

blessings

OPERATION BLESSING INTERNATIONAL | JAN 2017



A bounty of blessings
AIRLIFTED in Haiti

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A school stands in the gap for one Haitian community



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A former ISIS sex slave shares her story of survival



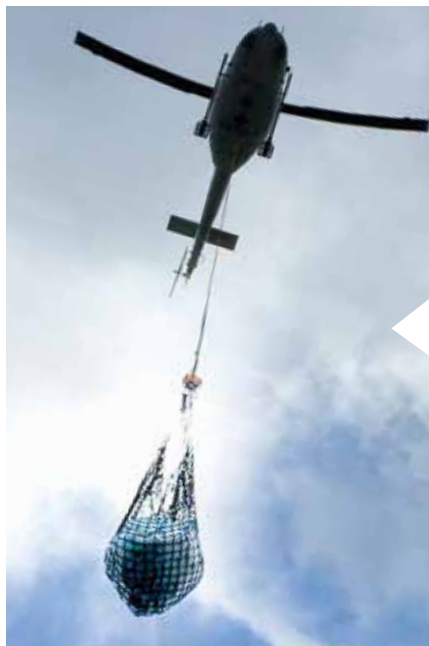
MAYA'S STORY

A Holocaust survivor saved once by kind neighbors receives help again



NEW BEGINNINGS

An Extreme Blessing helps a family start over in North Carolina



HAITI A helicopter takes off with essential relief supplies bound for the remote community of Bwa Pikan after Hurricane Matthew caused extensive damage there. It took three flights, but Operation Blessing was able to deliver 2.5 tons of food, chlorine, medical supplies and more.

IRAQ Two boys participate in an art therapy workshop supported by Operation Blessing. Iraqi children have endured years of war and violence, and ISIS has forced many from their homes. Something as simple as creating art can help them process what they've been through.



GUATEMALA Sonia and Lesly show off their brand new shoe stand! Little Lesly was born with a medical condition that demands constant attention, causing Sonia to lose her job. So OB Guatemala provided Sonia with a microenterprise, allowing her to both provide and care for her daughter.

OPERATION BLESSING HAPPENINGS

PERU Maria holds her children, sons Dani and Jodi, close. After suffering from abdominal pain, Maria attended Operation Blessing's Cervical Cancer Prevention program where she found out she had cervicitis. OB Peru provided treatment for Maria, and she is now healthy again!



HONDURAS

The third graduating class from Operation Blessing's Canela y Miel Cosmetology School toss their caps in the air in celebration of their graduation!



UNITED STATES An Operation Blessing volunteer hauls ruined flooring to the curb after Hurricane Matthew brought major flooding to Norfolk, Virginia.



Bill's Blog

by **Bill Horan**, President
Operation Blessing International

Read more from Bill's Blog
at ob.org/bill

2016 was an extraordinarily wet year, and our U.S. disaster relief team has been hard at work for eight continuous months in eight different places, helping flood victims in communities suffering from historic floods.

In Robert, Louisiana, a rural community with only 20 streets and one stop light, the local Tangipahoa River rose from 6 feet deep to 26 feet deep in 24 hours. In Denham Springs, Louisiana, where 90 percent

THE RAIN CAME DOWN

of homes were flooded, 32 inches of rain fell in 34 hours. The local State Representative told me, "That much rain would be the equivalent of 25 feet of snow." In Rosenberg, Texas, where the Brazos River ran dry just two years ago, the river rose from 14 feet to 54 feet, causing the worst flood since 1913. In and around Richwood, West Virginia, it rained so hard that 44 of 55 counties were declared in a state of emergency and 23 people lost their lives. In all of these places, an enormous amount of rain fell in a very short time taking residents and officials by surprise and disrupting the lives of countless people.

We heard the word "historic" over and over. In almost every case local officials told us that flood waters had spread far beyond historic boundaries and inundated

areas that had not flooded in modern times, leaving countless homeowners with ruined houses, no flood insurance and no resources to rebuild. In Baton Rouge alone, there were over 110,000 flooded homes, over 70 percent of them without flood insurance.

One of the small town mayors I met told a familiar tale: she lived in a farmhouse that her grandfather had built in the '30s and that three generations of her family had lived in, and none of them had ever seen floodwaters anywhere near the home. This

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time, three feet of water rushed into the house and everything was ruined.

