Haiti Trip Report 2019

Day 1 - Tuesday

We arrive at St. Joe's about 2:00 on Tuesday and immediately begin the arduous task of unpacking nine, 50-lb. bags that contain men's, women's and children's clothing, toiletries, food, painting supplies, dishes, blankets, comforter, curtains, and two folding benches. It takes us the rest of the afternoon to organize everything and we finish just as the dinner bell rings.

After dinner we venture up to the top floor of St. Joe's where we can relax and enjoy the nice breeze before bed.

Day 2 - Wednesday

After breakfast we need to begin packing the 30+ bags that are lined up on the beds. We form a quasi assembly line as each of us helps with this task. Upon completion of this job, Walnes takes us to the grocery store where we purchase more items for the bags (spaghetti and toilet paper). These bags will be delivered to all of the families for whom we have built homes in the past, as well as some other friends we have met along the way.

Upon our return from the store, our friend Daniel arriveds He and Walnes both come to shop at our Free "St. Joe's closet boutique" where they select many articles of clothing for their families and extended families that are living with them.
Shortly after the shopping is over, we head to Croix deBouquet to see our friend Dady and his wife's home. Dady has lost his job and cannot finish the house he has been building for several years. They had been living with relatives, but were humiliated by the job loss and needed to move. They have been living in a tiny shack with their two children the past seven months. Since we received a very large donation in 2018, we have some extra money to help Dady finish the project. Everyone is very pleased with this decision.

We return to St. Joe's just in time for dinner. After dinner we play some cards and then need to pack for our trip to Jacmel tomorrow.

Day 3 -- Thursday
Daniel picks us up bright and early for Jacmel and we are packed full...so full in fact, that Diane needs to sit in the far back. The three-hour trip over the mountains won't be very comfortable for her...but she is a trooper..!

Once we arrive in Jacmel, we go straight out to our land (which is about 10 miles east of the city). Madame Joanis occupies one of the homes and we heard through the grapevine that the orphanage which has been occupying the second home has possibly moved out. Sure enough...much to our disappointment...the lock is broken on the door and the house is empty except for a few pieces of furniture, some articles of clothing and LOTS of big, ugly spiders..!!! No one seems to know what became of the orphanage (no big surprise in Haiti)...and now we have a new task at hand...trying to find a new family for the house.
Madame Joanis is at home, but has absolutely no food in the house. She is boiling something that resembles weeds. She is pretty excited to find out that we have some spaghetti and rice in the bag we brought to her.

We stop and purchase a new door lock on the way to hotel and will be back in the morning to install it. The view from our hotel (Cap Lamandeu) is stunning. We have not stayed here for a few years, so it is good to be back.

Day 4 - Friday

We are walking to Wings of Hope today, so we leave before it gets too hot. The steps down from our hotel are much easier to descend than ascend...as there are 204 of them..!
At Wings, we give Carmel a tour since she has never been there. It is music hour and many of the children are able to clap along with the beat. I try to dance with Jackson, but he is not in the mood. We brought a bag of gifts for Ralph, one of the workers at Wings who grew up at St. Joe's and now has a family of his own. He was thrilled to receive some of the adorable dresses made by ladies from a church in Mississippi who have been supporting us for many years.
We are very happy to see that a church from Wisconsin has been building a new community center. Hopefully by next year it will be finished and in full use. It is wash day today...and every day. We are told that next year we could definitely bring some clothes for the children, so we will be collecting them throughout the year.

We leave Wings and drive back out to our land to replace the lock on the door. Madame Joanis is heading back from the community well...and Carmel jumps right in to help her carry the load

This afternoon we walked down to the Voodoo temple, but the gates were locked. Then we had time to relax in the sun before Daniel picked us up to try a new restaurant in town.
Tomorrow we head back, via Fermathe.

Day 5 - Saturday

Daniel picks us up after breakfast for the trek back to St. Joe's. The roads are considerably busier today and we get stuck behind a van loaded with passengers. The guy hanging off the back is more than likely riding that way the entire trip over the mountains to Port au Prince. In front of them is a bus loaded to the brim with passengers and cargo. We are just happy that the goats didn't fly off the roof...!

We also encounter ladies washing clothes down at the river, as well as many mountain people carrying goods back home from market on their heads. (My children used to complain when they had to clean their rooms...and these kids carry heavy loads on their heads for several miles down the mountain road).

We stop at the Baptist Mission for lunch and then off to see the progress on Daniel's home in Fermathe. I can never get tired of the stunning view from the Baptist Mission. Pictures just don't do it justice..!!

