

Haiti Trip Journal

February 13th to February 22nd, 2013

The 7.0 earthquake in Haiti occurred on January 12th, 2010. The country was completely devastated. To date there has been much improvement and reconstruction of the country is evident everywhere. But there is nearly no electricity, no water system, no sewage system and garbage continues to be a major problem. Most people no longer live in the tent cities but housing is very primitive and very crowded. There are very few jobs with very little promise of future jobs. In Port-au-Prince there are approximately 4 million people, which is about 60% of the total population of Haiti. With 60 – 80% unemployment there is little opportunity for the people to improve their current condition. When driving the broken roads, the traffic is horrendous. There are very few working streetlights and people must fend for their lives just crossing the roads. Motor vehicles always have the right-of-way. It was hard to believe that there were not more accidents. Fortunately, the traffic never moved very fast.

I did not plan to write a journal but my wife suggested that I take some notes so I would remember the events that occurred while our team was in Haiti. Like everything I do, I got carried away.

The following are the list of the people from the two Methodist Churches that comprised our team:

Santa Monica Church

Robert English (leader)
Kendra Gorlitsky
Martha Ross
Michael Kelley
Janet Hanley

Simi Valley Church

Camille Mattick (leader)
Carol Conner
Debbi McAlister
Nathan McAlister
Steve Thomson

Although the planned project assigned to the team seemed to change multiple times before arriving in Haiti, the final result was to go to Furcy, Haiti, a mountaintop community 30 miles south of Port-au-Prince, and work with the local people to help build a guesthouse for their church. Future teams will need a place to stay for future projects.

All the funds for this trip came from the members of these two churches and from UMCOR. All involved truly understand the huge need for this type of mission.

Feb. 13th Wednesday

Left L.A. on the 4:30 pm Delta flight to JFK. Arrived at JFK at 1:30 am. We slept on the floor at Gate 11. The team did not get a good night's sleep.



Feb. 14th Thursday

Ate breakfast at JFK as a group and boarded the flight to Port-au-Prince. The flight left at 8:55 am and arrived at 12:55 pm. We collected our luggage except Kendra who had one missing bag. Later, it was learned that Kendra's husband had been contacted and the bag had not left New York. We drove in a van (cage on wheels) to the guesthouse. Luckily I got to sit up front and took many pictures along the route. The streets were very rough but much cleaner than I expected. The guesthouse had three other groups and was very crowded. We had a great dinner and some of our team even went swimming in the swimming pool. Since we were the last group to arrive, we got last pick of the beds. We got the top bunks that were too close to the ceiling fans. The others felt sorry for us so did not run the fans while we were in bed. We still have our heads. The roosters crowed all night long, so again, we did not get a good night's sleep.

Feb. 15th Friday

We got up at 6:00 am. Had breakfast, packed two trucks and left the guesthouse by 8:00 am. We drove through Port-au-Prince and went up a long hill drive and arrived in Furcy at 10:30 am. After arriving at the end of the road, a large group of villagers carried all of our baggage down the mountain to the church. Pastor Elise was very militant in selecting each carrier and the movement of supplies to the church. The luggage was very heavy but each person would get \$1 - \$2 for carrying the supplies down the ¾ mile trek. Most of the bags, water jugs and kitchen supplies weighed close to 50 lbs. Little boys and girls carried many of the items. The total cost was about \$120 and the villagers were very happy to receive their pay.

We moved into the church and put two pews with backs together to form our beds. At noon we had a great lunch prepared by Lulu, a terrific person and wonderful cook. We ate at the pastor's home, which was down the hill from the church. We ate outside under a tarp on two tables. At the beginning of each meal, we would go to the house and pick up the plates and food, eat and then take all the tableware back to the house. The cooks would then wash the dishes in soap and bleach. They were very careful to insure that teams from the U.S. did not get germs from the water. The path to the pastor's home was a little treacherous and required a little caution.

After lunch we went to work on the guesthouse, which was between the pastor's home and the church. We hauled concrete that had been mixed by our hired workers, sifted the sand from a rock pile, and sifted the sand again into finer components. The sifting was conducted by placing a shovel full of rock onto a framed screen (approximately 12" x 20") and giving the screen a few shakes, the material going through the screen fell into a wheelbarrow and the material on top of the screen was put into a bucket and hauled to a rock pile. The workers would take the sand components and mix it with water and concrete. The inner structure of the guesthouse was made of concrete block, cement and rebar. The workers were now putting a smooth surface on top of the concrete block.