Operation Blessing's U.S. disaster relief team responds to floods, tornadoes, hurricanes, landslides and snow emergencies. All of these wreak havoc on families, but flood damage is likely the most discouraging of all. It doesn't take much water to turn the inside of any home into a smelly, eye-watering, mold-infested quagmire. Just imagine the catastrophe that even a foot or two of water — black from sewage and mud — would cause in your own home. Carpets, flooring, furniture, sheet rock, wiring all ruined; heirlooms and personal possessions accumulated over a lifetime turned into trash piled at the curb. Besides the physical loss, families are devastated.

Sadly, the media largely ignores the after-flood suffering and rarely covers the whole story. Networks feature flooding when the water is highest and they

can show spectacular helicopter footage of water as far as the eye can see. By the time the waters recede and the drudgery of digging out and rebuilding begins, the cameras have moved on, and the eyes and hearts of America are focused elsewhere. The media's lack of coverage makes our job of recruiting volunteers and raising flood relief funds much, much harder.

But here's the good news! Guess what the following churches all have in common? The Healing Place in Denham Springs, Louisiana; Covenant Love Church in Fayetteville, North Carolina;

Powerhouse Church in Katy, Texas; First Baptist in Richwood, West Virginia; Crossgate Church in Robert, Louisiana; and "The Church" in Rosenberg, Texas. Each of these churches served as "hubs of healing" and headquarters for Operation Blessing's disaster relief teams as they served flood-stricken communities with hot meals and teams of

energetic volunteers, providing hope and help to haggard homeowners.

We always look for a strong, local church partner in the communities where we deploy. By making a local church the nexus of our efforts, we know that that our skills and resources will be blessed and multiplied. Believers traditionally look to their church group and

pastor for spiritual comfort and guidance, but in times of disaster, go there for physical comfort, food, water and shelter. Regardless of how much a family has lost in a disaster, those with a Christ-centered life find deep strength in their faith.

"The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against the house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock." (Matthew 7:25)

Your support of Operation Blessing enables us to be there for believers and all those in need during the dark days that follow disasters. Thank you and may God Bless you! ♦



MAYA'S STORY

A HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR
SAVED ONCE BY KIND NEIGHBORS
RECEIVES HELP AGAIN

Like many Jewish Holocaust survivors, Maya made it through one of the darkest periods in human history, only to find herself again facing difficulties.

Maya was a small child in Ukraine when World War II erupted. At the start of the war, her father, who had struggled as a journalist under restrictive Soviet rule, left to fight in the army. Before long, she and her mother were restricted to a ghetto, and matters escalated as the Nazi concentration camps opened and Maya's mother was imprisoned.

For a time, kind Ukrainian neighbors kept Maya. Vacily, a policeman, and his wife

had no children of their own, and they hoped to protect 2-year-old Maya for the duration of the war and return her to her family once they were freed. However, after a few months, someone reported Maya's Jewish heritage to the authorities in German-occupied Ukraine. They took her from Vacily's home and sent her to the concentration camp with her mother.

Knowing the sort of conditions little Maya was enduring, the kind neighbors tried everything to save her, even considering adoption. Vacily risked traveling to the concentration camp, claiming that Maya and a number of other Jewish prisoners were ill. Afraid that the sickness might spread, the Germans allowed Vacily to take them away.

Vacily hid the people he saved in a boat, but as winter came, they suffered from exposure. Finally, they were rescued by a plane that took them to Moscow, allowing Maya and her mother to survive to live long, full lives. But Vacily was discovered for helping the Jews. Maya sadly reported, "After some time, the Germans came, and they killed him and his wife, and also his mother."

In 1992, Maya and her family immigrated to Israel. Today, Maya is not able to work. She struggles to make ends meet on the subsidy she receives as a Holocaust survivor. Maya often has to choose between paying bills, buying food and purchasing needed medications.

Just as kind-hearted individuals stepped up to help the Jewish people during the war, Operation Blessing is now stepping forward to help Jewish survivors like Maya have a better quality of life with our Adopt-a-Holocaust-Survivor program. Many of these now elderly survivors face financial difficulties, but thanks to our faithful supporters, they are receiving food, medical care, necessities and even companionship.

