Haiti Trip Report 2020

Day 1 - Wednesday

We make it safely to St. Joe's late today after a full day of travel...long custom lines...and major traffic. It is almost time for dinner when we finally arrive....so unpacking will have to wait until tomorrow. It is early to bed for these weary travelers.

Day 2 - Thursday

It takes us all day to empty 400 lbs of luggage (8 large suitcases) filled with food, clothing, blankets, sheets, pillow cases, table cloths, curtains, painting supplies, school supplies, medicine, toiletries, backpacks, lunch boxes, coolers and storage containers, as well as bags to be filled with rice, raisins and peanuts.

After everything is sorted and categorized, we begin the daunting task of filling rice bags....raisin bags....peanut bags....and finally the large bags for each of our families.

We are barely finished unpacking when our first guest arrives. Dady and his son, Christopher, are here to receive the gifts we have for them (rice, spaghetti, crackers and other snacks and backpacks for his sons, along with toiletries)..as well as shop in our little FREE closet shop....filled with clothing items that have been donated by our wonderful friends and family members. Dady finds many things for his wife, Lovely, and their other son Levitski. Dady is the former cook from St. Joe's, who has been out of work for several years. Lovely works at a factory making $5 per day. Christopher has not eaten all day, so he is pretty excited to see the food we have on the table in our room.

Dady is barely out the door when our next guest, Michelet, arrives. Michelet is the former janitor from St Joe's, who is building a room on top of his home where he can teach English. Michelet has been our translator on many occasions when we have needed one. Unfortunately, work has had to stop on the construction until he can afford to finish. Michelet has five adult children who all live with him and his wife. We visited him last year while we were here. Michelet has also found several clothing items for his wife and daughters and received a bag from us containing (rice, spaghetti, crackers and other snacks, along with toiletries).

Day 3 - Friday

Bill (the Director at St. Joe's) has a full day planned for us. We leave right after breakfast and head for the mattress shop. We are buying a single mattress for a boy named Roudens (pronounced Woodens). Bill's wife Lilian (who is a lawyer) was on a work trip a few years ago and came home with Roudens and another boy Rolando, who were both living on the street. The boys lived with Bill and Lilian for several years...but have since been reunited with family members....however, the living conditions are deplorable. The shack is way up a rocky mountain road and we need to walk a good portion since the van cannot make it. Roudens has been sleeping on the cement floor in this one-room shack where he lives with his mother and two siblings. When he sees us bring the mattress into the shack, his smile says it all.

Our next stop is to see Rolando and bring his family gifts. Rolando is living with an aunt until they can find out where his mother is. She disappeared one day many years ago and no one seems to know what became of her. They are living in a tiny two-room shack with several other people. His aunt sells water, pop and a few other food items to provide what she can for her family. They, too, are very appreciative of the things we brought. Bill is going to buy a mattress for Rolando in the near future (with money we gave him) as he, too, is sleeping on the cement floor.

Finally we are on our way to Bill's sister Sheila's house. We visit her every year and bring gifts for her and her husband and children. Since we were there last year, Sheila has had another baby. Bill paid for her to get her tubes tied so this can't happen again. While Bill was saving to pay the doctor's bill, he had to give the doctor some sort of assurance....so he gave up his son's birth certificate. Apparently in Haiti, that is sufficient collateral. We were disappointed to see that the bathroom at Sheila's house has not progressed any further than it was last year. Bill is helping her when he can, but time and money are scarce.

We arrive safely back at St. Joe's. We are glad to not have encountered any road blocks or demonstrations on the way...as things have been quite volatile in Haiti the past few months. It has been a long day and we are ready for dinner..!

P.S. As we are getting ready for bed...Kelli runs into our room screaming that she has an overnight guest (A cockroach). Diane and Wootrud quickly removed it while Kelli stands on a chair!

Day 4 - Saturday

Our plans to travel to Jacmel today have been suddenly diverted due to the fact that Daniel's car is in the shop and not ready for transporting us.

Bill quickly springs into action and makes a phone call to a friend from church. We are soon on our way to visit this family. They have a business at their home called the Better Life Club, where they teach a variety of classes to the general public. While we are there, they serve us popcorn and the best iced tea any of us has ever had. We spend several hours visiting and brainstorming how St. Joe's could implement a similar program. Since the political unrest began last summer, most groups from the U.S. have cancelled their plans and St. Joe's has not had many guests (we were the first guests since September). They need a way to supplement the lost income.