We were all tired after four hours of strenuous work. The temperature was about 85 degrees but the area was mostly in the shade. The mountains all around this area were

absolutely beautiful and we quickly learned that the people were just as beautiful. At 5:00 pm we went back to the Pastor's house for dinner. Dinner consisted of rice and beans, a pork dish, macaroni and cheese and plantains. It was a little misty and there were some leaks in the tarp but the company and the food were great. We finished about 5:45 pm and went for a walk further downhill to the school. About 50 feet from the school we noticed how dark it was getting so quickly turned around and returned to the church. It was already dark by the time we got back but fortunately, we had brought some flashlights to find our way back up the treacherous trails. We arrived back at the church at 6:30 pm. The generators were turned on and the church had lights for about one hour.

Feb. 16th Saturday

Up at 6:00 am. Lots of roosters crowing and lots of snoring in the church. It was hard to get a good night's sleep. Earplugs didn't really work. Breakfast at 7:00 am. We had hard-boiled eggs, noodles, peanut butter and guava jelly on toast (um-um good). At 8:00 am we were back to hauling concrete and sifting rocks. We moved the rock pile to a new location behind the cistern. At noon we broke for lunch and had peanut butter and guava jelly sandwiches, Vienna sausage, chips, cookies and juice. At the end of lunch, Lulu, our cook, taught us a song, as follows:

Let the weak say I am strong
Let the poor say I am rich
Let the blind say I can see
It's all the Lord has done in me
(repeat)
Josanna, Josanna For the lamb that was led
Josanna, Josanna Jesus died and rose again
(repeat)
Jesus died and rose again

After learning this song, our group agreed to sing it in the church service on Sunday. After lunch, the team split into two groups: the hikers and the slackers. The hikers went to the school, to a home of one of the volunteers, and to a coffee farm. The slackers sorted munchies for the children, did back exercises and read their books. At 5:00 pm we all went to dinner and ate goat meat, a corn casserole (out of this world good), rice and French fries. After dinner Lulu tried to teach us some Creole. At 7:00 pm we had a devotional meeting where everyone shared inspiring moments and we practiced our song for the Sunday service. Since we were sleeping on the church pews, we knew we had to get up early Sunday morning and pack all of our stuff out of the church.

Feb 17th Sunday

The days are flying by and it's Sunday. We cleaned up everything out of the church and got dressed up for church. We had oatmeal for breakfast and returned to the church. The sun was bright and the hills were beautiful. About 8:45 am the small band and some church members began to arrive. We were originally told that the church service would be from 9:00 am to 11:30 am, but soon learned that church started after many people came, which is know as "Haitian Time". At 8:55 am the service started with two band

members and 8 people. About 9:00 am twenty more people came and then kept on straggling in. All of the members from our team went up to the front of the church and were introduced to the congregation. We then sang our song with Lulu leading us. By 9:45 am the church was nearly full with approximately 100 people and they kept coming. One lady gave a testimonial. The pastor was a lay preacher, Ishmael. Each member of the congregation prayed out loud for about five minutes, not in unison and then in unison. A small boy, brother Nicholas, read a scripture lesson. They discussed having a person from Port-au-Prince come to the church to teach everyone to operate a sewing machine. It would cost 200 gourde per person to sign up. (There are 40 gourde / 1 U.S. dollar) They then discussed the planting of a garden that would be protected from the animals. The garden would consist of tomatoes and peppers and would have a water system. They then took an offering while the congregation sang, "This is My Story" in Creole. The sermon was on Lazarus, Daniel in the lions' den, three men in the furnace with the point of the sermon being, "God has the Solution". Our interpreter, Patrick, was translating the entire service to us. His translation was truly excellent.

By 11:00 am the preacher ended the service and thanked us and all the members that were a little late for coming. We had brought donations of raisins, granola bars, etc. and handed one to every member of the congregation. During the service there was a woman outside the church with a blow horn. I later learned that she was selling medicine (ointments) and walks through the hills to sell her wares. As the congregation left the church she found a few customers.

At noon we had lunch at the parsonage and returned to the church to set up our beds. As we relaxed at the church, Nathan was on the front steps playing with some children. He had placed a plastic cup on the stairs and the children would take turns trying to throw a rock in the cup. The children loved the game and Nathan beamed. We then hiked up the hill to Furcy and looked at the new construction of the Catholic Church. It will be beautiful with a great mountaintop view. We went into the old church and enjoyed the decorations. We split into two groups. Carol and Martha went to the Rustic Restaurant while the rest of us hiked to the waterfall. The hike was a four-mile round trip up and down trek. I was wishing that I had stayed with Carol and Martha. At 4:00 we got back to the Rustic Restaurant where we were joined by Lulu and her helpers and had dinner. It took a long time to order dinner and the restaurant was out of many of the items on their menu. Debbi never did get her order. We hiked back down the hill in the dark and it was quite difficult. Luckily, we had brought some flashlights. We had our devotional at 8:00 pm and were in bed by 9:00 pm.

