very good paying job with excellent health insurance to offset the benefits he would lose for himself and the kids. We feel that for him and these children who need to much extra time and attention, he is far better off to be at home with them, teaching them how to live productive lives. It is not easy for him to accept that he has to rely on the government for assistance, but he would rather do that than think of where the kids would be if he sent them to live with their mom on the streets of New Orleans.

**Q: What does the title of the book – “Angels and Quilt Pieces” mean?**

A: The Angels are all the people who have helped us and the Thornton family along the way, through monetary donations, by giving clothing or household items or with their love and support. Each time someone gave them a hug or a smile or a kind word, they gave the family a “quilt piece”. Someday we hope that they can put the pieces together and be able to wrap themselves in this imaginary quilt to comfort themselves and know that so many people cared.

**Q: Is this story finished?**

A: No, it will be ongoing. Our next challenge is to find a long-term housing plan for the family. With Mr. Thornton's only income of Social Security, it is not enough to pay rent or a mortgage. We have a fund and a group of very caring people who are working on buying a house that they can live in. In the event that something would happen to Mr. Thornton, we love these kids, and we will be involved in their lives as long as they want us to be.

**Q: Why did you write this book?**

A: The purpose is two-fold. 1) To tell the story of the Thornton family and our journey in helping them make a new home in San Antonio, and 2) To help others understand how to go about helping those in need without causing more hurt and trauma. We had many friends involved in different types of relief efforts, and many of them were disappointed because the people they were trying to help did not act or react in the way that they anticipated. We don't have all the answers, and we probably could have done much better, but we hope that it can at least start the thought process about educating ourselves about those we are trying to help.

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BOOK EXCERPT

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## Introduction

Randy and I live a quiet life in the Hill Country, north of San Antonio, Texas. We are self-employed and work from home. We have no children, only our cats, three of which we claim and various strays that claim us. From the top of our hill we can see for miles and we thoroughly enjoy the calm and quiet.

We had no idea how much our life was to be changed in the fall of 2005. While we watched in disbelief the events that unfolded following Hurricane Katrina, we knew that we wanted to do something in a tangible way to help those who had lost everything. When the church asked for volunteers to assist with a shelter, we decided that we could arrange our schedule to help with cooking and cleaning for a week. We had no intention of getting as involved with this project as we did.

Our journey over the following months has changed our lives forever. Through our association with the Thornton family, the other evacuee families, and those who operated and volunteered at the church sponsored shelter, we now think differently and our priorities have changed drastically. We will never be the same. We have learned so much about other people, about compassion and respect, how others think and live, trust and not being too quick to judge those around us.

As the days, weeks and months progressed, the Thornton's told us their story in bits and pieces. We tried not to pry, understanding that this trauma was so large that they could only tell it in this way. We tried to understand their story from their perspective, through their eyes and through their way of life and understanding of the world around them. We have talked and listened, laughed and cried, and wore ourselves out playing with the kids. We feel as though we have a new extended family and hopefully friends for life.

We are telling our story through our own eyes, what we saw, heard and witnessed. There were many wonderful people involved in this endeavor and many Angels who came to our aid. We thank everyone for all of their hard work and dedication. While most of the names have been altered, we are presenting the events as we saw them unfold and from our perception. Our lives have been greatly enriched and our understanding of those around us has been sharpened. We hope that we can bring you a little insight as well.

*Randy and Stephanie*

Friends are like quilts:  
Lives pieced together,  
Stitched with smiles  
Padded with memories  
And bound with Love!

- Author unknown

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