Not long after we return to St. Joe's, we receive a notice from the Embassy that there are demonstrations close to St. Joe's and we are to stay put. After dinner we see a fire just a few blocks away. We assume it is demonstrations...but Bill believes it is simply garbage burning.

Day 5 - Sunday

Daniel has found a driver to take us to Jacmel...so shortly after breakfast we are on our way. We are fairly nervous about this trip as Daniel and Walnes have each been robbed at gunpoint within the past few months...each time on the road to Jacmel. Walnes had to relinquish his laptop and cell phone and Daniel had to forfeit the $500 he had just taken out of the bank to pay the workers at St. Joe's. Once we get through the heart of Port-au-Prince, we assume we are safe.

It is very disappointing to see that garbage continues to line the streets where the pigs, dogs and goats are readily helping themselves to breakfast. In the midst of the garbage, you see families waiting for a bus or tap tap to take them to church. Little girls in beautiful white dresses seem way out of place among the trash.

The beautiful mountain views make the trip worthwhile and we arrive safely in Jacmel by mid afternoon. After we check into the hotel and change clothes, we are on our way out to our land in Cayes Jacmel and hoping to meet the new tenant, Classita.

Both Classita and Madame Joanis (who occupies our second house) are home and making dinner. Classita's son shimmies up a papaya tree and begins throwing fruit down to his mother. Fortunately no repairs are needed this year, however, both homes are in dire need of re-painting...so we will plan on that for next year.

Day 6 - Monday

Daniel and the driver pick us up after breakfast to head back to Port-au-Prince. The holidays are over and traffic will be dreadful. We stop quickly at Wings of Hope to say "hi" to the disabled girls and boys and head home. Two checkpoints along the way make our trip much longer than expected and we arrive back at St. Joe's in time to do a little reading before dinner.

Day 7 - Tuesday

We have a free day today with nothing planned...so Bill and Walnes take us out to see Dady's house. He has been asking us to come out there and although it is a very long ride in a cramped car..we don't want to disappoint him. Haitians are very proud people and want to show off the little they have.

Inside the house we discover that Dady's son Christopher sleeps in the front room and his wife and youngest son occupy the bed in the back room. Dady sleeps in the tent on the floor.

We leave Dady's house and head up to the mountain town of Fermathe where Daniel has been building a stunning home for the past eight years. He purchased the land with money he earned at Taco Bell in Eagan while he was attending Inver Hills. For the past eight years it has been a "pay-as-you-go" home which is almost finished. The walk to Daniel's house from the road is long and hilly. Going back up is great exercise for our lungs and legs..!

Day 8 - Wednesday

Today is painting day....the premise for our trip. It is going to be 90 degrees today, so we make sure we have plenty of water and Gatorade packed along with our snacks for lunch.

Pastor Leon picks us up bright and early as we are trying to beat traffic. Unfortunately, about 20 minutes into our journey, we come upon the remains of a fatal motorcycle accident and we have to watch two young men being covered in white sheets on the side of the road.

Our first stop is the orphanage that Pastor Leon's daughter runs. She is not there and the children are all in school, so we drop a bag of clothing off and leave for next destination.

We then stop at Pastor Leon's clinic nearby and drop off a bag of medicine, bandages, empty pill bottles, etc.

Next we stop at the grade school where Diane gets to meet the little boy her family just started to sponsor last year. His name is Woodlynson and he is four years old. Diane gives him a bag containing food and toiletries for his family and some toys for him to play with.  
Next we are off to meet with the families for whom we have built homes and give them their bag of gifts that we have for them. They are all so appreciative and we get hugs and kisses from most of them.

Our next stop is to meet the young mother who Pastor Leon has already chosen to receive a new home next year. Normally we wait until November or December to start the new homes....but we tell Pastor Leon that as soon as we have raised enough money, he can start on the home for her and her husband Shadrack and their three-week old baby.

Finally we are on our way to see the two new homes that were built in 2019 and meet the families.

Home No. 1 is Daniel and his wife and two children. They have been living in a tent for the past ten years since their home was destroyed by the earthquake of 2010.

Home No. 2 is for a family of seven (two adults and five children). They were living in a tiny shack and are very happy to help us paint. Many children from the neighborhood also come to check out the "blancs" and watch us work.

By the time we arrive back at St. Joe's late this afternoon, we are hot, tired, hungry and eager for our cold shower.

After dinner, Wootrud serenades us on his guitar.

Tomorrow we head for home....with an overnight stop in Miami.

Thank you all so very much for your continued support...whether it be monetary...or donations of clothing...household items....toiletries....or something else. Our trips could not be possible without your help.