



The Haitian Connection Newsletter

Lorraine Antieau, Editor

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Eyewitness Account of Conditions in Port au Prince

Renate's friend, Roslyn, was in Port au Prince in January, and gave the following report in response to an email from Renate (her last name and the name of the organization she is with are withheld for security purposes.):

Hi Renate, thanks for the email.

Port au Prince was not safe at ALL. I am actually surprised by how much things have changed. Saddened to say the least. When I first got there, I saw that there was hardly anyone on the road. I only spent a day in Port au Prince to evaluate the office and staff for the organization and then flew to the south immediately. Les Cayes and Port Salut seem to be running OK. Although not enough access to resources.... gas/diesel is available but VERY expensive compared to what it used to be. I came back to PAP three days later this past Sunday. I had an interview to do and did that. When Mr. Ray and I headed home (armored land cruiser), the first thing I saw was that we were the only car on the road....and a second later, we started getting fired at....he stepped on the gas...it paused for a second, then two men stood in the middle of the road and as we continued driving pass them, they fired at us and one of them blew a huge shot at our glass in the back....luckily due to the armory it did not shatter all over....as we continued as fast as possible....another group of men at the side of the road started shooting at the car....and blew our antifreeze tool right below the car.

Luckily, we eventually got to our gated community and they let us in fast! We counted 7 bullets that had been shot directly at us and made holes in the car.

I got to the house, but the next day we had an escort come get us and take us to La Fourchette Hotel and Restaurant (where our office is). We had planned to go to Mirebalais...but everyone said those roads are flooded with bandits and there is no way to get out of PAP with a car. We then planned to fly to Cap Haiti and then rent a car to go see the offices in the central plateau (and we had some work in Cap Haiti to get done) but we could not book a flight to (Sunrise) Cap Haiti until Friday or Saturday of this week. Thus, we flew back to the US the next day, Tuesday.

So, I can't tell you if Haiti is safe, but I can say that I would not recommend anyone to go to Port-au-Prince right now. I am very sad about this. I have many friends who are in PAP and the people deserve a much better environment to live in.

Roslyn

"Insecurity in Haiti is not just a Haitian problem - it has a transnational nature that cannot be ignored. It's crucial to address it by understanding the drivers and causes beyond Haiti's borders." -- Jeffsky Poincy, International Development and Public Policy Specialist

Community Oven Project



In our August newsletter, we reported that the women in the community of Latibolye had asked to build their own oven in their community so they could make their konparets on site. This would save them traveling to and renting another oven, which increases the cost for them. Unfortunately, the building costs for this endeavor is much higher than originally estimated. One of the main reasons for this underestimate is Haiti's 40% inflation rate, which makes everything more expensive than originally planned. Work has started on the building that will house the oven, including shelving

for the baking sheets that are so important for a bakery's functioning. I still very much believe in this project, because once everything is in place the oven will be useful not only for making konparets, but for baking bread, and also lending the oven out to other groups in the community. To complete the project, the women need an additional \$1,800.00 which Haitian Connection does not have right now. We are patient and feel this project will be successful in good time. Haiti is littered with unfinished projects, and we do not want this one to flounder. These strong women in Latibolye deserve better than to be another failed development effort. We will be giving you regular updates. If you feel so moved to contribute that would be wonderful.

Mental Health Program Thriving

The Community Mental Health program in Jérémie is alive and well and continues to support the community. Circumstances are in flux and can change in a matter of minutes. These days everybody in Haiti lives under stress, hunger, insecurity, with little hope for the future. Our mental health program in Deschamps is embedded in the community. People come to hear how they can diminish stress as well as to receive pastoral counseling. Pastor Erik is a great force in the community and he takes every opportunity to lend his support. The mental health agents communicate via WhatsApp and we support each other.



Our mental health agents have also been called upon to speak to school children, primarily high school students, about sex education. This topic is not talked about in the schools in Haiti, and because of the lack of education in that area, young people have little idea as to how their bodies function. This results in a high rate of early pregnancy. The young people were eager to learn, and the presentation was very well attended. The students were appreciative of the session our mental health agents conducted.



After-School Program Back in Session



Haitian Connection is delighted to let you know that the after-school program is off to a good start. Our staff has returned and so have the children. It's not clear who is happier, the children or their parents. These are families that cannot afford tutoring or any kind of extra school help. To them our after-school program is a God send. We currently have three 8th graders, five 7th graders, one 6th grader, two 5th graders, one 3rd grader and one 2nd grader. They love coming to

the center, and even come on days when there is no school. There are several children on the wait list, but we need additional blackboards. We do have blackboards, but they are in storage and as soon as we can get them we will be able to accept more children.

This year, because of the continuing insecurity, school started in December, rather than in September. Many adjustments had to be made. The parents have little money to pay for school and uniforms as well as books. With prices for everything skyrocketing, families had to use the money set aside for school, for food.



More Updates for the After-School Program

The two stored blackboards have been retrieved from storage and are now in use in the after-school center, allowing for 8 more students to be admitted to the program! Please enjoy the additional photos below.



