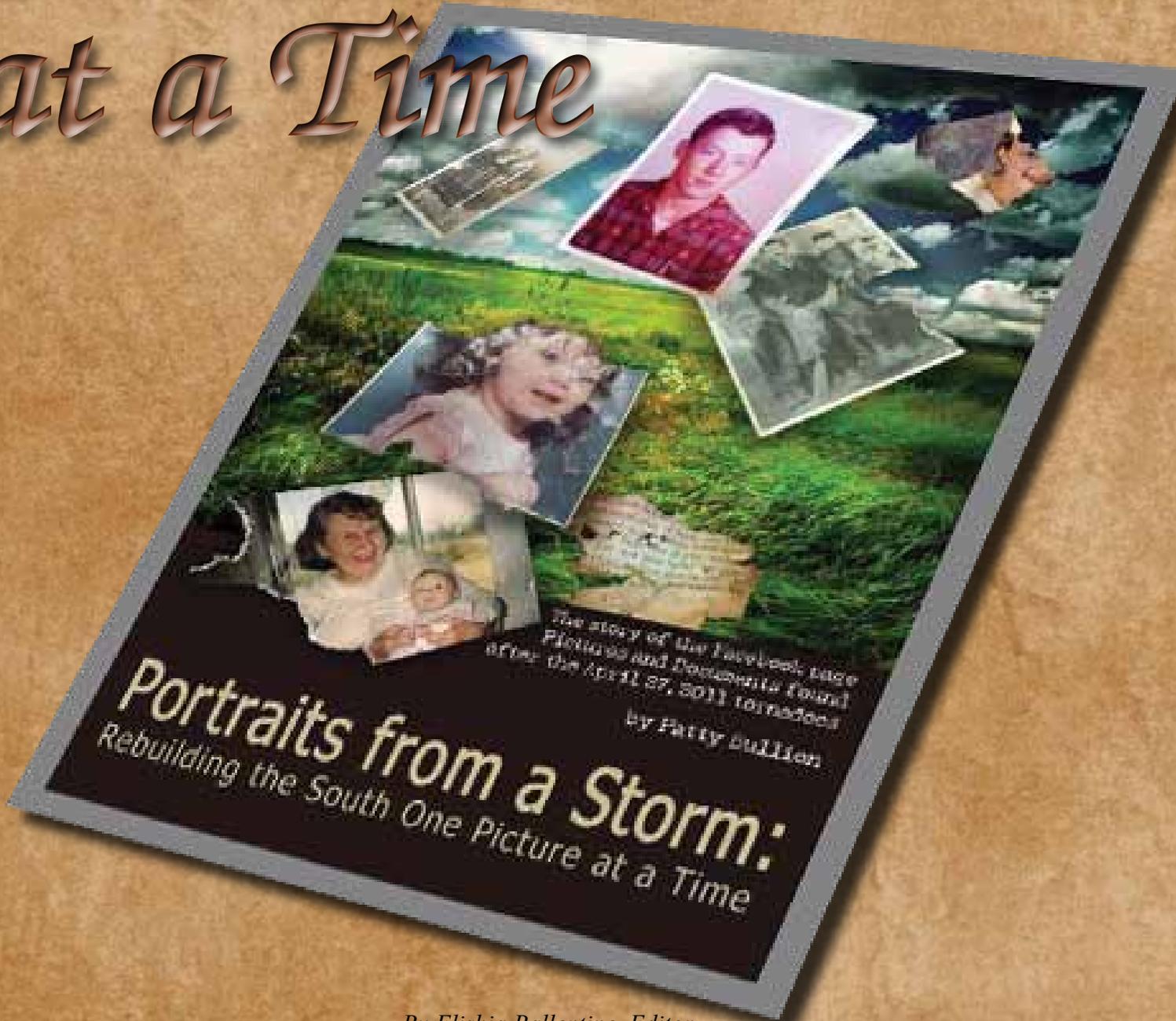


One Picture at a Time



Portraits from a Storm:
Rebuilding the South One Picture at a Time

The story of the Facebook page
Pictures and Documents found
after the April 27, 2011 tornadoes
by Patty Bullion

By Elishia Ballentine, Editor

Often in the aftermath of a devastating event, something new is born . . . as in the legend of the phoenix rising from the ashes. Such is the case here. After the storms ravaged the state of Alabama in April of this year, Patty Bullion, wife of AFC Hazard Mitigation Specialist David Bullion in Limestone County, had a brainstorm of her own. She took on a tremendous endeavor . . . she created a Facebook page that would provide a central location to list personal possessions found scattered far and wide after the devastating tornados – a cyberspace lost and found. She named the

page simply, “Pictures and documents found after the April 27, 2011 tornados.”

Through the use of this social networking site, the storm survivors were given a chance to recover a few of their cherished items. People who found items could post them – people who had lost absolutely everything could then be reunited with those irreplaceable precious memories and keepsakes that were blown away, often as far away as another state. The site also afforded the opportunity for some of the item owners to post their thanks to those returning the documents and photos.

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Patty and the family had watched the storms go over; the majority of the damage was to the south of them. Feeling very blessed, she said they never even lost power. Husband David went out on search and rescue; she and the kids were at their home near Athens, Alabama when a friend called and said, "It's raining pictures. Go look!" Sure enough, they went outside and started finding photographs in the yard. All total, they found eight items around their own house, but it was one piece in particular that really touched Patty's heart: an infant's ultrasound. She said she couldn't imagine keeping a baby's picture and not at least trying to find the owner. Scanning and uploading the pictures to Facebook, the idea was launched and she began to tell her friends and neighbors.

Even with all the chaos at that time, 40 pictures were posted overnight. Within just a few hours, she was amazed at the number of hits on the site. The word spread quickly, but Patty said she never dreamed the concept would take off as it did. The items started pouring in – not only from Alabama, but also from Tennessee, Georgia, Mississippi, and North Carolina as well – and they're still coming!

Giving comes natural to this full-time mom and wife/freelance photographer, so donating her time, energy, and personal resources to the cause was no different. However, since this project sprang from the goodness of her heart, she's been a bit shocked by the media craze that ensued. In fact, Patty has become a celebrity of sorts, all because of her selfless venture to help her state's storm victims. Not only was the story covered by local television channels 19 and 31, but she has also been interviewed by national media outlets such as CNN, "Good Morning America," both US and Canadian radio stations, the *New York Times*, and *People* magazine. A film crew came all the way from Facebook headquarters in California for an interview that was posted on "YouTube." Internationally, she was even interviewed by a journalist with a French photography magazine.

Patty says that through this experience, she has made many new friends. Also, as a result of the events of the past few months, she has written a book entitled *Portraits from a Storm: Rebuilding the South One Picture at a Time*. It details her emotional journey of creating the Facebook page and meeting some of the amazing people behind the photographs, as well as their inspiring stories.

To date, over 4,000 pictures have been posted on the Facebook page . . . even more astounding, the number of items reunited with their owners is over 2,000! Ironically, of the eight items Patty and the kids found in their own yard, all have been claimed except one . . . the ultrasound.

In spite of all the acclaim that has come her way, Patty remains devoted to her mission, very humble and unassuming, and still trying to help others. "I know we can't fix everything that these people have been through; however, when you have lost everything, getting one picture back can mean the world!" ☺

