Haiti Trip Report 2021

Day 1 - Friday

We arrive at MSP airport a little before 3:00 a.m. but don't get very far before we encounter our first obstacle. Upon trying to check in at the airport with our nine, 50 lb. bags of luggage (three bags each), we are informed that we had been given bad information. Apparently, there is an embargo in Haiti that dictates each traveler can only check two, 70 lb. bags for a fee. Needless to say, we have to scramble to unpack all nine bags to determine what can stay behind and what needs to go with us. To make matters worse...what was supposed to be "FREE bags" turns out to be a $600 charge. We barely make it to the gate...with seconds to spare.

Upon arriving in Port-au-Prince, we are greeted by the Haitian version of a mariachi band that doesn't disappoint with their island music. Getting through customs was a breeze today....unlike most years.

At the baggage claim...the chaos is always amusing. Hundreds of Haitians are ready, willing and able to grab our luggage and take it outside where our driver, Ronnie, is waiting for us. We give them some cash and are soon on our way.

At St. Joe's, we waste no time in unpacking as the dinner bell will soon ring and our daylight will be gone. We quickly fill all of the shelves in our walk-in closet with items from our luggage and soon afterwards our first two customers arrive. Bill and Walnes happily shop for their wives and children from our little makeshift store.

Dinner is a welcome site as we have not eaten much today. Helen and Wootrod have been busy in the kitchen and it looks delicious..!

After dinner is the daunting task of filling 36 large cloth bags with items from the shelves....and the bags will be handed out over the next three days.

Bedtime is early tonight for these weary travelers.

Day 2 - Saturday

After breakfast, Walnes picks us up to take us to the Caribbean Market for spaghetti, and toilet paper for the bags...and a few things for us. We then head to the outdoor market where we purchase two 50 lb. bags of rice. The market is always busy....especially today. It's fun to see what the Haitians carry on their heads....or today on a wheelbarrow. Someone is going to have chicken for dinner tonight.

After we return to St. Joe's, we get to work filling bags with rice and then the large cloth bags are complete.

Several shoppers come to see us today and we are able to visit for a while before dinner.

We are able to get in a game of cards tonight...but need to be up very early for our Covid test tomorrow morning that we need to get back in the U.S. on Tuesday.

Day 3 - Sunday

There are two predominant religions in Haiti -- Catholicism and Voodoo. This morning we see many families who practice the former donned in their Sunday best and walking many miles to church as we set out for our Covid tests. It always puts a smile on our faces when we see the little girls in their bright white dresses and fancy shoes.

After the Covid tests, Bill takes us to see Regina....a lady that he knows who is building a tiny house up on the mountainside. To those of you who voted for us in the Old National Bank contest recently...some of the money we won is going towards this home. We have clothes, food and toiletries for her and her three children. Ronnie takes us as far as his van will go...and then it is on foot the rest of the way. It is a long, dusty walk up the mountain road to her spot...but she is extremely excited to see us and naturally grateful for what we bring her. The tiny little tin shack where the four of them are currently living is not much larger than a tool shed.

Our next stop is to visit our good friend Daniel who lives in the mountain village of Fermathe. Daniel works at Wings of Hope in Jacmel (where we usually spend a few days)...but because of our short trip this year, we bring diapers and clothing to Daniel to deliver for us. Daniel was in Jacmel earlier this week and barely made it back to see us due to a kidnapping on the road from Jacmel a few days ago. The road was blocked for several days. We are so glad that he made it home safely.

After Daniel's, we head to see Bill's nephew Enerson and his stepfather, Watson. As some of you know, Bill's sister Sheila passed away suddenly last summer, leaving five children behind.. so four of the five nieces and nephews had to be split up. Since Enerson is the oldest, he remains in the house with Watson. We drop off bags of items for them...and then head over to see Dady (the former cook at St. Joe's who is not able to feed his family since the factory closed where his wife was working).

Our next stop is to Our Father's House -- the orphanage where Bill's niece and nephew have been sent. Paster David runs the orphanage and he tells us that the children have adjusted well to their new surroundings.

Our last stop is at Bill's house where we see two nieces who have been living with Bill and his wife. Their tiny little house doesn't have enough beds, so we bring an air mattress, among other things.

After ten hours on the road today, it feels good to be back in time for dinner and a nice cold shower.

Early to bed again as Paster Leon is picking us up tomorrow morning.

Day 4 - Monday

Today is the day that we meet with all of our families for whom houses have previously been built...and then to see the families Pastor Leon has picked out for the next round.

Most of the families walk several miles in the extreme heat to receive the bags we have brought for them. As always, they tell Pastor Leon to convey their appreciation for all we have done for them. On the way to see the new homes, we stop at one of Pastor Leon's several schools so that my sister can see Woodlysen, the little boy she and Kirk sponsor. The school children run up to see us and they are enamored with Dawn's tattoos. Bill quickly engages the children in song and clapping.

Pastor Leon's daughter, Nadege, runs the orphanage at his Blanchard location. We are not visiting there today as the children are all in school...but we give many dresses to her for the girls.

Finally...we are on our way to see the new homes and future families. We are not painting this year because of our shortened trip and Covid and kidnapping concerns. The homes look great and the families are happy.

The families that Pastor Leon has picked for the next round are some of the poorest that we have seen. The first lady is living in a tin shack with her 7 grandchildren. Apparently her three daughters have disappeared after leaving their children on her doorstep. It breaks our hearts to see their deplorable conditions. The roof and walls are leaking and the room is a muddy mess. One of the granddaughters is washing dishes and it makes me sick to my stomach to see the water she is using.

The second family has five children...one of whom is in a wheelchair. They are all living in a tiny, one-room shack. Again...heartbreaking. Bill is going to work on transporting the son in the wheelchair down to Wings of Hope in Jacmel where he can get food, education and therapy.

We promise Pastor Leon that we will do our best to raise the requisite funds for these next two homes....and God willing....we will see him next January.