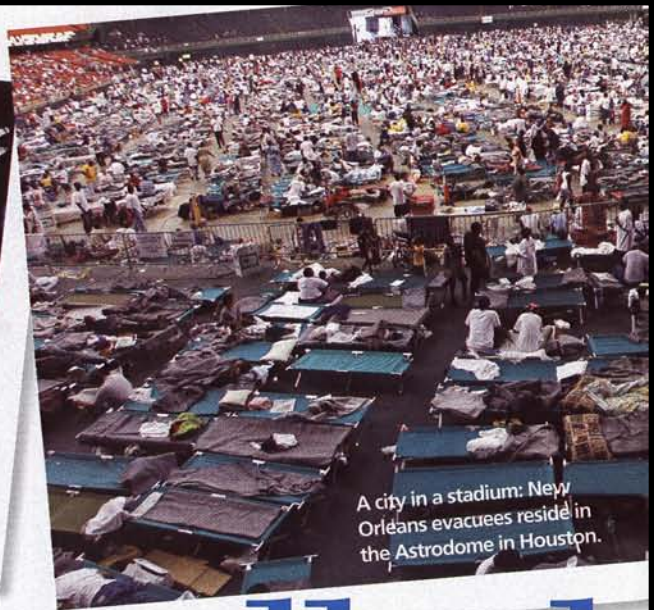


Another hurricane swirls over the Gulf Coast.



A city in a stadium: New Orleans evacuees reside in the Astrodome in Houston.

# When duty called

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, four California nurses stepped up to offer help—an experience that changed their lives

“I wanted to get down to the people who were in the heart of the mess”

**+** **Lynda Moss, 57,**  
pediatric intensive care unit nurse at California Pacific Medical Center, in San Francisco  
**Lives with her long-term partner, Greg, 44**  
**Mother of 3, stepmother of 4, grandmother of 2**

**+** **Becky Werner, 55,**  
intensive care unit nurse at San Joaquin General Hospital, in French Camp, Calif.  
**Married to Ron, 56**  
**Mother of 3**

**M**ore than 1,000 nurses from across the U.S. streamed into the Gulf Coast after Hurricane Katrina devastated the region on Aug. 29, 2005. One group—the California Nurses Association (CNA)—was quick to mobilize. Within a week of the disaster, more than 300 members of the CNA had left their own homes to do all they could, working in the hardest-hit sections of Louisiana, Mississippi and Texas. Volunteers used vacation time or took unpaid leave to pitch in where they were needed most. For some of these nurses, caring for people who'd lost everything was truly a life-changing experience.

By Laura Fraser

**E**ight days after Hurricane Katrina hit, Lynda Moss and her sister, Becky Werner, were at a rural hospital in Jackson, Miss., caring for about 300 elderly people evacuated from a nursing home. “They didn’t know where they were or where their loved ones were,” says Lynda. “We cleaned them up and gave them comfort.”

From Jackson, Lynda and Becky traveled to a tent clinic that had been set up in a church parking lot in Gulfport, Miss. Working dawn to dusk for seven days straight, they cared for 150 patients daily and administered

as many as 800 tetanus shots a day. They also diagnosed numerous cases of diabetes, hypertension and other chronic illnesses that their patients didn’t even know they had.

“Everyone was so grateful for any ounce of kindness,” says Lynda. She remembers one man

“Everyone was so grateful for any ounce of kindness.”

—Lynda Moss

hugged all the nurses. “He needed a shot of human warmth, and we gave it to him.”

Lynda and Becky flew home after two weeks but returned in

December. “I wanted to get down to the people who were in the heart of the mess,” says Lynda. During their second visit, they worked in a mobile medical unit in New Orleans. They’d expected to see signs of cleanup, but little had changed.

“People were still without food and shelter,” says Lynda.

“It was gut-wrenching.” But there were also signs of hope. As Becky was treating one man, he looked out the window and smiled. “The seagulls are back,” he said. The gulls had disappeared after the hurricane. Says Lynda, “That meant things were getting back to normal.”

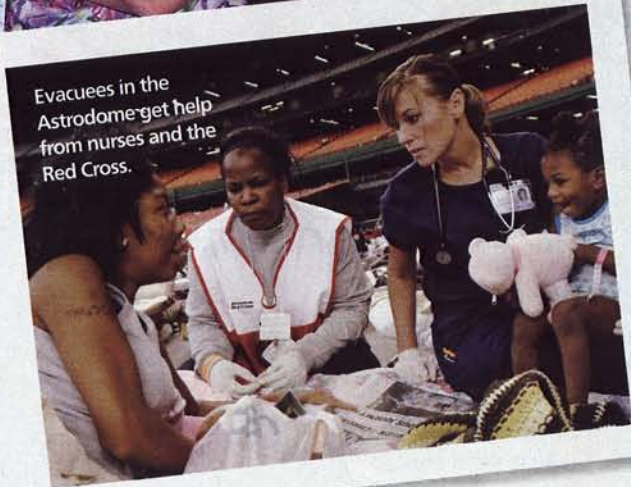
*We made a difference*

Lynda Moss, on couch, with (clockwise from left), her sister, Becky Werner, her daughter Cindy Sweat and her granddaughter, Madison.





Leslie Hawkins does her part to help Katrina's neediest.



Evacuees in the Astrodome get help from nurses and the Red Cross.