Maya is thankful for the assistance she receives, and truly appreciates the time OBI workers spend with her and her daughter. "We are very lonely, and for us it is very important to talk with people, meet with people. And if the people can help us, we are very happy, of course. I'm sure that most of the survivors are in the same condition as my family, and most of them will be happy to have any help." ♦

High in the hills west of Port-au-Prince lies the small farming community of Jaquot — accessible only by a steep and deeply rutted dirt road. Life here is hard. With agriculture the only means of income, the locals are constantly at the mercy of the weather, always praying for enough rain for their crops to grow. The last few years, however, have been very dry. “My mother and father are from this area, and I never left this

place. This is all I have, even if life is hard,” says Dieumene, a Jaquot native and mother of two. “When it doesn’t rain there is no life for us. We live from what we planted.”

Even when the rains do come, the land is harsh and few plants will grow. To add to the burden, the markets where the farmers can sell their produce is very far away. “Sometimes I sell goods in the market, but because of the distance to the market, the road is not easy,” says Dieumene. Still, those who live

in Jaquot are thankful for what they have and work hard to give their children a better life.

The hopes and dreams of the kids here rest on getting an education and finding a good job. Until a few years ago, however, there was only one state run school in the region. Though this school is free, it is much too small to serve all the children in the area. To make matters worse, the school is often closed and locals complain that the children aren’t getting the education



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HOPE GROWS ON HIGHER GROUND

*A school stands
in the gap for
one Haitian
community*

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they deserve. “The government doesn’t fulfill their responsibilities at that school,” says Dieumene.

In response to the desperate need for education, two sisters and a brother from the French Catholic order Fraternite Notre Dame du Frechou founded a kindergarten and primary school that serves this remote and impoverished region. The school was established at its current site on a hilltop in 2013 and has become known as Higher Ground. “The school the sisters started helps us a lot in our community,” Dieumene says. “Not only is it closer to us, but the kids are well taken care of.”

In addition to providing an education for the children, the sisters living at Higher Ground would serve the locals with basic medical care. The school and medical clinic soon became well-established

bright spots in Jaquot. The farming community was grateful to be able to send their children to school and for the medical aid they were receiving.

Then it all came to a halt.

Violent thieves attacked the compound, hurting the sisters and stealing valuable supplies. The assault was so brutal that the priest was nearly killed. In the wake of this heinous crime, the sisters and brother who founded the school were devastated and traumatized. They decided that they could no longer continue their work at Higher Ground, but they knew that it was essential that the school remain open.

In March of 2015, a British chaplain who works with the Fraternite Notre Dame contacted Operation Blessing in Haiti and asked for help. Our staff

visited the school and

it was immediately clear that the school’s closing would be a devastating blow to the people of Jaquot.

Operation Blessing now supports much of the school’s



daily operations, providing school supplies, teacher training, curriculum and even building a new restroom facility. Higher Ground students are now given safe drinking water, two nutritious meals per day and have even been treated to special Christmas and Easter celebrations.

Higher Ground continues to serve Jaquot as more than just a school. The meals students receive are reducing the number of malnourished children in the region, and Operation Blessing has brought in a community health worker to renew the medical services once offered by the sisters.

The students, and their parents, are thankful that they still have a

school to rely on. Dieumene says, “I have two kids in the school, one in first and one in kindergarten. It is a joy for me to see!”

Though there have been tumultuous times for Higher Ground, Operation Blessing is helping bring stability back to the school. Children who were once malnourished now get the sustenance they need, more kids have access to a quality education and the community once again has somewhere to turn for medical aid. Operation Blessing partners are ensuring that this essential institution will continue serving the people of Jaquot for years to come. ♦



HOPE FOR THE FUTURE

A former ISIS sex slave shares her story of survival

The following is a first-person report from Operation Blessing staff member "D" from an IDP camp in Iraq.



The heat hits your body the moment you walk outside. It is so hot it sucks the life out of you. My eyes stare in shock at the shimmering horizon. Waves of heat seem to be visible, rising through the dusty landscape. With temperatures well above

100° F, everyone stays indoors as much as possible during the day. Finally, the evening brings some respite from the baking hot day, and the night air comes alive with the sound of children laughing and playing past midnight.

I enter the Yazidi camp near Dohuk late in the evening. The camp is silent. It is two years since ISIS attacked the Christian and Yazidi minorities of the Nineveh Plains region of Iraq.

I am here to meet a young woman and her four children, all of whom have escaped from ISIS just 24 hours ago.

I step into her tent. She has nothing but some mattresses on the floor. Like many other survivors, she has come into the IDP

(Internally Displaced Persons) camp to live in a tent with little or no support.