Feb 18th Monday

Woke up at 6:00 am, dressed and went to breakfast. Cereal, toast, peanut butter, fat pancakes and juice. After breakfast we were back working at the guesthouse. Kendra and Peterson went to the clinic to help local patients. There were some HIV, TB, and Malaria cases. One little girl had pneumonia. There were six patients. Using a bucket brigade, we moved a huge pile of rocks to the rear of the water cistern. We also hauled concrete, sifted rocks and hauled concrete blocks. Some of the workers taught us how to dance on each end of a stick. Nathan and Michael were very good.

We worked until noon and quickly ate lunch so we could get ready for the “big feed”. Mama Lulu, our cook, prepared enough rice and sauce comprised of beans, chicken, peppers, onion and water to feed 250 children. We carried the very heavy pots of food up the hill from the parsonage to the church grounds. We placed tarps out for the children to sit on. Lulu and her helpers dished up the rice and sauce while we delivered it to the children and many adults. Everyone also received a small portion of orange juice. The lunch was from 1:30 to 2:30 pm. There was a small incident in which a local crazy man threw some rocks at some of the children. The crazy man had to be escorted from the area. We think some of the kids may have provoked him in some manner. Patrick quickly got everything under control.

After lunch all the children went to the soccer field while Robert, Steve and Martha got dishwashing detail. The children played soccer, jumped rope and colored in coloring books. The whole session was very chaotic. By 4:00 pm the children went home and the exhausted team returned to the church to shower and rest. At 5:30 pm we ate lasagna, BBQ chicken, rice, plantains and a carrot/potato dish. After dinner we returned to the church to cleanup. Michael and Nathan worked on building cars made from soda bottles, wheels and wooden axles. The cars were very cute and could be pulled by a string. We finished the night with a devotional to prepare for a duplicate “big feed” on Tuesday, our last day in Furcy.

Feb 19th Tuesday

Up at 6:00 am and everyone dragged out of bed for our last day of work. We had an excellent egg-meat-pepper casserole, pineapple, mango and cereal for breakfast. The morning was spent sifting the sand out of the pile of rock and bucket brigading the rock to the rock pile behind the cistern. We also moved a pile of sand from the clinic to a location behind the church.

By 11:30 am everyone was done and went to cleanup for lunch. We quickly ate sloppy Joe sandwiches, peanut butter sandwiches, watermelon, chips and cookies. We all realized that we were not losing much weight. After lunch we again hauled pots of rice, sauce and orange juice up the mountain to the church. This second day we were going to feed approximately 120 children. We were better organized and the hand washing went more quickly. Again we had three groups of children on tarps. All were served quickly and up we went to the soccer field. We had modified the jump ropes into three long ropes for the girls, organized two soccer matches separating the bigger and smaller boys. The coloring pages were for the smaller children and Frisbees for other children. There

were fewer children and a little less chaos. The children that were so well behaved at lunch turned aggressive on the soccer field. Robert and Camille learned that some of the children enjoyed “pinching”.

As we returned to the church, many vendors had arrived to sell their baskets, paintings, necklaces, sandals, coffee beans, chalices, metal work, etc. By 5:00 pm the team began the cleanup process. I looked out the church window and noticed a teenage girl standing on the cistern talking on her cell phone. Cell phones are everywhere. Evidently, Digicell, one of the biggest suppliers in Haiti, gave out thousands of free phones. They charge by the call. Watch out for that monthly fee.

Dinner was at 6:00 pm. We ate a chicken and pea casserole, rice and a beet-pepper-onion-potato and mayonnaise salad that was out of this world. We returned to the church in the dark. At 7:00 pm Robert and Camille scheduled a Communion Service inviting the local pastors, our workers and our cooks to join us. We gave out our prayer blankets to some of our favorite people. The Communion Service, the prayer, the scripture lessons and the songs were very excellent and all present enjoyed the service. In fact, it was difficult to get our beds back in order because no one wanted to leave. Robert and Camille ended our work session in great style.

Feb 20th Wednesday

Up at 6:00 am and ready for the long trek back. Breakfast at 7:00 am with macaroni, peanut butter and jelly on bread and a dab of pineapple. It was apparent that the food supplies were nearly depleted. We returned to the church and packed up all our items and cleaned up the church. Many of the townspeople had gathered to assist in taking all our suitcases and supplies back up the $\frac{3}{4}$ mile trek to the truck that had been sent for us. We left about 9:00 am and loaded up the truck. The townspeople were paid about \$80 for helping. Of course, we only had about half our number of suitcases and supplies. We drove back up into Furcy and began traveling down the bumpy road to Port-au-Prince.

