Haiti Trip Report 2018

Days One and Two

We arrived safely in Haiti on Friday morning. As we enter the airport, the Caribbean band is there to welcome us with their island music. The scene at the Port-au-Prince airport is nothing short of chaotic. Dozens of airport baggage handlers are all vying for our business....as they know we will tip them well for helping us cart the luggage out to the van.

Upon arrival at St. Joe's, our first task is to unpack the six gigantic suitcases filled with items that were either purchased by us or donated by one of our awesome supporters. 33 large bags in all need to be filled with rice, pasta, toiletries, peanuts, cookies, clothing, etc. 26 of the bags will go to the families (and one small orphanage) for whom we have built houses. The remaining will go to our "special friends" that we have made over the years. The large cloth bags were made by Tammy Robinson from Mississippi.

After the suitcases are empty, we trek up to the Eagle Market for some supplies. It's about a mile walk...but we don't complain about walking in the warmth. Shortly after we return from the Eagle, it is dark and time for dinner.

Today (Saturday), we need to fill the 33 bags so we can start handing them out. We already have had several satisfied customers.

Our friend Michelet (the former janitor at St. Joe's) is our first guest. He wants us to go greet his family....so we carry the large suitcase we are giving him (filled with donations) about three blocks up to the main road and then take a Tap Tap to his house.

When we arrive back at St. Joe's, our friend Choupy and his daughter, Ariah, are waiting to see us. We give them a bag of supplies and some clothing.

Days 3 and 4

Yesterday morning we headed out for the trek across the mountains to Jacmel. As usual, it was market day in every village we passed through. Almost every town had large slabs of cow or pig hanging from a hook for purchase in anticipation of the traditional pumpkin soup that would be made to celebrate the new year.

After checking into our hotel in Jacmel, we headed over to Wings of Hope, the home for severely handicapped children. One of the residents, Steve, is always excited to see us and loves having his picture taken too! We also checked on the boy from Citi Soleil that we were able to bring to Wings of Hope last year -- as his mother was no longer able to take care of him. We are told he is learning to eat by himself and they are trying to get him toilet trained. He is 20. I took his photo to show Pastor Leon on Thursday when we go to Cite Soleil so he can show the picture to the boy's mother. She will probably never see him again.

On our way back to the hotel, we poked our heads into a little "art gallery" next to the hotel. I was quite surprised to find it filled with Voodoo artwork..!!

Last night we were able to enjoy a nice dinner at our hotel and played cards until we rang in the New Year. We have a new friend named Minjung. She is studying for her doctorate in Philadelphia and is in Haiti doing research. She is staying at St. Joe's and traveling alone. When we invited her to accompany us to Jacmel she was more than excited. It was nice to have a new friend with whom to ring in the new year.

Today Daniel picked us up early so we could take Minjung and my nephew, Ryan, up to Bassin Bleu....since they had never been there. It is a beautiful pool and waterfall, however you need to scale down the enormous boulders by rope in order to enter the basin.

This afternoon we headed out to visit the orphanage that is occupying one of our homes in Cayes Jacmel. There are several new children who are all starting to learn English. We were happy to see that the money we sent for tiling the floor of the orphanage was put to good use. Both of the homes in Cayes Jacmel are in need of roof repair...so we will need to do some serious fundraising this year.

Tomorrow we head back to Port-au-Prince....via the Baptist Mission for lunch... and then out to see the progress on Daniel's home he is building in the mountain village of Fermathe.

Days Five and Six

Yesterday was a travel day as we headed back to St. Joe's from Jacmel. We were quite disappointed to find out that the Baptist Mission was closed yesterday because it was a national holiday. We really look forward to eating there every year as they have American food.

Daniel's house in the mountain village of Fermathe is coming along nicely. It's just a hop....skip....and a VERY LONG WALK on a bumpy path from the point where the van had to stop driving.

After returning to St. Joe's yesterday, we continued to fill the large cloth bags with more items we purchased at the Caribbean Market. They are now complete and ready for delivery on Thursday.

