

I am writing this e-mail in an effort to gather my thoughts on my recent trip to Haiti. It has been very difficult to express the devastation and suffering experienced by the Haitian people but I think it is so important to share this experience, as none of it would have been possible without your support.

There is a constant struggle in my mind as to why such a catastrophe has to occur and saddens me even more to think something so tragic had to occur to open our eyes and our hearts to the poor in Haiti. It challenges my faith and I find myself asking "why"? Ironically, each time I find myself doubting and questioning God, it is God, through all of your prayers, that picked Jim and I up on the first day of our arrival to the Matthew 25 House in PAP and gave us the strength to continue throughout the week. The first night at Matthew 25, as we slept on the driveway in the front yard, a shouting match began at 3:30am between the guard at Matthew 25 and a man in the street. With thoughts of news footage depicting growing violence in Haiti (which by the way couldn't be farther from the truth), I woke in fear as I listened to the yelling in Creole. It went on for what seemed to be forever, and the man was eventually forced to the ground and restrained by the guard. Sister Mary, who runs Matthew 25, came over to see what was going on. Out of nowhere, this old man, spoke in the clearest English I have ever heard and said, "Mother Teresa, you know who I am. I am hungry, I am thirsty. Help me!" I felt God's presence as the man quieted down and was escorted away. The overwhelming desire to get up and offer what food we had weighed on my heart but was not the wisest thing to do at the time. Thankfully, the next night, a truck showed up to deliver food donated by the DR.

On a good day in Haiti, life is tough. I am convinced the Haitians faith is what carries them through every day. Jim and I arrived to a church service being held in the field the first day and woke each morning following to the sounds of praise and worship. The Haitians faith is an inspiration to me. If there is a silver lining in this devastation, it is that all eyes, hearts and minds are on Haiti. The support will have to continue for a long time to come if that recovery is to take place. There are thoughts and visions that haunt my mind:

- Smells of death and infection
- Diagnosing the severity of an infection by the aggressiveness of the flies
- Crushing wounds needing attention with no knowledge of facilities able to help or means to transport
- Innocent children crying in pain as dressings were changed
- Discharging patients home....realizing through their stories, they no longer had a home or family
- The need for food and water critical to healing and no escape from the sweltering heat
- Admitting care needed was beyond our ability

Despite the nightmares in my mind, there were so many uplifting things that occurred that reminds me why I love Haiti and its people. The community around the Matthew 25 House pulled together and took care of its own. They are the ones, with the help of Sister Mary, Patrick and Vivian, that organized the field hospital before Jim and I arrived, helped the wounded, gave of their time, talents and they are the ones that will have to continue on each day, to help pull their community and their people together again. They are so grateful for the support they received through your donations, prayers and through our presence. I will hold close to my heart the signs that occurred throughout the week that helped us continue:

- The beautiful rainbow outside the airplane window as we flew into the DR. That same rainbow followed Jim and I on the road to PAP and showed itself again at Matthew 25.
- The smiles of the Haitian workers, their daily gratitude and appreciation
- Sister Mary, Vivian and Patrick
- Mark's passion to help, his fluent Creole and joy and he brought the children through song
- The touch of a mother's hand with the words "mesi" (thank you) despite the pain I caused changing her child's dressing, letting me know it was okay.
- The arrival of the team from Denver....the knights in shining armor!
- The reception and hug Jim and I received at Double Harvest Hospital from Noel after his amputation

- Jon Steele and Bernhart showing up at the right time, giving us a means of transport for Benji – our skull fracture patient needing a neurosurgeon.
- The words “I love you” from Benji Janvier as she was preparing to be airlifted to the USS Comfort
- Encouraging words from Mike each night as he reminded me everyone was praying for us
- The transition throughout the week from critical medical needs on day one, to the availability of advanced medical care as helped move in mid week and finally to the end of the week when the field hospital transitioned from patients needing hospital care to only patients needing to return for dressing changes. The basketball game at the end of our last day was a symbol of the young men in the community to try to return to some type of normal life and get their mind off the destruction around them. That made our leaving a bit less painful.

I have to say a special thank you to my husband Mike who has supported my Haiti efforts from day one. As I go off on these trips, I often forget about the worry and concern that is put on his shoulders. I will be forever grateful for his love, understanding and unexpected gift of e-mailing☺ I would also like to say a special thank you to Jim Toth. Ten years ago Jim spoke at St. Monica asking for people to join our medical efforts in Haiti. It was Jim 10 years ago and Jim today whose faith and dedication to the poor continues to inspire me to serve. His sense of humor, friendship, caring personality and determination carried me through our week in Haiti. After day one, we both looked at each other and asked, “What in the hell were we thinking?” It was a good laugh but we already knew the answer....there wasn't an option **NOT** to come.

In the words of Mother Teresa, "In this life, we cannot do great things; we can only do small things with great love."

Thanks to your support, we made a small difference, we saved some lives and I pray that we showed the Haitians some love, giving them a reason to hope.

Barb

