

Haiti Reflections

Hope Church members, Kari Miller-Fenwood, Ben Sikkink, and Larry and Karen Mulder, recently visited Haiti where they worked with the Hope House ministry led by Mallery Neptune. Hope House supports an orphanage, school, and community development as an expression of Christ's love for the people of Haiti.

March 2013

To all Hope church folks,

Our recent trip to Haiti was a sobering event. We occasionally laughed and joked and relaxed—but mostly we were awed and silenced and reflective as we spent five days with the Haitians. The reality of their difficult lives was stunning. The glimmer of the hope in the oases we spent time in was wonderful to see.

The generosity of all of you, especially Brim Bunch; the products that you contributed; the financial aid you poured into the Haiti Fund; the encouraging words you gave to us as we wondered if the trip was actually going to happen; and the prayers that we felt you offering on our behalf were so much appreciated by us as well as the little Haitian toddlers that will never know you but were blessed by you.

Thank you so much for all the different kinds of support you offered. At times it seemed that to just about the trip would have been the easiest and safest path for us, but how blessed we all have been for not doing that.

We hope that our adventure to Haiti will be the beginning, not the end of Hope Church's "Haiti Experiences". We're not ready to sign you up yet, but maybe soon?

-Larry and Karen Mulder



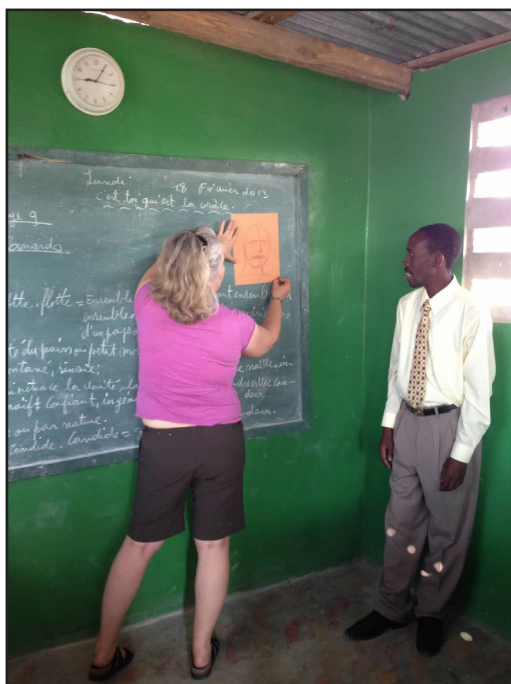
Haiti

by Kari Miller-Fenwood

The Haitian people I had the pleasure to get to know shared a common quality that was so refreshing. These qualities are hard to put into a single word or phrase, so I am going to explore my memories in this writing and see what we discover. I think the pressure that is felt in a country with so many difficult problems produces an interesting response to each opportunity. I wanted to share my brief encounters with two individuals that captured for me the best of Haiti.

They were Elisha, the Principal of the elementary school at Les Bours School of Hope, and Romulus, the fifth grade teacher. Elisha provided us an opportunity to walk through the neighborhood and meet some of the locals. The interior streets were mainly open areas with a few homes that were small and made with discarded pieces of metal, bits of wood, or plastic sheets with some cement block walls. Mothers with babies, older men, and gangs of young boys roamed the street. The qualities of Elisha that impressed me were those of a person who was deeply in touch with who each person was, where the deepest need in the neighborhood was, and a

clear-eyed realism about the situation. Elisha spoke Creole, French and English, and translated the art class I taught on our second visit to the school. We decided the fifth grade class was a good place to teach a more advanced class, which would introduce the use of pastels in both portraits and landscapes.



I began the class talking about the notion that we were created by God and that God had seen us before the beginning of time. We were “fearsomely wrought” by a creative all powerful God for a purpose, which makes each of us unique. I wanted each of us to think about that fact as we looked at our neighbor and drew that person’s face. “I want you to really look at the face as you draw. Learn how to use your eyes and really see each other. It is important to not look at the paper too much but to look at the person. To train your eye to learn what you are seeing and coordinate that with your hands as you draw.” Elisha translated all that I said. Then I demonstrated this technique as I drew a student and then the teacher, Romulus. They were all so excited by this revelation. They were also afraid. I explained that in this process there was no “right or wrong”, and that all artists feared that blank page at some moment in time. I encouraged them to charge ahead and find the line, then find the head, drawing the oval and then where to split the oval in both directions for the eyes first and then the nose.

“ I talked about Haiti and the beauty that was there, but maybe hidden to some degree because of the earthquake or other problems. When we faced difficulties we could still find beauty in our thoughts and minds. This is a place God would meet us and we could find peace. ”



I had also offered Elisha and Romulus an opportunity to join in. Each of them found a spot and began to draw someone as well. We worked on the portraits for about a half hour and then began to share what we had drawn. We encouraged each one for their wonderful drawings. It was a marvelous time together.

I began the second kind drawing exercise talking about an interior landscape drawing. This was completely different and offered the artists time to meet God within themselves and create an ideal place on the page. I talked about Haiti and the beauty that was there, but maybe hidden to some degree because of the earthquake or other problems. When we faced difficulties we could still find beauty in our thoughts and minds. This is a place God would meet us and we could find peace. I began to make a drawing of people walking down a mountainous road with palms and banana trees. Each student created a drawing of some personal landscape containing good things like a home, sun, water, ocean and family.

The thing about these kids was that they all jumped in feet first; their drawings were bold, energetic and filled the pages. They said this was the first time they were able to experiment with pastels and the idea of “seeing” through art. And their teachers Elisha and Romulus took the risk too. Elisha and Romulus were willing to share an area with the children in which they had little experience. This to me was true educators willing to share in a learning experience with their kids, to be vulnerable with an American stranger, and be courageous. This sharing is why I had gone to Haiti. To meet these marvelous people, and to share art time and God time with them.



A daughter of Haiti, I take with me in my mind
painting by Kari Miller-Fenwood

Looking back

We learned that...

- some children eat dirt cookies (dirt+lard+salt) because they are so hungry
- the roads in Haiti make the *worst* roads in the US look like Super Highways
- US stop lights and “Rules of the Road” are good things
- most Haitians are surviving one day at a time
- we Americans complain about some pretty trite things
- the human touch can communicate powerfully



We were challenged by...

- not knowing the language
- visiting the House of the Dying
- the question: what can we/ I do?
- the question: what will we/I do?
- the question: how can they learn to fish instead of continually being given fish?
- the question: what should we do for the people of Haiti to help them be successful themselves?
- 3 minute cold showers

We especially appreciated...

- what Mallery and Frenze are doing with/for Haitian children
- sitting outside at night looking at stars and talking
- that Water Missions International is at work in Haiti
- getting to know and learn from six traveling companions
- members of Hope Church who contributed products and financial support for this trip
- the compound guard dogs (which are a very good thing!) who liked Ben the most-one even sat in his lap
- the irresistible little Haitian toddlers!



Looking ahead

As a result of our experience in Haiti, we will...

- tell others about the “Haiti Foundation Against Poverty” (www.haitipoverty.org)
- tell others about the global water crisis
- do something about the sanitation at the Les Bours school
- help bring clean water to the Les Bours community
- thank God for the Haiti experience