On the way we stopped at the Turnbull House to see the clinic and zoo. We then went to the Tea Terrace restaurant where we bought souvenirs and had lunch. After lunch we went outside the Tea Terrace to purchase other souvenirs from the local street vendors. Haggling for the price is part of the culture. If you paid more than half the asking price, you paid too much. All the purchasing was done with U.S. currency. Some of the vendors got so aggressive that our little interpreter, Peterson Jules, nearly got into a fight. He was quite upset by the conflict. We loaded back into our van and drove to a lookout point over the entire city. It was very clear that Port-au-Prince was a very beautiful city before the 2010 earthquake. We bought some more souvenirs at the lookout point and then drove to the Guesthouse.

After unloading all our suitcases and supplies, some of us jumped into the swimming pool. It was heavenly. We then went our separate ways, some heading out to negotiate with more vendors, some getting on the internet and some just lounging around the pool and one writing up the day's activities. Dinnertime at the guesthouse is 5:30 pm. All enjoyed a great dinner of salad, spinach with cheese, beef, rice with sauce and

watermelon. We met other team members and shared experiences. One of the teams had met Pamela Anderson that day. She was helping to bring attention to Haiti's issues.

At 7:00 pm we met for a "debriefing" with Tom Vencuss, the head pastor of the Guesthouse. Tom reviewed the trip with us as we described the highlights of our visit to Furcy. He also described the many complex issues facing the Haitian people and how it will take a long time for the people to ever achieve an acceptable standard of living. Teams like ours truly help to build hope throughout the country and help people to solve their own issues. Sending money doesn't work. It doesn't get to the right places. Sending people with money to help build the infrastructure is slow, but is working. Tom has observed many positive improvements in housing, roads, garbage control and many construction projects. Jobs are still the major issue with the unemployment rate being nearly 80%. Some companies are showing interest in Haiti but jobs will come very slowly. The two most beautiful and largest buildings in Port-au-Prince are the Netcom and Digicell buildings. Since there is not electricity, everyone wants a cell phone.

By 8:30 I showered, shaved and went to bed to read my book. Most of the night I listened to trucks, dogs barking, roosters crowing and the Voodoo drums.

Feb 21st Thursday

The long journey home. We packed all our bags and placed them in a special location for loading on the truck to the airport, except for Kendra's suitcases. We ate a good breakfast of eggs, fruit, toast and coffee. I talked with a gentleman who was working with schools on a program to help rebuild the forests in Haiti. At 8:30 am we packed our van (cage) and headed to the airport. We soon realized that Kendra's suitcases were not on the van and called the Guesthouse for help. On the way, we stopped at the museum to learn a little of the violent history of Haiti and of the attainment of their independence. We strolled around the museum grounds and looked at the rubble across the street that used to be the palace. We returned to the van, which now magically contained Kendra's suitcases and went to the airport. We arrived at the airport at 10:30 am.

Going through Customs and Immigration was a tedious process endured mostly by Robert and Camille. One long line after another checking passports, checked luggage, carry-on bags and metal detection. We finally got to our gate where I watched the bags while the others went to eat. Sweet Carol brought me a sandwich and a welcome bottle of cold water. I wasn't feeling too well. We were finally called to board the plane only to find another security check. The officials went through the carry-on luggage again, did a pat-down check and took my cold bottle of water.

It did feel good to get on the Delta jet. The trip to JFK took 3 ½ hours. Now we had to go through the Customs and Immigration at JFK. The Haiti officials were much more pleasant. The crabby U.S. official checking my passport asked if my trip to Haiti was business or pleasure. I told him pleasure and he responded with "why would you go to Haiti for pleasure. Did you catch cholera?"

We then had to get our checked luggage and find our way to the Delta counter to recheck our bags. They took our baggage, gave us our boarding passes and told us how to get to the gate. After a short ride on an airbus, we had to go outside, cross two roads, and walk to another terminal. It was cold outside and I was the only one with a coat. JFK is not well organized. We went to a small café and enjoyed a brief bite to eat while everyone got on their cell phones and called their loved ones to let them know we were in the U.S.

We boarded our plane to L.A. at 8:30 pm for our six-hour flight home. The team was very tired and read, watched a movie or slept on the long flight. We arrived at LAX at midnight, got our luggage, said our good-byes to our wonderful teammates and drove home. It was truly a great experience. I will always have a warm place in my heart for the friendly people we met in Haiti and for my teammates.