Haitian Women's Soccer Team Qualifies for the 2023 World Cup



Although much of the news coming out of Haiti these days is grim, one bright spot is that the Women's Soccer team has qualified for the FIFA Women's World Cup for the first time. Congratulations and good luck, ladies! We'll be rooting for you!

Cash Without Conditions Helps the Whole Community

This photo is from our Cash without Conditions program, where poor women receive a monthly stipend without any conditions attached to it. They may use these funds however they want and need. One of the women was able to restock her small store, which she had not been able to do for several months. This is helping her, and helps her neighbors, too, because they can shop directly from her without having to travel downtown. It is amazing what the women are able to do with just a little help. We are so grateful to the donors of this project.



Donor Spotlight by Bob & Rita Boeke

Renate asked us: Why do you continue to give?

Why do we give? We have wonderful memories of our times in Haiti, the laughs we had with our students, the songs we sang, the surprise on the faces at unexpected things we taught, the team spirit as they worked together, and their determination to be part of Haiti's future. Mostly, we received more than we give.

While we were in Haiti the first time, we discussed what we might do to stimulate the student's ability to "think outside the box". Back home, we enlisted Dr. Mercedes McGowen, a former colleague of mine, and started to assemble a seminar based on a series of exercises involving "thinking outside the box". It consisted of many group exercises based on the students' experience of their life in Haiti. We called it Divergent Haiti, and it was a great success. It inspired a group of the students to plan and finance a trip to Chicago to take a university course and visit us. We still hear from some of those students.



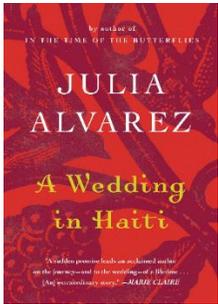
A year later we brought three Haitians to Chicago and trained them to present the seminar. Those materials are still in use in Jérémie.

In the five weeks total that we were in Haiti, Renate showed us some of her work there. She took us to see one of the houses that she had built for a woman and her children. As we approached the house, the woman was dancing on her porch, she was so proud and eager to show it to us. As we prepared to go to Haiti the second time, we asked our extended families to donate money for a house, and they did!

We attended a meeting of the group of women who decide who will get the next house. We couldn't understand their language but we did understand their joy as they ended the meeting singing: "How Great Thou Art". We also met some of our scholarship students and still remember their words of gratitude.

Haitian Connection has many programs including scholarships for college students, mothers and children all are worthy of our support.

Book Corner



A Wedding in Haiti by Julia Alvarez, Algonquin Books, 2013

In a story that travels beyond borders and between families, acclaimed Dominican novelist and poet Julia Alvarez reflects on the joys and burdens of love—for her parents, for her husband, and for a young Haitian boy known as Piti. In this intimate true account of a promise kept, Alvarez takes us on a journey into experiences that challenge our way of thinking about history and how it can be reimagined when people from two countries—traditional enemies and strangers—become friends.

Haitian Connection

Haitian Connection is a 501(c) (3) tax exempt organization founded in 2005, which focuses on the needs of women, children, and young adults in the Jérémie region of southwest Haiti. A variety of projects have already touched thousands of lives: houses have been built for more than 97 women and their children; a small microcredit program is providing economic opportunity for women in 2 communities; a potable water initiative is giving healthy water to one thousand families; and local school teachers have received training in the Child-to-Child method. Haitian Connection's Divergent Thinking Institute is providing Divergent Thinking seminars all over Haiti.

As a response to the earthquake in January 2010, and its psychological aftermath, Haitian Connection has established a mental health program in Jérémie to provide counseling as people resettle, tally their losses, and adjust to a new reality. 27 members of the community have been trained in psychological first aid. This served the greater Jérémie area well after Hurricane Matthew in October of 2016. Our mental health agents were able to hold community meetings to give people an opportunity to debrief and receive some training in stress reduction techniques.

Support Us

Haitian Connection is a 501(c) (3) nonprofit corporation registered in Illinois and your gifts are tax deductible. Our projects depend on volunteers and the financial support of people who desire to help.

The cost of building a home for a woman and her family in Jérémie is \$2,000. The houses have three rooms and a latrine. You could contribute to a house, or even get your church/organization to sponsor a whole house. After Hurricane Matthew, this has become a priority for people in the region.

Scholarships for needy students from elementary to secondary schools.

Microcredit group: contributions accepted.

Mental Health Program: contributions to mental health center accepted (total cost for one year \$10,000)

Support for training programs in Divergent Thinking, mental health, Child-to-Child, and continuing education. For every program for 25 people, we provide a meal for all participants and give the facilitators a stipend (about \$500 per training).

To support our projects financially, donate online by visiting our website at: www.HaitianConnection.org and clicking on the PayPal button.

If you would prefer to send your donation by mail, please address checks to: **Haitian Connection**
5300 South Shore Drive # 27
Chicago, IL 60615

Get Involved

We are looking for volunteers: English teachers, educators, specialists in various fields to give short conferences or seminars. To volunteer, contact **Renate Schneider** at haitianconnection@gmail.com or by phone at 312/493-3719; in Haiti: 011/509/3 463-7532

