

Haiti 2011 Exploratory Trip Journal

May 14th – 21st, 2011



Saturday: *We're not in Kansas anymore.*

The team (Randy, Bill, and George) left for the airport at 4:00 am, traveling through NYC, and arriving in Haiti at noon. We met Jules, who would serve as our primary interpreter for the week. Jules lives in Port au Prince, and he knows his way around the country. He was invaluable to us.

We got the first small sense of Haiti while walking out of the airport. In short, Haiti challenges all of your senses; sight, smell, hearing, touch, personal space, you name it. There are few opportunities in Haiti, so the primary philosophy is you never let one get away. We were approached by many baggage handlers who desired to offer their services. We experienced this type of "eagerness" all along our travels.

We then spent the next 4.5 hours driving to Cayes on the southern peninsula. The rule of driving in Haiti is that there are no rules. People drive with a cautious recklessness; not the first paradox we'll discover.



We were excited to arrive at Pastor Paul's for the night. Pastor Paul lived in Ft Wayne, Indiana for 6 years while receiving his doctorate at Concordia. It was there he heard the calling to return to Haiti. He lives just outside of Cayes, and pastors a church there while also teaching at American University. Cayes is urban, but on a much smaller scale than in Port au Prince. Pastor Paul's gracious hospitality was to be the theme for our week. We had a comfortable night in Cayes with beds, electricity, and showers, but these luxuries would become scarce in the days to come.



Sunday: *We aren't all that different.*

After a 2.5 hour drive, experiencing extremes in road conditions (paved to non-existent) we arrived in St. Martain at 8:00 am to the Geneva team singing songs. It was a welcomed sight. We quickly settled in and got acclimated. We then met Doug Bradbury of Haiti H2, the team from Geneva, and Pastor Voltaire.

Church service began at 9:00ish. There were about 150 in attendance. The church service was spirited and although there is a language barrier, it's clear these people have a heart for God. George would preach at both services (morning and evening). What appeared to be people coming to the altar were really people coming to plug their cell phones in to be charged since the church has the only electricity in the area.



After church we would then have lunch and relax for the day.

Monday: *The more you walk, the more you know.*

We spent the day visiting the village, and taking a water survey of the village. A common struggle for St. Martain is the accessibility of water, sanitation, and waste removal. We discovered that a common well had been broken for several months, demanding a 1 hour walk (both ways), to carry 5 gallon bottles.



We were greeted warmly by all whom we visited. One gentleman shared that he felt that the Lord himself was visiting his home. He then proceeded to climb a coconut tree and cut down several coconuts, cutting them open so that we could drink the water inside, which tasted clean and sweet.

Our translator for this event was Lukener, who with every discussion said "The more you walk, the more you know." How right he was.

Tuesday: *Everything takes work.*

After breakfast we policed the yard, removing garbage and dead plant material. We burned most of it together because there is no form of garbage removal. Later in the day, the team conducted more village visits.

Bill had lunch with some kids from the village along the road, met a family with a blind grandmother, whose son returned to his family after the earthquake, and several fishermen showed him how they catch fish. They use small carved canoes for spear fishing, and/or using fishing line tied to an empty soda bottle. The small sailboats use nets. Fish is a staple in St. Martin, and what doesn't get eaten is sold. Fish is either eaten that day or salted so it can last weeks or longer.



In the afternoon our team joined the Haitian women in the kitchen and helped prepare dinner. Everyone had a good laugh, but mostly at our expense. We then climbed the local range of hills to water trees that had been planted to keep soil from running off. While the view was wonderful, the journey there involved us carrying 5 gallon water buckets; sometimes on our heads.

We could take a shower in a small concrete space while standing in a large salad bowl, or going down to the ocean in your clothes. George opted for the ocean.

Later that night there was another worship service, in which George was asked to preach again. He preached from several passages in Hebrews about Jesus being our brother.

Wednesday: *Dega'je (Make it work any way you can)*

We began a planned trip to Cayes, and then Plan Montain, but within ¼ mile one of the trucks did not survive the river crossing. The trip to Cayes was completed by towing it with rope (rope broke 3 times). So, our trip to Plan Montain was postponed 1 day so we could get the truck repaired. We then spent the day in Cayes, and traveled to Pastor Paul's house where we spent the night. While we were frustrated by the events of the day, the luxuries of Pastor Paul's house were a blessing.

Thursday: *Haiti is up hill both ways.*

We spent a good portion of the morning traveling into the mountains to the village of Plan Montain. The road that we traveled is in the process of being paved. This road will connect the southern and northern coasts of the peninsula; increasing travel and trade.

Upon arrival we began a gutter project that will provide water to a newly built cistern. This will allow the village immediate access to clean water. The gutter project was slow going due to dega'je construction and the general lack of tools we take for granted. But, once we got it figured out, we were able to proceed. Randy was able to train the students on how to saw effectively and removed nails from boards we salvaged for the project.

In the evening we all went down to a mountain river for some fun, and then gathered later for a time of fellowship. Randy shared his testimony with the church leaders and Geneva team, and then the local pastor and his wife shared theirs. This all occurred in a tin and bamboo structure at night under the light of one oil lamp. The setting was perfect.

Friday: *If you're not flexible, Haiti will break you.*



Friday was a travel day. We first traveled from Plan Montain to Pastor Paul's house to drop off the Geneva team's luggage. Because Jules' truck was still being worked on, we had his father's, which was a small Ford pickup with only two seats and two small jump seats. Bill and Pastor Paul's son opted to ride with the luggage in the back, but were less than enthusiastic about their experience coming down the undeveloped road we traveled. Once on our way to Port au Prince travel moved along well till we hit the city limits. This is where we faced traffic gridlock and heat; two elements that tested all of our patience. When we arrived at Jules' house we were grateful for a bed and shower. We felt like we were closer to home.

Saturday: *Don't assume anything.*

As of Saturday, Jules' truck was still not repaired. The engine seemed to have survived, but the computer was fried by being submerged in the river. Several used replacements had not fixed the problem, but others had been lined up.

The ride to the airport started early. It was stifling hot, slow, and congested. Independently, not bad, but when combined, torturous. We all had a wonderful sense of relief arriving at the airport, but it was short lived. We were once again greeted by the eager baggage handlers, and told we were not able to enter the airport because we were too early, but we soon discovered that if we paid someone, we could avoid the long line of people waiting for the airport to "open". Checking in went smoothly and we enjoyed some refreshments, but as we went through customs we were met once again with "cease every opportunity" as an agent availed themselves to some of Randy's chewing gum and nearly a personal electric fan. Randy kept the fan, and sacrificed two sticks of gum. To top off the evening, our shared bag was left in NY, but arrived later that day. It was just nice to be home.

Lasting Impressions

Haiti is a land of contrasts; aggressive and hospitable, hard working and inefficient, organic and polluted, harsh and joyful. The people of Haiti are eager to gain your trust, and once that has been established they are among the most dedicated people I have met. There is great potential for a future partnership. Many of the needs they have could be address through the people of Four Mile. While the trip was among the toughest any of us had faced, we all felt a great affinity with the people we met.

Next Steps

The next step is to sit down and compare the two trips; evaluating the needs of each community and the potential for partnerships with the communities and organizations who we worked through. Please pray for wisdom and discernment, and a spirit of confirmation. . . The adventure continues.