“It was like something out of a war zone”

**+** **Leslie Hawkins, 48**, neonatal intensive care nurse at Kaiser Permanente Fresno Medical Center, in Fresno, Calif. **Married** to Rick Hawkins, 56 **Mother** of 3, **grandmother** of 6

Leslie Hawkins was so busy working the week after Hurricane Katrina hit, the only way she got information about the disaster was by listening to the radio. “But I had Labor Day off, so I watched TV then,” says Leslie. When she saw footage of the thousands of victims who were being sheltered in Houston’s Astrodome, she became so upset, she couldn’t sleep that night. “I had to do something,” she says. At 4:30 the next morning Leslie visited the CNA emergency Web site and volunteered to go to the Astrodome. Her husband, Rick, who is also a nurse, was unable to travel with her but encouraged her to go. “Two days later I was walking from cot to cot, taking care of patients,” Leslie says.

When she arrived in Houston, Leslie found

the conditions at the Astrodome overwhelming. The stadium’s bright lights stayed on day and night, and the constant blare of announcements over the loudspeakers made it almost impossible for people to sleep. Evacuees who had left New Orleans with little more than the clothes they were wearing wandered the arena confused and searching for lost relatives and friends. “People were shell-shocked,” says Leslie. “It was like something out of a war zone.”

“Sometimes I would just sit with people because that’s what they needed most.”

Leslie was assigned to a makeshift pediatric clinic, where she set to work treating and comforting one tired, hungry, dehydrated, disoriented child after another. She gave formula to infants and tended to the cuts and bruises that other children had

suffered while escaping the storm. Many of her young patients were confused and distraught at having been separated from their families during the evacuation. Occasionally a child would be reunited with a mother or father, and the somber atmosphere would be brightened by an outburst of joy.

When Leslie wasn’t treating children, she saw to the needs of the elderly who had been evacuated to Houston, many of whom had been sitting in wheelchairs for days. She bathed some of them and helped them into clean clothing and arranged for others who needed special care to be taken to the hospital.

Leslie worked seven shifts that left her exhausted, but she didn’t mind. She saw it as simply doing her human duty. “I didn’t do anything heroic,” she says. “Sometimes I would just sit with people because that’s what they needed most.”

STAN HONDA/GETTY IMAGES (ASTRODOME)



Colleen Hynan (right) still helps in Gulfport, Miss.

## California Nurses

“I wanted to be part of the long-term healing”

**+** **Colleen Hynan, 58,** emergency room nurse at Kaiser Permanente Vallejo Medical Center, in Vallejo, Calif. **Single mother** of 5, **grandmother** of 12

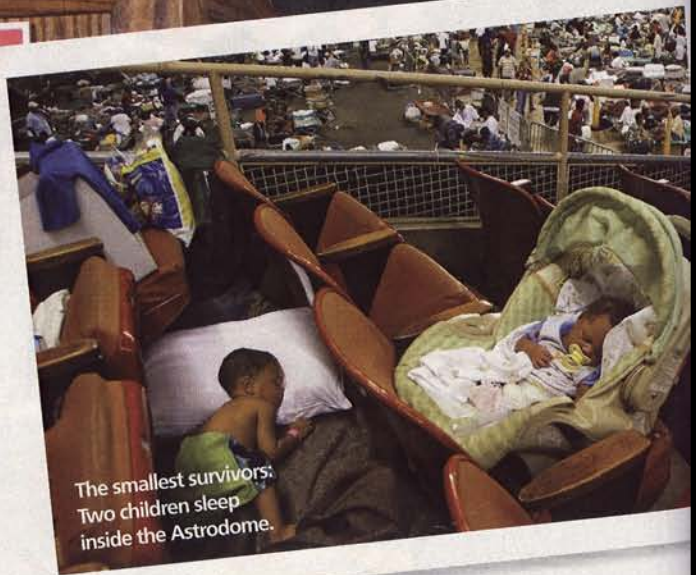
Colleen Hynan couldn't take time off from work to go to the Gulf Coast right after Katrina hit, so she answered phones at the Red Cross center in Napa, Calif., fielding calls from people who had barely survived the storm. “The stories I heard were heartbreaking,” says Colleen. After speaking to one man who said he'd been trapped on his roof when his house collapsed and had to cling to a part of the roof to survive the flooding, Colleen knew she had to do more to help. “I was determined to get down there somehow,” she says.

When she finally made it to Gulfport two months later, she was stunned by the devastation. Houses had been smashed to pieces. Trees had been torn from the ground. Piles of debris had been bulldozed into mounds that stood 30 feet high. Colleen pitched in at a clinic operating out of three trailers in the parking lot of a church, where

the all-volunteer medical team treated 300 patients a day. Many of the people who came to the clinic had lost their homes, cars, businesses, jobs and health care as a result of the storm. “So many people had fallen through the cracks,” says Colleen. Working with these survivors affected her deeply. “It made me take stock,” she says. She decided she wanted to become more involved. “I wanted to be part of the long-term healing,” she says.

“There's a sense of community and camaraderie that's infectious.”

Colleen stayed a month and returned three weeks later for another visit. During her second stay, she bought a badly damaged house near the beach that she is now slowly fixing up—rewiring and replacing the plumbing and floors. All around her, Colleen's neighbors are repairing and rebuilding their homes, too. Colleen now



The smallest survivors: Two children sleep inside the AstroDome.

divides her time between Gulfport, Napa and Macon, Ga., where she is helping to care for a friend's sick mother. The money she earns from her paid nursing work in Macon and Napa helps underwrite her volunteer work in Gulfport.

Today, more than a year after Hurricane Katrina hit, Gulfport is beginning to rebound. The number of people visiting the clinic has dwindled, and the community is slowly rebuilding. “There's still a lot of debris,” says Colleen, “but there's a lot of cleanup work going on. We're making inroads. But there's a long way to go.”

Colleen's children and grandchildren don't understand why she keeps going back to Gulfport. She explains that she loves the people she has met and loves feeling like part of a team. “There's a sense of community and camaraderie that's infectious,” she says. “Everyone's helping with the recovery, and you just want to be part of it.”