After her husband and the other men in her community were killed by ISIS, she was captured and sold 13 times to ISIS fighters who used and abused her at will. They are soldiers of the so-called Islamic State who believe they can buy and sell women and children who are not Muslim for their sexual pleasure. They pass them from one

jihadi to another or simply go down to the slave market and choose a girl.

She cries as she tells her story. Her hands twist the white tissue she holds over and over into a tight ball of pain soaked with tears.

Some were Iraqi men, some Saudi Arabian and one was an American Muslim. Her 9-year-old daughter was taken by a Saudi man for some weeks and sexually abused. Her son was taken

“ **SHE CRIES AS SHE TELLS HER STORY.**

Her hands twist the white tissue she holds over and over into a tight ball of pain soaked with tears. ”

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as a slave in the home of one of the ISIS fighters' families. Two of her children were sold and found, some time later, abandoned in a home when the ISIS fighter had gone into battle. They are all nine years old or younger.

While in captivity, she fought hard to keep track of her children so that she could reunite the family.

After two years as a sex slave, she was finally able to escape.

During the day, I spent time with her, helping her to pick out kitchenware; buckets to carry water in and to use to wash up in the hard camp conditions; and clothing for her and the children as they arrived only with what they had when they escaped. She tells me she can't wear colors, as she is still in grief over the death of her husband and the men in her family.

She and the 110 other women and girls that Operation Blessing is here to help, all former ISIS sex slaves, are incredibly grateful for the help. Most of them have children and are trying to cope with not only what has happened to them, but also with the trauma their children have gone through. On top of that, they are now IDPs in a sprawling, hot and dusty camp.

These survivors have a long way to go on their road to recovery. However, Operation Blessing's help not only gives them assistance in their current situation, but also some hope for the future. Hope that they have not been forgotten. Hope that they will have a voice. And hope to keep living and fighting for their lives and the lives of their children. ♦



OPERATION BLESSING
has worked extensively with IDPs in Iraq, as well as refugees across the border in Jordan, bringing food, hygiene items, bedding and other relief supplies to those who have been forced from their homes by ISIS.



NEW BEGINNINGS

AN EXTREME BLESSING HELPS
A FAMILY START OVER

Hurricane Matthew flooded Kim's house in North Carolina and destroyed her belongings only a year after she and her children had moved in. Everything she had known was lost — but an Extreme Blessing gave her family the opportunity they needed to start anew.

Kim remembers well the sight of her house when she hitched a ride on



a boat through her flooded neighborhood. But more than that, she remembers the call of her teenaged son as she yelled his name across the water.

The two had not spoken since the night before when he was trapped home alone as the waters rose while Kim worked her shift as a nurse at the nearby hospital. When Kim heard Michael's voice call back, "Mom!" relief rushed over her. The two reunited and rode the boat out of the neighborhood, not knowing what would be left of their house after the floodwaters receded.

When they finally made it home, everything had been lost. Kim felt overwhelmed when she saw how much work had to be done, but soon Operation



Blessing reached out to her with a team of volunteers ready to help.

"It was amazing. I can't imagine having to do all that — pulling everything out — if it was just me," she said.

Operation Blessing's team of volunteers pulled the ruined furniture and other belongings to the curb. They removed soaked sheetrock and insulation, but little did Kim know, that was only the beginning.

As soon as the team met Kim, staff members knew she was in need of a special blessing.

Kim had struck a rough patch before the hurricane hit. She just finished nursing school and started her first job as a nurse, but before her family even settled into their new routine, Hurricane Matthew slammed Fayetteville.

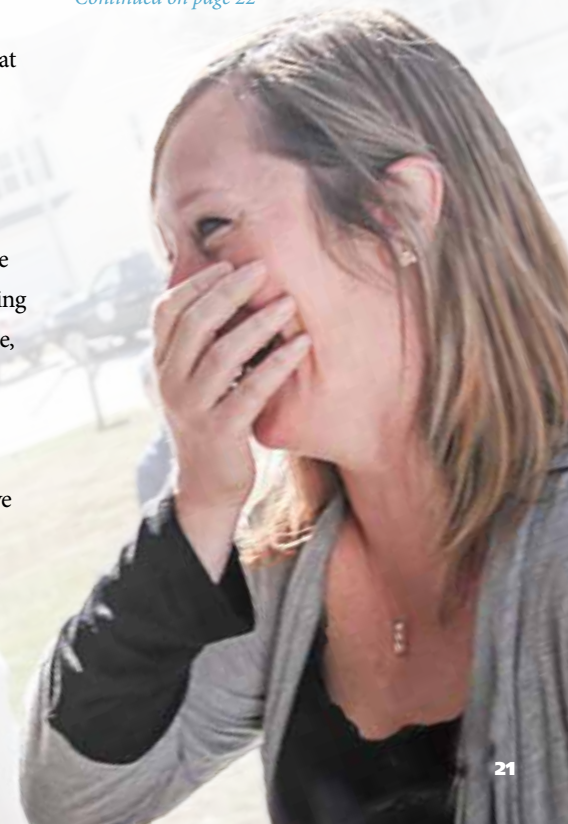
While the family made plans to move into a borrowed RV in the driveway of their broken home, Operation Blessing's United States disaster relief team made plans to restore it.

