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Dear Friends,

January 18, 2010

We write to thank you for your caring, prayers and concern during our recent harrowing experience in Haiti. I will attempt to tell you the story as we lived it.

On Monday, January 11th, our team of 9 arrived at the beautiful mountains and valleys of Fondwa, Haiti to paint some classrooms and add electric lights to the school and orphanage. In 1988 the Fondwa community formed the Association of Peasants of Fondwa (APF) which is partially supported by the Haiti Catholic Church and Family Health Ministries, a North Carolina non-profit formed by a Duke University professor in an effort to improve life in this valley of about 17 communities. The people farm, raise chickens, pigs and goats. APF built a school, an orphanage, a guest house, a radio station, and bank. They have planted many trees and are reforesting the mountains.

Our new young St. Luke's Pastors have worked with this site for many years, including living there 2 years. We stayed in the Guesthouse, half mile from the school of about 450 kids and the orphanage of 50 kids. Monday evening we visited the children in the orphanage.

On Tuesday we visited the school in the morning, grades preschool through 13 and met all the children and teachers. All children walk to and from school taking a half hour to 4 hours. Can you imagine? Leaving and arriving in the darkness walking up and down mountains? Teachers live in Port au Prince, an hour and half away, coming to work by tap-tap (Haitian taxi), motor bike and walking the last mile. We walked back to the Guesthouse for a lunch of rice and beans and back down the mountain to sand the rooms we intended to paint the next day. We walked back to the Guesthouse about 4:00 PM. Five of our team headed for the showers (cold, of course) to rid ourselves of the grime, the other four walked to the orphanage.

After our showers, Gary and I had just gotten dressed, except shoes, when a tremendous sound like a jet hitting our roof occurred. Gary shouted, "It's an earthquake! Get down as low as you can against the outside wall." I did, and he spread eagled over me as the building swayed and tilted and light appeared through gaping cracks and the inside wall came crashing down. The inside wall had fallen into our room. We grabbed our shoes and left quickly through this new opening in the wall into the bedroom next door where the outside wall was now gone. We heard team mate, J. D. calling our names. He caught me as I jumped from the ledge of the now mangled house. Gary jumped behind me. We located the other three members who helped remove a Sister from the wreckage. We got as far away from the building as we could, up on a rise in the road and reassembled with our teammates who reported that the orphanage withstood the shock and the children were physically OK.

Unfortunately one of the novice sisters, who lived behind the Guesthouse, and a two year old orphan who lived with her were not. We heard tapping noises for a short time and then nothing. They did not survive. Danny Chin, our youngest and palest team member ran down the mountain to the school to learn that the school had collapsed and two building workers were trapped, one dead and one who died later that night. We had lost 4 Haitians in our midst. We realized that it could have been much worse. Had we been at the school when it hit, all of us with 450 children would be gone. Had it occurred while we were at dinner at 6, all the sisters and the team who would have been buried in the dining room in the bottom level of the Guesthouse. God had saved us. We were grateful. All others were accounted for except the two Sisters who had gone into town to retrieve

our missing luggage and pick up paint. With the collapse of the road, they could not get back to us and we prayed they were okay.

It was about an hour before dark and we began to plan survival strategies. We decided to begin to ration whatever snacks we had left. We could get clean water from the orphanage. Aftershocks occurred for a long time. As darkness approached, we sat on the ground in the middle of the road back to back for warmth. We were in short sleeved shirts and some in short pants. As the dew fell and temperature dropped, we got colder. We sat this way until midnight and then made a decision to lie down flat, jellyroll style, using each other's bodies for warmth. It was the longest night of the world. But the Heavens were filled with beautiful stars and our faith gave us strength that we were not alone.

We slept little or none that night and Wednesday morning began more strategy for survival. One of our greatest concerns was that we assumed our families had heard about the quake, and we had no way of letting them know that we had escaped injury. We were totally isolated from the world. Cell towers were down, we had no radio contact and the roads were blocked both north and south. We had not eaten since noon the day before so Denise Jean Claude foraged and found some grapefruit trees. There was so little we could do except calm each other and soothe the frightened orphanage children whom we moved up to the road, away from the structure in case of another tremor.

