

## Haiti Trip Report – Amber Kaderbek April 2014

Tuesday-February 18-The Beginning of the Journey-- First, a word on the Company: Our fearless leader was a 70 year old bald guy in combat boots: Bob McCoy. He drives like a Haitian and treats us all like his kids, which is extremely comforting when one travels to alien lands. Kathy, his wife, is a lady of many talents, among which are miniatures, shopping, and stained glass. She delights in producing just what people need exactly when they want it. For instance, we could not have conquered the pink grease without her. Julie is my 39-year-old sister in all things, including hatred of roaches and the corporate world and love of the Catholic faith. She was our go-to translator for the trip, fluent in Russian, French, and Spanish, stimulated some of the best conversations, and learned, after almost overdosing on aspirin, that she is addicted to caffeine, which explains why she looks worried and distressed in almost every picture. Thu is a 26-year-old Vietnamese who works at Dynetics and happens to be discerning the priesthood. He founded the Late Night Haitian Vacation Rosary Group and is one of the few people my age that I was immediately comfortable around, probably because he is almost exactly where I am on the Road of Difficult Discernment. I give him credit for fearlessly using his French and for staying up until the wee hours of morning talking to Gary. He also seems to be the only one not affected by the environment. Gary must be between 50 or 60 and has successfully replaced Waldo in my mind. "Where's Gary?" was the constant theme of the trip, particularly when we were ready to leave anywhere. Gary loves the faith, so his conversations and his opinions were great. He must love photos to death because he risked his neck and wandered off more times than I could count. He also loves chocolate, because he brought 3 huge bags of Ghiradelli baking chips with us to Haiti. Chuck is from Pennsylvania, which explains a lot. Just about everybody in the world was in his science class at some point or another. He idolizes some poet named Robert Service and gives everybody a good, hard time. The last two members of our official group were not regulars, but they were part of the mission, although briefly: Huecco and Laura. When I first heard of Huecco, it was too close to Wacko and the name stuck. Considering he is a reasonably famous Spanish rock star, we were all surprised to find a dearth of dreadlocks and weirdness. However, don't let his appearance fool you; his music, though unsurprisingly Spanish and rock, in some ways is centered around the kids in the orphanage. It has a good beat to it and his heart is really with these kids. I didn't get a good chance to get to know Laura except that she is very pretty and very nice and can speak many languages.

Now, our journey began in Huntsville, Alabama and passed through Charlotte, Ft. Lauderdale, Potoprens, Ayiti, Leogane, and ended in Palmiste-à-Vin Monastery of the Little Brothers of St. Therese. Today was the longest travel day in my life. Yesterday I spent packing, almost in denial about going, just like Colorado. Unlike Colorado, I packed half a dozen sandwiches in peanut butter on wheat, butter on six grain, gouda on six grain, and fontina on pumpernickel. Even I thought it was a little overboard. I also packed the same waterbottle that carried me through Haiti. You can imagine it looked really rough by the end.

Anyway, I got up at 3:45am and we were out the door by 4:00 and at the airport by 4:30, right on time, which should have pleased Bob. After rearranging provisions to give Thu more mass,

we checked in the bags and worked on getting my tickets changed. My middle name was misspelled on the birth certificate as Maree and it has been causing problems ever since. The bottom line is that I refused to leave the country until those tickets were changed. I was NOT going to hear it from Dad when I had to call him up to tell him that the Haitians wouldn't let me into or out of the country and I needed him to pick me up. The young lady who fixed the ticket was extremely nice. Little sleep makes me standoffish, so I was a little grumpy and sat off to the side, observing, from a distance, the interesting fact that Thu was reading a book called the Young Man's Guide to Discerning the Priesthood by Fr. Brannen. Fr. Brannen is the same contact that the Sister Servants gave me for Savannah, Georgia.

