

Van describes her job this way — People that were victims of disaster fill out an application. If there is anything wrong with their application — like no birth certificates, proof of renter, or proof of homeowners insurance — the apps are sent to one of the Disaster Field Offices. And generally having that information is the last thing on someone's mind when they are stuck by disaster. Caseworkers like Van would then call these people and have to walk them through the process of getting the missing paperwork.

One of her most chilling experiences came after a major disaster down south.

"I contacted a woman and explained that we didn't have any proof that she had children. And she said it didn't matter. And I said 'But your application says you have two daughters.' Now we had people on the street too, helping people. And she kept telling me it didn't matter."

Now they were only allowed so many minutes when making these calls, but Van felt this woman was in bad shape and really needed help. Finally she asked "why doesn't it matter?"

"She finally told me that when she was picked up there wasn't enough room for her and her daughters to be in the same canoe." Distressed, one of her daughters was yelling for her, stood up in their canoe — the canoe turned over and everyone died.

"I still get chills when I talk about it."

Van proceeded to tell the lady to stay on the phone and cry, and in the mean time "I was writing notes to my co-worker who was sitting there and said 'this is a 9-11. She needs help now.'"

"We were able to get a social worker to her. I don't know

whatever happened to her."

Van said those kinds of jobs, as rewarding as they are, was something she just couldn't do.

"I don't leave them at work. Some people have that ability to leave it at work and I can't."

So within three months, Van was transferred to the FEMA Headquarters office and became a senior grant management specialist. Her job was to review all of the program solicitations to make sure they were legally and ethically correct before they went out. She also did oversight, which sent her out to the regions to monitor the regional implementation of programs. Van held this post until the establishment of the Department of Homeland Security.

"As soon as the Department of Homeland Security was established my boss came to me and said 'Van, do I have a deal for you.' That sent up red flags."

The CFO of FEMA said that either Van or her boss had to go to Homeland Security and set up the Grant Policy and Oversight office. Her boss wasn't going, so it was up to Van.

"I thought okay, that's kind of challenging. I'll go do that."

For the next seven years, Van worked for the Department of Homeland Security as the director for grant policy and oversight.

When Homeland Security was developing, 23 agencies came into the agency. Van says some had Grant Policy offices and some didn't, so it was her job to combine everyone under one Grant Policy and Oversight Office.

"I had a goal — my goal was that the office would be recognized as a major office within Homeland Security. And that there would be a Senior Employee Service position, which is an executive

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