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Dear Friends,

Here we are, already well into January, and we would like to extend warm and sincere wishes for a blessed New Year to you and those you hold near and dear. The past 17 months have been some of the most unusual for us. Seeing our daughter and son-in-law off to Iraq, Hurricane Katrina, living in a FEMA trailer for nine months, becoming grandparents for the first time, and becoming full-time RVers has kept us busy and moving. We pray for a quieter 2007.

Our years of living on a boat provided the opportunity for us to call quite a few places "home," but Bay St. Louis, Mississippi left a mark on our hearts that we've found hard to ignore and impossible to forget. Though we lived there for a very short time, we made a lot of friends. We learned what makes this little *dot* of a place so special. And, like the locals, we were stunned and saddened beyond words when Katrina obliterated this part of Mississippi's 26-mile coastline. Life as we ALL knew it had changed, literally overnight.

As you might remember, we stayed on in Bay St. Louis after the hurricane, at first volunteering, and then working, for the Chamber of Commerce who had its work cut out: eight out of every 10 businesses were either damaged or destroyed. And many of these business owners lost their homes as well, an unimaginable situation. We stayed busy. Every day after work we returned to our devastated neighborhood, two of only a handful of residents. In those early months after the storm, we couldn't imagine leaving Bay St. Louis. Nine months later, we couldn't imagine staying. Things were just not happening fast enough. A few homes were being re-built. Tall, leafless trees swayed precariously. A block away, a white cross reminded us of one of our neighbors, Penny, who had made the fatal decision to ride out the hurricane. There were reminders everywhere of August 29, 2005. How long could/would this go on?

Kate's delivery date coincided at about the same time we fired our builder. At first he was supposed to start in February. When no work had been begun by May, we decided to put the house plans on hold and buy an RV. Since taking delivery on the RV on 8/1/2006, we have put more than 22,000 miles on the rig. Now that we can bring our home with us, we hope to visit Bay St. Louis and Waveland whenever possible. We've been here twice in four months (October 2006-January 2007) and we are so dismayed and disheartened. It is sad that more progress is not being made. The few homes that have been, or are in the process of being, built almost look freakish, they stand out so much. Some semblance of normalcy can be seen on Hwy. 90—that's where most of the businesses are—and a couple of shops on Main Street. But all in all, I think this is a huge façade. I really think BSL (Bay St. Louis), like a proud and dignified Southern woman in the midst of disaster, is putting on a false front. She would like for us to think that everything is fine. But it isn't.

For months we have struggled with trying to figure out how we could continue to help the people who remained in BSL while we lived on the road. I think the right thing has finally presented itself! The idea came last week when I took a dear friend, Marian Squires, on a tour of BSL. Marian and I went to grade school together. She was in New Orleans for a sales meeting. We happened to be at an RV park in Abita Springs, about an hour away. She wanted to get together. I wanted her to see coastal Mississippi. So I picked her up at the Hyatt near Riverwalk and drove 50 miles to the east on I-10. She was stunned as we drove the miles and miles of

empty lots, and kept repeating, "I had no idea. I had no idea." And then it occurred to me: Probably most of the USA **HAS** no idea that it's still this bad. After all, Katrina is old news.

The reason you are getting this letter is that there was a time not too long ago when you asked, "What can I do?" or "What do you need?" Basic necessities were needed at first. But as time has gone by, another need has presented itself.

There is a group of people in Hancock County, Mississippi, that desperately need your support: the Artists. Here's the problem: There are no galleries available for them to exhibit and sell their work. If they can't sell their work, they will have a hard time getting back on their feet.

CAN YOU HELP?

SPACE is needed for approximately one month at a time. Ideally, said space is heavily trafficked with people prone to buy art. Likely spaces include:

- Office Buildings
- Conference rooms
- Colleges and Universities:
 - Alumni rooms
 - Reception rooms
- Banks, Securities offices, Title Companies
- Libraries, especially in major cities
- Certain schools: i.e.: magnet or charter schools specializing in Fine Arts
- Airports
- Of course, art museums and art galleries. Private or public. Big or small. It is all good.
- Up-scale restaurants

You can probably think of more. Please, please, think about whom you know who might have some space to share. Please pass this information along to your friends and relatives and ask them who they know. Then call or e-mail me and I will pass along the contact information to Ruth Thompson, who schedules and coordinates exhibits for The Arts. For more information, go www.hancock-art.com

It is our hope that our artists can stay afloat and remain in the community while the rebuilding takes place. It is estimated that it will take at least 10 years for the Mississippi Gulf Coast to be rebuilt. Until then, we hope to treasure one day at a time and some day bring our children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren to a recovered coast. There is no place like this on Earth.

Please help us help others. Thank you.

With heartfelt appreciation,