Something you should know if that my character is highly dependent on the amount of sleep I get. Seven hours means I can run all day. Six and a half (or anything less) means I am fading from the time I get up. I was tired all day, no thanks to my travel pillow. One size DOES NOT fit all; I knew I should have got the kid one. I was tired through Charlotte and Ft. Lauderdale. I did not notice until later that we did not rendezvous with Chuck of Pennsylvania like we should have. He was delayed by a snowstorm, but more on that later. When we boarded the plane for Haiti, I was sitting far apart from the rest of group because my reservation was made later. Happily, I was given a window seat and a clear day by the Lord, so the Caribbean and all its islands were laid out underneath me in every shade of blue there is. We flew over a lot of islands, which was comforting, in a way, but at the same time, it eventually got a little boring, because they all looked like pathetic little sandbars that one good five foot wave could drown. Plus, most of them had a few houses and dirt roads and a sad little airstrip, but you wonder how anyone survives. Then we came up on Haiti, which I knew was mountainous. In my head, I pictured it kind of like the island in the Incredibles, complete with parrots and rainforest. In reality, Haiti is mountainous, but not green, so much as brown. This is partially due to it being the drought season, but mostly it is caused by the poverty of the people. Food literally grows on trees there; in fact, those are the only trees left standing, because all the others are chopped down and burnt for charcoal, which is used to light fires for light and cooking. However, mountains and no trees equals erosion, which contributes to the poverty that started the circle to begin with. So, from the sky, turquoise waters contrasted starkly with the gray brown color of the land and the dust that covers everything. When I stepped off the plane, 95 degrees smacked me upside the head. The airport in Port-au-Prince looks like an airport, but the oldest, dirtiest, hottest airport ever. It was also the scariest airport ever, in spite of Haitian band playing. Chaos and Creole and those reportedly corrupt authorities were everywhere. Furthermore, I turned in my green form, which is the "I am now here in your country and here is where to find me" paper, and received the green card back. OK...scary beyond all reason: you cannot leave the country without the green card. Escape depends solely on the retention of a fragile green cardboard slip. So, about it being scary, Bob both helped and aggravated this sense of unease. He helped because he knew what he was doing and there is nothing like a leader who carries knowledge and confidence, but the speech about the porters who will try to take your bags or your cart, the customs people who could take our luggage and take what they want and charge what they want for redemption, and the importance of staying with the group lest we be snatched by human traffickers really emphasized that we weren't in America anymore. Like we could forget...We had some difficulty finding our bags, which had

been pulled off to the side for some inexplicable reason, and I selfishly left the unwieldy cart for Thu to struggle with. Sorry, Thu. We followed orders and deliberately declined eye contact with the Customs people, blindly handing them our white customs papers. Note: indoors and outdoors are the same in Haiti. I saw the air conditioner in the aeroport, but I am 90% sure I was hallucinating. My hat went on at the same time I saw an unmistakable sign of real poverty: the presence of the Missionaries of Charity, Mother Teresa's order, in their characteristic white and blue habit. Thu got excited.

We spotted Ancy, who had delivered our ride. The entire time we rode in the blue KIA, which is as big as a train engine, runs diesel, and happens to have a convenient cage on the back for storing luggage...or people. It is equipped with extremely hard wooden benches for that reason. The Cage Crew was composed of Thu, Gary, and I, the usual members, occasionally graced by the presence of Julie or Bertone. The first time us prisoners were shut in it, we were locked in from the outside. Of course, that didn't make *anyone* the *least* bit unsettled. Thu said it first; it felt like we were being transported to our execution. Well, Thu said *martyrdom*, but considering Haiti is 85-90% Catholic, chances were against that, except for the odd Voodoo radical. We didn't run into any of those.

So then we had to wait for Chuck for an hour and a half, in the shade provided by the KIA, in a parking lot that had more potholes than concrete. The parking lot for the aeroport was adjacent to a park. When I say "park" think brick benches and a tree in the middle. I only saw one other park in Haiti, so parks are unusual, but the loitering people occupying it were not. All over Haiti you see people just sitting. It could be the heat, but I would hazard a guess that it speaks more of the unemployment rate than the heat. Haiti produces (exports) almost nothing, other than, judging from the occasional billboard, Rum Barbancourt and Prestige beer and Digicel cell phones, which almost doesn't count because the cell phones are not produced there.

It was clear immediately that the people around us were poor. For instance, there was a street vendor near the chain link fence surrounding the park selling what looked like junk on a fold out chair. Looking toward Potoprens from our position, past the chain link fence and on the far side of the highway, there was a young man hoeing the ground, which, as I may have mentioned before, could be mistaken for lunar soil. There was a man waiting in a car next to us who stared at us for a long time with hostility. The KIA was unfortunately parked near the portable toilets, which did not smell, but you don't need much imagination to picture the people who used them. The men never bothered to close the door, for one thing. It was very sad to note some of the symptoms of STDs. Then the police officer walked by and I couldn't help thinking about what the American Embassy would do if he were to rob us or hold us captive or kill us. It was not very comforting to reflect upon Obama's "Blather a lot and do nothing" foreign policy.

