

Haiti Reflection 2014

By Susie Slater

Each of us has a story with a beginning and ultimately an end. What transpires in between is part choice, part fate be it good or bad, and random life opportunities that happen to come our way. I look at our week in Haiti as one of these life opportunities, a very short chapter in my life story but one that aptly builds upon the chapters that preceded it and hopefully will influence the chapters yet to come.

I speak from personal experience that there will never be a perfect time or a surplus of money, and in all likelihood always a legitimate reason to defer taking one to two weeks of your life and going to Haiti. Haiti was on my bucket list along with many other to-dos but more in the sense of a vague concept rather than as a concrete idea. I threw my hat in the ring to go on the Mission Haiti immersion trip late in the game, in early fall 2013, but was told the group was full. Less than two weeks later I was signed up along with my 16-year-old daughter, agreeing to her missing a week of school along with an entire week of basketball, nothing short of a mortal sin — or perhaps it was just fate, a random life opportunity that came our way?

Nothing really prepares one for their initial introduction to Haiti. Your senses are flooded with conflicting images, noises and smells that are stunningly beautiful and utterly devastating all at the same time.



The first Haitian I met was Jean Garry who embodies the best of the Haitian culture; warm, generous and kind with an infectious spirit along with a laugh that is deep and genuine. One quickly learns that Haitians are proud and hopeful people who don't want our pity

but simply the opportunity to live the best life that they can. In many ways they are just like us.

Our week in Haiti was comprised of moments; moments that were highlighted by meeting individuals that are the heart and soul, the present and future of Haiti: visiting the various schools passing out candy and school supplies and feeling a bit like rock stars; meeting Paulo and Johnny and hearing their dreams to graduate from filò and pursue a college education; shadowing Sister Alta Emile, always with a perpetual smile and calming demeanor but also a savvy businesswoman who oversees an army of nuns and outreach services that minister to the children, the poor, to those that have no one or nowhere else to call home. Visiting Father Rick Frechette's pediatric



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hospital, Father Tom's ministry, Sammy of the Recycle center whose passion for his country is seen in the philosophy of self-reliance and who truly walks the walk — it is clear that there are daily miracles that occur in spite of the daunting odds.

There were certainly lighter moments: our nightly Coca Cola and Prestige happy hours at Mon Chez Moi; our high stakes, cutthroat scat card tournament; shopping in Croix des Bouquet; visiting the molasses factory; or lunch and sun worshipping at Visa Lodge. When all of these moments are recalled in the context of our week with our extended family that spanned three generations who came together largely through fate and random opportunity, we wrote an amazing chapter in our book of life and I feel blessed to have had the privilege to do so.

The term 'ministry' takes on a whole new meaning in the context of Haiti whether it is jumping rope



on Annunciation's playground with children who are far more talented than any in our group (including the under 18 crowd), or painting nails and massaging the ladies and the young women at the HIV/Aids clinic, or simply holding a baby at Mother Theresa's, playing with a high energy toddler who has been nursed back to a healthy state, or helping the nannies feed and change the babies, visiting the earthquake memorial in the foothills of Port au Prince (with Connie breaking every rule in the book and slipping \$1.00 bills to the local lads), or simply driving to the top of Petion-Ville to take in a stunning view of Port au Prince temporarily hiding the evil by-product of poverty that is rampant throughout Cite Soleil.

All of these moments allowed me to put a human face on the county of Haiti, take it from abstract to real and begin to understand this challenged yet magnificent country that has so many reasons to live on the edge in a perpetual state of despair but refuses defeat, and marches on to another tomorrow with a hopeful outlook for their children and future.

Jimmy and Connie were the consummate tour guides; they provided the means and opportunities to truly experience the people and culture of Haiti. Their genuine love of Mission Haiti, for the sisters and the work that they do is infectious and before you realize it you are head over heels in love with a place on earth that will beckon you back with its splendor and awe.

One story that resonated with me was about a gentleman who wanted to make a financial donation on behalf of Mission Haiti. Jimmy thanked him for his generosity but said his money would do more good if he bought himself a plane ticket and visited Haiti himself. The gentleman did just that. On a visit to Leogane he saw the need for a new tractor for the sisters to tend to their growing farm. Two years later the gentleman, true to his word, bestowed a John Deere tractor to the sisters. Like the little moments of our trip, the little ministries add up.



We all have a story, a work in progress which includes choice and random opportunities that allow us to make a difference and have an impact on something greater than our individual self with the possibility to make this world a little bit better. If you are looking for an opportunity to add to your story, consider Mission Haiti.

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