Today is one of those days that makes coming to Haiti all worthwhile. All the games and concerts that we volunteer at during the year now all make sense. Bill took us out to see his sister Sheila today. Bill is the Director at St. Joe's. He came to live at St. Joe's when he was 11 years old. His mother passed away and he and Sheila were sent to live at separate homes. Bill became a Restavek (child slave). When a Catholic nun heard that he was being beaten by the woman he was living with, she rescued him and brought him to St. Joe's. Now he is 33...married and has two children. He never thought he would see Sheila again...but as luck would have it....he found her living in a mountain village a few years ago. She was married with four children...living in a shack....without a penny to her name. Bill and his wife took their life savings and started to build a house for Sheila and her family in Cannan. That's what the Haitians do; they protect each other. We met them last year for the first time when we gave Bill a little money to help finish the house.

When we drove up to the house today, the children came running out to meet us. We all received a kiss on the cheek. They were thrilled to receive the clothes, food and toiletries that we brought them....especially the food. They had not eaten yet today as there was no food in the house. Bill gave Sheila money to purchase water so she could cook the pasta. They need to buy water to drink...cook...and bathe.

The house still does not have running water or electricity and the bathroom leaves a little...no, a LOT... to be desired....but Bill is hoping some day that will change. Recently, when the family was at church, someone broke in and stole all of their mattresses, among other things. Bill had to purchase new beds for them....so it will be awhile before he can finish the other items on the list.

When we arrived back at St. Joe's, there was a man named Angelo waiting to see us. He used to live with one of the graduates of St. Joe's and heard that the "blancs" (Americans) were here. He begged us to come to his home. I really didn't want to go...but Walnes said he would take us to the Caribbean Market afterwards...so I went reluctantly. I can't even begin to describe the deplorable conditions we saw. Angelo lives in a one-room shack with a blanket for a roof high on the mountainside of very colorful homes. There are 8 people living there. We climbed about a third of the way when we came to a garbage strewn ravine with a pig roaming around. That's where Linda called it quits. She had sandals on and the stench was more than she could stand. Diane however, continued on with Angelo while Linda waited behind. She was shocked when she saw his home. 8 people and one bed..! They had not eaten today either. We took Angelo to the Caribbean Market and bought him food for his family to eat a few meals. As I said earlier....this is why we work so hard during the year. It now makes sense.

Tomorrow we go to Cite Soleil and see the two new homes we built this year and meet the new families.

Day Seven

Pastor Leon picked us up early this morning to take us to Cite Soleil. All 24 families for whom we have built homes were invited to meet us. Unfortunately, a glitch in the communication between Pastor Leon and another member of his congregation resulted in several families not receiving the message. Those who came to see us were as grateful as always for their bag of gifts.

Pastor Leon has four parishes in the Cite Soleil area...and each of them has a church and school and additionally they also have mobile clinics, a guest house and orphanage. We visited three of the four today. The mobile dentist clinic was in full swing today with volunteer dentists from the U.S. treating a multitude of patients. All I can say is....I'm glad I didn't have a toothache..!!

Next we drove out to see the two new homes that were built in 2017 -- one of which is still under construction. We met the new occupants and took a few photos.

The first home is being built for a couple who have a small child. The husband is an electrician who doesn't get much work. The wife is unemployed.

The second home is being built for a man and his wife who have a four-year-old son...and a child on the way. She told Pastor Leon that it was so hot in their former home that she couldn't stay in it past 8:00 a.m.

Another home is being built by Pastor Leon's parish for a lady who is almost blind. A friend was there doing laundry. I took a picture of the outside and inside of her current home. There are no words to describe the conditions.

Finally we drove out to an area in Cite Soleil called Sakala. It is a neighborhood community program that we just heard about and wanted to see what they are doing. Their mission is to get kids off the street and get them involved in sports, agronomy, reading, etc. They have a massive garden where the children plant vegetables and trees in old tires...then learn about gardening. It is so nice to see a program of this magnitude in such an impecunious area. When we left, they insisted that we sign their "message wall."

To all of you who continue to support our mission and follow our progress......Mesi Anpil (Thank you very much).