Finally, we got moving, which meant a mild respite from the heat and a sore backside, because one does a lot of flying and landing in the cage. A word on Haitian driving: there are no traffic lights, no stop signs, no speed limits, and no lanes. When I said that Bob drives like a Haitian, I say it with a large degree of respect. The first part of the drive was in Potoprens, but Bob wasn't driving there; the traffic was terrible, which meant we were moving slowly and made frequent

stops. The streets were crowded with people and mopeds and motorcycles and cars and taptaps. Vehicles are valuable in Haiti and they make the most of them, cramming three or four people on a motorcycle. A taptap is an extremely colorful and dangerous form of public transportation, which are invariably packed to capacity, with people even covering the roof, and which generally have a religious theme (like The Mercy of Jesus in French), in contrast with how dangerous they are. Every tourist guide has a warning against them. Plus, the fellows on them look scary and they didn't wave back at me.

The spirituality of the Haitians is very alive; Jesus and God and Mary are everywhere, on headlights, in the name of the gas stations and the taptaps, everywhere. For all their poverty, it is clear that they are rich in the one thing Americans starve for: the Faith.

So back to driving...In Potoprens, there were people everywhere, mostly young men and women. In the heavy traffic, they were very close to the KIA, which sometimes made me nervous, in spite of the fact we were locked in from the outside. We saw poverty up close and personal; I knew going in what it would look like; we have all seen the pictures of the tent cities and the slums, but I had some idea that these were isolated incidents. I had no concept of an entire country being so poor; shacks were more plentiful than tents and the partially leveled buildings. Most of the Haitians sold what they produced, which was foodstuff like mangoes and sugarcane, and everything else, like shoes and clothes, were imported. Everything but the foodstuff was old and used or so covered in fine dust that it looks like it. Many of the women carry baskets on their heads; think five gallon buckets full of stuff, but this skill is not limited to the ladies. Eventually, the kids got out of school and they were the best dressed, all matching in nice school uniforms. I cannot even imagine growing up in this environment, walking back and forth through slums that, in America, we have no concept of.

Like I said, we stopped frequently and because we were in the back, we never knew why. Thu and Gary and I missed the Haitian policeman who pulled us over because he saw Americans in the KIA and thought "Money". He told us we owed him money; Anzi told him we didn't have any. He let us go, but Anzi was ashamed of his countryman nonetheless. We stopped again, in the country, to drop off Anzi. Then Bob drove and we all crowded into the front of the KIA; I was seated backwards, with my knees pressed up against other knees. Now I think on it; it was very Haitian of us, because they have no concept of the American Bubble O' Personal Space.

In the country, the traffic was different, because the terrain was mountainous. But forget lanes! Let's all scream around corners with sheer drops (luckily a guard rail) and pass people at the risk of our lives. The best and most common safety precaution drivers took was that, when passing, they would blare their horns continually to warn the other guy screaming the other direction to watch for them. I never thought I would see the day that someone would actually use the car horn more than Dad, but there you go...the whole country does.

I thought we were headed to the monastery and I was extremely distressed to find that we were not. I think I am one of the only college student alive who has never significantly deviated from my sleep schedule. Therefore, my body and my mind were not functioning well at all, running on fumes. However, we visited the new orphanage at night, which was so spectacular

to see all lit and clean and new. It was beyond doubt the best building we ever saw in Haiti. It made me proud to look at because it represented to me the generosity of Americans. The orphanage is made, like everything seems to be in Haiti, of concrete, with no glass in the windows, only bars and screens open to the air. Unlike everything else in Haiti, it was clean and well lit and new. I saw Eliane, the director of the orphanage, for the first time, but I was so tired, I couldn't do more than snap a picture and hope we would leave soon. The monastery was beyond doubt the best accommodations in Haiti, minus the new orphanage. It had running water, for one thing. Keep in mind, however, that our worst base house (which the poor in America refused) looks like luxury compared to this, at least in terms of glass windows, carpet, air conditioning/heater, heated showers, and electricity. The monastery has electricity, but it only has it from 630pm sundown to about 900pm at night, because the generator is only on that long. After that, you are in the dark relying on flashlights.