We stop and purchase two 50 lb. bags of rice on the way back...and that is our project for the day upon our return. We fill over 30 freezer gallon bags with rice for each family who will get one of the large bags we filled on Thursday.

Day 6 - Sunday

Bill (one of the directors at St. Joe's) hires a driver to take us to his sister Sheila's house for our annual visit. Sheila and her husband have four children and have had virtually no income until recently. Bill gave them some money to start a small business selling ice, pop and a few other items out of a shack in their yard. As some of you may recall, Bill and Sheila were separated when they were young. Bill was sent to live with a lady who made him a restavik (child slave) and Sheila went elsewhere. Bill ended up at St. Joe's and didn't think he would ever see Sheila again. A few years ago he began searching for her and was able to find her living in squalor up in the mountains. Bill and his wife moved them to Cannan and have been supporting them the past few years and have started building a house for them. There have been several improvements since we were there last year...especially the progress on the indoor bathroom. The outdoor bathroom that they currently use has not improved.

As always, they are very excited to see the food and clothing we have brought for them and the children immediately put on a style show for us with their new attire. None of them had eaten yet today, so they are happy to see the rice bags.

After leaving Sheila's, we stop at a place called The Apparent Project. This was started by a woman from the U.S. who came to Haiti after the 2010 earthquake. She wanted to find a way to generate income for women who need to feed their children. This small project has evolved into a very impressive boutique, restaurant and factory where some 300 women make jewelry, pottery, ornaments, bags, etc. for sale, as well as provide a decent place to eat and drink in the community.

We then stop at Bill's home so we can see his son Maleki, as well as meet the two orphans his wife brought home a few months ago. They were living on the streets of Les Caye where she had gone for business and couldn't bear to leave them there. Neither of them had ever gone to school....but with a little extra tutoring, they are now in third grade. Fortunately some of the clothes we brought this year are their sizes.

A quick stop at the grocery store, and we are back at St. Joe's where we rest until dinner.

Day 7 - Monday

Our friend Michelet walked to St. Joe's to pick us up this morning. Michelet was the former janitor at St. Joe's and he is quite proud of the project he has been working on for several years. He wants us to come see it. He is adding a room on above his home where he will teach English to the Haitians. It is a fairly long walk, but the day is beautiful, so we don't mind. On the way we encounter a group of street urchins who beg us for money, but if we give them any, it will cause a riot...so we brush them off. It is hard to see how skinny and ragged they are. They probably haven't eaten in days.

At Michelet's, his wife and one daughter greet us. Michelet has five grown children...all of whom sleep in one bedroom. Up on the roof there is a construction worker chiseling an entire cement column down by hand...the Haitian way. We take a different way back to St. Joe's and barely make it up the road on foot.

The afternoon today was a free day until dinner.

After dinner Bill and Wootrud (one of the boys who grew up at St. Joe's and is now living here and helping with kitchen duties) entertain us....first with Bill telling us his story of how he and Sheila became orphaned, separated and made restaviks. Then Bill played his bongo and Wootrud played guitar and sang. It was lovely.

Day 8 - Tuesday

Today is painting day...and it is predicted to be a 90 degree day. Pastor Leon picks us up after breakfast and we head to Cite Soleil. Our first stop is at one of Pastor Leon's four campuses where there is a free clinic this week. A team of doctors and nurses from Ohio are here staffing the clinic. Word is out that they are here...and the lines are long.

The families for whom we have built homes come to greet us. Many of them walk very long distances because they know they are going to receive gifts from the "Blancs." After many hugs and smiles, we are on our way to see the three new homes built this year...and then paint.

Almost every child who wasn't in school has appeared at the home we are painting. We are definitely a novelty for them. Several of them come up to us and touch us...as if we are plastic. They don't speak English, so we can't communicate with them. Pastor Leon enlists the help of several young men who have also come to check things out.

We have lunches packed...but due to the size of the crowd, we decide to leave the food in the bag as they have no doubt gone a day or two without eating...and we don't want to feel guilty. We are certainly hungry by the time we finish painting.

After painting, we go to visit Pastor Leon's orphanage (House of Hope) which is run by his daughter Nadege. There are currently 15 girls living there, three sets of whom are siblings. One of the girls was two years old when she arrived...and only weighed 13 lbs. Another girl was four and did not know how to speak. Each of them is now in appropriate grade levels and plays the violin.

It is nearing dark by the time we leave the orphanage...and we are glad to get back to St. Joe's for a cold shower and hot meal.

Tonight we pack...and tomorrow we head home.
It is been a wonderful, successful and heartwarming week with our Haitian friends. The smiles and gratitude make it all worthwhile.