Our dear Pastor and Leader, Jamalyn, speaks Creole fluently which was a tremendous blessing. The bodies of the dead were removed from the destroyed structures and funeral planning for the novice Sister and baby were underway. Still with no communication, we waited until late in the afternoon when the Sisters, who had driven to town early Tuesday, walked down the mountain, after many miles of walking, carrying a bag of bananas for us to eat! Another blessing. They were very distraught at the loss of the novice Sister and baby Obey, so we tried to console them as we calmed each other with assurance that someone would rescue us sometime. I was sure the Red Cross was somewhere. We gathered courage and went to the devastated Guesthouse and carefully retrieved a few mattresses and sheets for another cold night on the road. We had devotions before settling down for another cold night on the mountain. As we sang Amazing Grace we heard the Haitians echoing in Creole. The stars were brilliant again and no rain, thank God. Just before bed, two cooks from the orphanage brought us some rice. We slept a bit better, still anguished that we could not let all of our families know that we were okay.

On Thursday, we held the funeral for the novice Sister and baby Obey and grieved with our Haitian friends. Jamalyn began to think of ways we could get out of the mountains as we could see no way anyone was coming in for us. But a blessing came down the mountain on a motorbike. It was one of our Haitian Academy doctors who had graduated last year! He was a Godsend and we thanked Margaret (Mag) Russell, St. Luke's, Larry Stevens, Mike Blood, and Marie Rene who nurtured this young man for 9 years as he struggled to become a doctor. After tears and hugs all around, he went to the injured in our community, setting a leg and an arm with sticks, cleaning out wounds, tending to those who needed a doctor's care. Even checked our blood pressure to see how we were doing. Gary wept as he watched Vlad at work. Dr. Vlad took all of our families' numbers and vowed to return to his clinic to use the land line to reach some one for us. He did just that, reaching our daughter, Carla, who in turn passed the good news along that we were OK.

We slept little on our ground bed that night as we were excited about getting up at 4AM and hiking the mile up the mountain to a road where we could rent motorbikes to get us to the nearest town. The hill climb was strenuous for some of us, but we made it and the bike ride down at the skilled hands of our drivers was fun. It was a close up view of the roadside destruction. At times we had to get off the bike and walk around the landslides that covered the highway.

We went to the village of Leogane, which we learned was 90% destroyed. We had a contact, Susan and John from Texas staying at a hospital compound. They who took us in. They offered us grassy space for sleeping Friday night and a pickup truck ride to the U. S. Embassy in Port au Prince on Saturday morning. Best offer we had! They had one MRE package of spaghetti and offered us 9 forks. We each took two bites around. We had managed to have a banana along the road, so we were okay. Still we did not know if Vlad had reached our families. We slept on the grass with probably a hundred Haitians camped there. Their singing lulled some of us to sleep. Although it was warmer here, the dew was heavy.

We sneaked out at 4 AM to avoid waking them and piled in the pickup for the ride to the U. S. Embassy. We wanted to avoid the traffic in the city. It was dark and the silhouettes of the destruction were eerie looking. We arrived at the Embassy at 6:00 AM. We looked like the refugees we were. Not in a bed since Monday and lacking toiletries, we simply said, "Thank God, we are alive and here and there is hope we can get out." We stood in line 7 hours outside the Embassy. Once inside, all of the team except us were processed on to the airport. Because mine and Gary's passports were buried in the rubble under the fallen wall in the Guesthouse along with our computer, cell phone, wallet, meds, glasses, hearing aids and most everything we had with us, we had to wait for travel documents. We finally left the Embassy at 9:30 PM by SUV to the airport. We stood in line until midnight waiting for a flight. The airport was an exciting drama: huge planes arriving with pallets of food and supplies, search and rescue people coming in, and small planes evacuating injured. We blessed President Obama as we later learned that barely 24 hours after the quake he had help there on the ground. We were so proud of military on the ground who were acting with compassion. We boarded an Air Force transport plane for the mystery trip. Two and a half hours later we landed and were told we were at the Air Force Base in Homestead, Florida. Red Cross and military people welcomed us with a quick customs processing, food, drink and cots. They bussed us on to the Miami airport where we were able to get a flight through Chicago at 7:05 AM. We arrived in Indy about 1:00 PM to the welcoming arms of our biological family and our Church family.

Dear friends, we are okay, alive and well, sleeping in our comfortable bed, but we ache for all Haitians. They are a warm and friendly people whose compassion accommodated us. At no time did we fear threatened by the people.

We will be working, starting to raise money to send food and medicine to five different clinics, schools and orphanages supported by our Hearts and Hope for Haiti non-profit organization. The Haitians can survive on the ground until rebuilding occurs later, but without food and medicine, they will die. If you choose to help, a contribution to "Hearts and Hope for Haiti" mailed to our address (530 Round Hill Road, Indianapolis, IN 46260) will get help directly to people we know on the ground. What we cannot use to purchase supplies now will be used to rebuild/repair the clinics and schools as soon as we can. We believe that we have been spared to help.

Thanks again for you love, caring and assistance in our absence.
Love and God bless,
Kay and Gary