

## About the Impact of Hurricane Georges by Natalie Woodward

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On September 22, 1998, Hurricane Georges hit the Dominican Republic. The hurricane did serious damage to the country: Homes, roads, bridges, dams, and airports were destroyed or seriously damaged. The official death toll was approximately 300.

When the storm passed, a huge number of trees fell and the roads were closed. Of course, there were also electrical wires down. The damage was extensive. You could actually see how the rivers had flooded their banks. People came to us and said they had lost their town, they had lost their way of life, they had lost their way of living. They had no idea what to do. But they wanted to continue to stay together. They asked: Could you help us?

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We soon realized that there were people isolated—on "islands," so to speak, created by the rivers—without water and without food. So we chartered a plane. And that night we began packing two-and-a-half-pound bags of food. We packed all night. The next morning, the first plane took off. We flew out into one of the worst hit areas and dropped the food, because we couldn't land. For a week, we dropped the food to people who were in pretty bad shape.

The staff at the Peace Corps office in Santo Domingo realized very quickly that we had people who could help. We had Peace Corps Volunteers—people who were experienced in community organization, spoke Spanish, were well-educated, and who could step forward and do something. We worked with the Dominican government, and we joined with the Red Cross to assist them in setting up their refugee shelters. For a period of time, we managed 16 of the shelters. We worked together.