

For many years I have enjoyed hearing other's recounts and experiences from their various mission trips, and for many years I have desired to be able to go on a trip of my own... and thanks to BEPC I finally was able to take my first mission trip to Haiti in March, and now have my own memories and life changing experiences to share.

Martha told me in November that someone had dropped out of the 2015 trip and she needed to fill that spot, I spontaneously, without blinking said, "I want to go!" Although I was a little concerned that I would have nothing to offer in a medical clinic, Martha ensured me I would be needed, and I felt led to commit. I had let my passport expire earlier in the year, so I quickly sent off for my renewal. It came back in record time, so I was confident it was meant to be... then in late December, a few weeks before Martha was to order our airline tickets and start finalizing details, I broke my arm in two places, crushed my elbow and had to have elbow replacement surgery in mid-January. I knew I was in for months of rehab so was very concerned about making the trip and being able to contribute like I needed/wanted to. I prayed daily about it and decided to stay with my commitment and contribute the best I could. Now I can honestly say it was truly one of the best and most rewarding experiences of my life thus far.

Our trip over was basically non-eventful, as everything went smoother than expected. While we knew there was a risk of being searched and possibly detained due to the amount of goods we were in essence smuggling into a foreign country, somehow we were able to avoid all searches. There was some culture shock after arriving in Port Au Prince on Friday. If you have never seen the conditions in which most there live, you almost cannot imagine. Driving through the city towards Grace Mission, looking out the window at the sea of people, and trash, and poverty, I wondered what the next 9 days would hold for us. At that point I couldn't imagine the blessings I would take home with me.

Due to rioting in the city beginning on Monday, we were to leave for the remote village named Boudarie, in the mountains above Cotes de-Fer a day earlier than we had planned. We prepared all day on Saturday, sorting medicine and supplies, packing, re-packing, and bonding with our group in preparation for our four night stay in the village. On Sunday evening, after about 6 hours of travel on the sometimes treacherous, narrow roads where there are basically no driving regulations, we arrived at our home base for the next four nights. We were greeted with smiles and true hospitality from the villagers.

Preacher Ava and his family gave up their home for us. With four rooms, concrete floors and walls, and an open-air metal roof we were safe from the elements. We took air mattresses to sleep on. They had an out building (brand new) with an in-ground toilet and wash room where they would walk to the well to carry water for you if you wanted to wash. There is no running water or electricity in the village so it was a bit of an adjustment for some of us. Being the most prestigious man in the village, Preacher Ava had a small 'store' building where he sold some needed items to the villagers, a cooking room and an adobe oven on the hill above his home. Several village ladies would prepare us breakfast and dinner each day. We were served goat and rice for several dinner meals and were sent away the final morning with breakfast of spaghetti cooked in fish. My personal favorite was chocolate coffee, strong and sweet, that was made for us each morning.

Preacher Ava had begun to build a church where there once was a cock fighting ring, so that was to be our onsite clinic for three days. It had partial block walls, gravel for floors, and tarps for shelter from the blistering sun. People walked from many miles around to come to the clinic and receive medical attention for various ailments, as most had never seen a doctor or had never had medication or vitamins. They lined up very early in the mornings and some would wait for many hours under the hot sun for their turn with Nurses Martha, Carl and Veda (a wonderful Haitian nurse we took to the

village with us), with nothing but smiles and endless patience. After the second day we were out of vitamins and running low on most medications and knew we would not be able to complete another full day of clinic, but saw as many as we could until we ran out of medicine on day three. In two and a half days we served almost 300 patients. What a blessing it is to have generous, caring doctors here locally that have been able to donate many thousands of dollars in medication and supplies for this mission ongoing each year over the past 15 years or so. This year we were also able to take worming medicine for the village animals. Martha was able to administer the medicine to about 30 goats, donkeys and horses in the village. The Grace Mission is under the leadership of Pastor Berhil, Pastor George and Pastor Tullosome, who were alongside us in the village. Thony and his wife run the day to day operations of the Grace Mission House, along with their three children, and are all truly wonderful.

We were fortunate to have been able to go to two church services while in Haiti. On Sunday, before heading to Boudarie, we went to the church at Grace Mission and on Wednesday night, our last night in the village, in the same spot where we held our clinic during the days. Each service was a very moving experience... even with the language barrier. The Haitian people sing so sweetly, from the heart, mostly without song books or printed words. They have the words memorized, they sing loud and proud, and you feel the power in their songs. They need no piano or accompaniments, but may use an occasional drum (tanbou). I could listen to them sing for hours and thankfully have a short recording of one of the

services. Now I pull it out, close my eyes, listen and feel the Holy Spirit through their songs. Whenever I do this, I am reminded of an amazing experience, exceptional people and the love that God has for all of his people, in all languages and across all borders.

While this trip was not a vacation under the same definition that my vacations in the past have been, it was truly the best and most needed vacation I have ever taken. I will forever have the memories of our team, Haiti, Boudarie, the villagers, and especially a four year old named Samson, etched on my heart and in my mind to cherish, always. A passage of scripture I kept running across in preparing for this trip sums it up for me: Proverbs 11:25, "A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed." I feel refreshed and blessed, thank you all for that.