Julie and I shared a room in the guest house with the dining room, which was good and bad. Food was convenient, but Cook's Pest Control doesn't exist in Haiti. Our room was in the building that survived the earthquake, which made those cracks in the walls. Fortunately, our room was so dim for the majority of the time, thanks to the shutters we kept closed to keep mosquitoes out, I didn't notice them or make the connection until much later in the trip. Otherwise, I may have been slightly unsettled.

I was so tired, I reemphasize. Anyway, we dined on rice and this extremely tasty sauce that had a lot of flavor, potatoes, and there was this hot tea with some spice in it that did not agree with my stomach. The heat didn't agree with the rest of my body, but of course I had to try it. At dinner, we were sternly warned NOT to go out at night, at the risk of our lives. Why? Because, in spite of a religious monastery being surrounded by a huge wall, topped with the most evil barbed wire I have ever seen, there are three bloodthirsty German Shepherds that patrol the grounds at night. The moral of the story is: in Haiti, what is not nailed down, surrounded by walls and barbed wire and savage animals, is stolen. Bob told us the story of when Brother Olizard, who keeps the dogs, neglected to mention this important fact to Bob and he got up at 430 to wander around and met them all. Saved by his knowledge of the beasts, he knew to keep his back to the wall to keep them from circling and to shine his flashlight in their eyes. It is almost needless to say, but I did not venture out of doors at night. Instead, I did other stupid things, but more on that later.

You'd think I'd be almost done with the day by now, but no...I haven't even begun to tell you about the insects. Last time, Julie brought bug spray with her, but Haitian mosquitoes considered it a marinade and ate her alive. Recall that when I heard of this, I defied the pestilential malaria-carriers and said, "Do they like DEET? Huh? How do they like that?"

Historical moment: I thought about composing a song in honor of Sarah. She accompanied Mom to the Commissary prior to the adventure and discovered not 20%, not 65%, but 98.25% OFF Deep Sportsman DEET and she convinced Mom I needed two bottles. Julie and I spent a quarter of an hour weighing which human inventions surpassed 98.25% DEET. I think it was a toss-up between the Space Shuttle and DEET, with only the wheel claiming superiority. Anyway, I had no idea of the power of the mosquitoes, so when I was done with

my cold shower (surprisingly, in spite of 95 degree days, the water is COLD), I applied DEET, but not on my face. Within 30 seconds, I had a massive bug bite over my eyebrow, reminding me of Ol' Shelob. I hastily put it on my face, beginning a ritual that was diligently carried out each day: Wake up; reapply DEET; put on sunscreen. Over the course of many long outdoors hours, cover oneself in sweat. Shower and immediately reapply DEET. Go to bed. The cycle continues.

Fortunately, this night I managed to shower before the electricity was turned off, but there is no light in the bathroom, so it is very dim in there. I mentioned before how icy the water is, so I was washing my hair upside down, staring down at the drain. To my horror, from the drain between my feet came a gigantic black spot. I did not need my glasses to identify the object. It was a huge roach. I admit a strangled "AAAHHHH" escaped me as I scrambled backward. I stared at it. Unlike Bob, I have an issue with killing roaches with my bare hand or foot. There was nothing on hand; I was wet. Looking at it, I remember thinking, "This is Haiti; you can't do anything about roaches. Therefore, you can let it get to you OR decide it's no big deal." By the grace of God, I shrugged and continued showering. I did, however, have Gary hit it with a shoe when I was finished so that Julie, who is about as terrified of roaches as I was before working at SAIC, could shower. Now God's plan makes sense; I worked at SAIC to earn money for Haiti and also to learn to overcome a childhood fear of roaches. Paralyzing fear of jumbo palmetto bugs is a handicap in Haiti.

Lastly, Thu invited us to pray the rosary in a group, all of us in the main building: Julie, Gary, Thu and me. Despite being so tired my mind was numb, I made it through the rosary, though I had to count on God to supply the merit because all I could manage was the words. This night rosary in community was a fountain of blessings for everyone on the trip. Furthermore, saying the rosary, in the dark, in the complete silence, was peaceful and allowed us to recharge for the next day of sweat and work in the discomfort zone. Thu would lead and give each decade a different intention and then we would each lead a decade and back to Thu. This is one of the top three things I will remember about Haiti.

