

THE ONLINE EDITION OF THE SOUTHEAST OUTLOOK NEWSPAPER

The Southeast Outlook

"You shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free."
JOHN 8:32

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Terry Hayes' second chapter includes remarrying her former husband

By Ruth Schenk | rschenk@secc.org

Terry Hayes was ready for a new chapter in her life when she hiked through underbrush and around boulders to be baptized in Lake Pontchartrain on Oct. 3, 2006.

The last thing she expected to find in New Orleans was faith. The 39-year-old divorced mother of an adult son volunteered for Help build Hope after seeing a news clip about the massive building project in the parking lot at Southeast. Building 1,994 walls for 33 homes in hurricane-ravaged New Orleans fascinated Terry. She'd helped build Habitat for Humanity projects before and thought this one would be fun—minus the church part, that is.

Terry had left church behind as a child. Her biggest fear on the trip was that "church" people would see through her. Her life wasn't bad. It just wasn't great.

When she left for New Orleans, Terry still was adjusting to divorce after being married many years, taking welding classes to qualify for a better job.

The daily schedule in New Orleans included time to worship every morning and evening. Terry watched from the sidelines, grateful that no one asked her to pray or sing.

When she heard the group talking about going to a service at St. Mary's Baptist Church in Algiers to hear Pastor Brown preach, Terry made plans to avoid that group outing.

She drove around the city in circles for a while, got lost and ended up back at the dorm just as the group was leaving for the service. They begged her to go along.

The church was packed by the time Terry arrived. She took a seat beside Southeast members John and Wanda Burkhardt. They'd worked beside each other the last few days.

That night, Pastor Brown talked about hardships during Katrina and how much it meant when people volunteered to help rebuild. At the end of the service, he gave a simple invitation for anyone who had never given his or her life to Christ.

Terry slipped out of the pew and went down to the front of the church.

A crowd surrounded her at the front of the church that night.

Southeast member Tom Rowe led the group of volunteers that week. He asked Terry if she wanted to be baptized in New Orleans or back in Louisville.



RUTH SCHENK/THE SOUTHEAST OUTLOOK
Terry and Steve Hayes will be remarried on Aug. 2 in the Southeast Chapel.


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Terry decided she wanted to be baptized in Lake Pontchartrain. It was the closest body of water, the right time at the right place.

The next day Hayes, Rowe and the whole group of volunteers made their way down to the lake close to where the levy broke during Hurricane Katrina.

The wind and water were freezing. But nothing deterred Terry—not the white-capped, choppy water or the floating debris.

Terry said she felt "like a new person" when she came up out of the water. Worry and guilt were gone. So was her life-long sense of being alone.

Terry told everyone in Louisville about her baptism and showed pictures of that day. Her ex-husband, Steve, said she was different person.

"She's the person I fell in love with 30 years ago," he said.

Terry invited Steve to go to services at Southeast with her. They had never gone to church before as a couple.

"Nothing held me back from going to church except myself," Steve said. "Southeast is a big church, but I felt right at home right away. I felt like the preacher was talking just to me."

About a month after Steve started going to church with Terry, doctors told him that he had a malignant, baseball-sized tumor in his kidney. Taking that out didn't scare him as much as being baptized.

Steve slept very little for six days and nights before mustering the courage to call the church. Ray Fryrear, head of the Pastoral Care Ministry, told him to come on over. Terry gave him a ride. This was something she didn't want to miss.

On Nov. 7, 2007, the water in the baptismal was a chilly 50 degrees—almost as cold as the day Terry was baptized in Lake Pontchartrain. She stepped down into the water with her ex-husband. He made the Good Confession, then Terry baptized him.

There were a lot of tears and a lot of joy.

The two continued to go to church together. They met for dinner when possible since both work different shifts. When doctors removed Steve's kidney, they were "99 percent" sure it was malignant. The pathology report calling it benign surprised everyone.

More good news followed.

Terry had been praying for "a good Christian man" ever since the divorce, never thinking that "a good Christian man" would turn out to be her ex-husband.

Steve proposed in January.

"I'm not sure why you'd want me," he said. "I have one kidney, a bad back, bad eyes. But things will be different this time. I know what's important. I won't take anything for granted. I'll protect our marriage."

This time, it will be different. The Hayes were 17 and 19 when they eloped. On Aug. 2, they'll say their vows in the chapel at Southeast. They begin pre-marital classes soon. Terry is shopping for her wedding dress. Their son will be the best man, and Terry's sister will be the matron of honor. They've already planned their honeymoon.

Terry said she's looking forward to another 30 years with Steve.

"This time we'll grow old together," she said.

