

At 2:37 AM, the harsh beeping of my alarm jolted me awake. I sat up, the bright numbers on the clock searing my tired eyes like staring into the sun. In that delirious trance, the gravity of what lay ahead finally hit me.

After months of planning and fundraising, our team was deploying to Puerto Rico to assist with hurricane relief efforts. The category 5 storm had devastated the island just days earlier. News footage showed apocalyptic scenes of shattered homes, flooded roads, and desperate families lacking basic essentials. Despite the danger, I felt a profound calling to help these communities rebuild.

The next 24 hours became a blur as we landed amid the wreckage and established operations. My senses were overwhelmed by the permeating stench of mold, ominous cracking of toppled trees, and survivors' horrific tales of scrambling through sewage-tainted waters. Yet amidst this tragedy, neighbors united tirelessly clearing wreckage and distributing what little food and water remained.

Our team jumped into action, setting up supply chains from the airport to provide medical aid and provisions. I'll never forget a young girl's face lighting up in a smile as I distributed her first dehydrated meal packet. In her balmy grasp of my hand, I recognized the depths of human resilience to persevere through unfathomable adversity.

After weeks of backbreaking labor, our temporary community defied the wreckage's gloom through acts of perseverance and compassion. Shared slivers of joy sparked through dusty laughter and spontaneous conga lines boosting morale during precious moments of respite. Our immense privilege shone through Puerto Ricans' dignified gratitude for our modest contributions to their herculean recoveries.

As the mission concluded, I gazed upon a shine of brilliant azure peeking over the horizon - the first sunrise of renewal and hope transcending the island's nightmarish trials. This grueling service awakened an understanding of our indomitable human spirit to unite and overcome cosmic tests of our most catastrophic hours. I now move forward with a

recharged humble outlook - to appreciate each day as the most precious gift while striving to alleviate suffering wherever possible through compassionate action.