It took four weeks of work and around 1,000 volunteers who gave their time freely to help this and other hurting families in hard-hit Fayetteville. Operation Blessing told Kim they were working on her house a little, but gave no indication how much they might accomplish.

"I thought it would be maybe the floors and the walls so I would have a base and I could go from there," she said later. "It was way more than that, way more than that."

When Kim and her children returned to their house, they had no idea what awaited them — their fresh start.

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Beyond walls and flooring, the volunteers and Operation Blessing staff filled her home with the necessities her family needed to start over. Kim and her children now have all new furniture, bedding, appliances and more. The walls are adorned with personal touches, including a section dedicated to photos of the family.

When the family arrived, the volunteers welcomed them home with cheers and applause, and when Kim saw all that they had done for her, she cried thankful tears.

“It’s been a God-send,” Kim said. “This has definitely been life changing.”

The weight of her damaged house lifted as she realized that her family

would no longer have to live in an RV while trying to rebuild on a tight budget. Instead, they are safely back in their home and looking forward to what comes next.

“I don’t have to worry about everything here. I can go on and do life,” Kim said. “The future looks amazing.” ♦



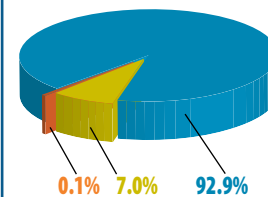
A MISSION YOU CAN BELIEVE IN. A CHARITY YOU CAN TRUST.

Operation Blessing is dedicated to relieving human suffering by combating poverty, hunger, exploitation and oppression with the provision of food, clothing, shelter, medical care and more. And we’re committed to fiscal responsibility, efficiency and excellence.

- **Forbes magazine** ranks OBI as one of its “100 Largest Charities.”
- **Consumers Digest** named OBI one of “America’s Top Charities” based on financial efficiency.
- **Ministry Watch** gave Operation Blessing a 5-star rating.

CONDENSED FINANCIAL INFORMATION FOR THE FISCAL YEAR ENDING MARCH 31, 2016:

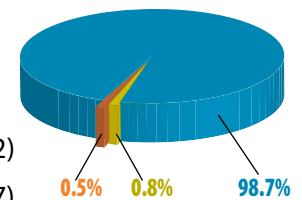
REVENUES:



Gifts in Kind	\$286,270,434
Contributions.....	\$21,501,231
Other Revenues	\$315,715
Total Revenues	\$308,087,380

EXPENSES:

Programs	\$(304,882,900)
Fundraising.....	\$(2,423,255)
General and Administrative	\$(1,463,052)
Total Expenses	\$(308,769,207)



Gains and losses	\$ 10,071
Decrease in Net Assets	\$(671,756)

FOR OBI’S COMPLETE FY16 ANNUAL REPORT VISIT OB.ORG/FINANCIALS.

For Operation Blessing International’s complete financial statements audited by KPMG LLP, please visit ob.org/financials or request a hard copy by writing us at Operation Blessing International, Public Relations Department, 977 Centerville Turnpike, Va. Beach VA 23463.





make a promise INSTEAD OF A RESOLUTION **FOR 2017**

At Operation Blessing, we're looking at how we can make an even bigger impact in the fight against poverty in 2017 for families like Sylvie's.

Sylvie, an immigrant to Uganda, was left with a baby and a single bag of belongings in a foreign land with nowhere to go. You helped her get on her feet again, and now she has her own business!

We have big goals for 2017 to change more lives like Sylvie's, and with your investment as a Club Bless partner, we can make them happen.

JOIN CLUB BLESS AS A MONTHLY PARTNER AT
OB.ORG/CLUBBLESS



operationblessing.org



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