Wednesday-February 19- OK, so this night was exactly what I expected. I kept the covers on, in spite of how sweltering it was, to keep the mosquitoes away (my trust in DEET had not yet reached full maturity) and I heard the little bloodsuckers buzzing around my head for about five minutes before I was out. However, it was a very interrupted sleep; I woke up once to use the bathroom and my light sent large beetles scurrying for cover. Waking up from a deep sleep to find oneself in another country is disorienting enough, but once I woke up to an unearthly scream of agony in the night, complemented by the dogs barking and growling. Then the car alarm was set off. Obviously my imagination was picturing the grisly fate of some intruder, but the reality was much nicer. I had no idea roosters screamed. The sound they normally make sounds just like "cockledoodledo" and trust me, I wasn't any happier about the normal noise, because this rooster crowed and crowed. I would've thought better of the dogs if they HAD eaten the dumb rooster. Julie and I woke up once to the alarm in the black night, took one look at each other, and turned over. We did not make the rosary and Matens this morning. At 630 in the morning on the top of the mountain at Palmiste A Vin, Haiti was finally the tropical paradise it was described as, complete with natives who look like they want to kill me. Fruit

trees, mangoes, coconuts, bananas, were everywhere, complemented by lush foliage. Julie and I sat on the porch on the roof for awhile, adding sunscreen and DEET to the salt already there. Julie has a journal of blessings to keep her optimistic. I hope it's to teach her optimism, because she needs a little more hope, if you know what I'm saying. Of course, this impression could have something to do with how bad she felt this morning; I offered her a perkeset, but she turned it down for aspirin. We explored a little, observing her tree and passing the unfriendly guy with the machete, planting in my mind a thought for what kind of souvenir I wanted. We were really hungry for breakfast. I was excited to try the coffee, which reportedly, is picked from the trees outside the monastery, ground up, and has water poured over it. So...Haitians and dairy products don't mix, on account of no refrigeration. Therefore, evaporated milk was served with the coffee. Normally, I don't like coffee, but this stuff tasted like bitter chocolate, but whether that was due to the evaporated milk or what, I dinnae ken. I attempted to eat a mango for breakfast, but the mango is God's tropical joke. It is near impossible to eat one, period, much less politely. You can't really cut it, because the pit is invisible and ginormous, and you can't really bite it either, unless you want hairy teeth. I gather that the best thing to do is to suck it dry. I was a mess after the experimental mango dissection was declared a failure. Sudsammas, on the other hand, are kind of like tangerines or clementines, except uglier on the outside and tastier on the inside. We ate some eggs, either hard-boiled or fried, I haven't recorded it, and some rolls that were bright yellow and good with mumba (peanut butter). I ate a lot because I knew we had to work hard all day and who knew when the next meal would be?

First, we stopped at the medical mission, which speaks volumes about what the Haitians don't know. It is surprising to find that, for all the missionaries, information about how cholera spreads and the importance of vaccinations is not as well distributed as you would hope. One of these days, Julie and I ran across the street to take possibly our best, most beautiful pictures of Haiti. It was this day that we met a very friendly Haitian man, who managed an English Good Morning and good naturedly allowed me to take his picture. I told Gary about it and so we crossed the street too, making the necessary dash, risking our lives for, ultimately, a photo of a taptap. This is when the people refused to wave at me.

The medical mission is serviced by the Holy Spirit Haiti Mission and it is no surprise that the "warehouse" is inside it, containing PVC pipe pieces, nails and screws, and various other items for the installation of pumps and purification systems. From the medical mission, we went on to the orphanage. Julie asked Eliane if we could teach English and she said that school was cancelled for the ceremony preparations. This was our first clue that Haitians have no concept of plans or time or schedules. In spite of all the work I did ahead of time, inventorying and labeling and pocketing all those dratted books, God tested my patience and brought those books, which have become rather noxious to me, back to my attention. And not momentarily either, because Chuck, being a science teacher, couldn't leave them alone. He had a whole idea for how to categorize those cursed books. I did my best to stay away and Thu and I labeled the new books brought along. Oh well. I knew it was God, so, once again, I had to say "Annh" and shrug my shoulders.

Actually, this illustrates a very important lesson, which Julie and I learned well and will not forget again. Most of my distemper had to do with dehydration, because I was grumpy one second and then Bertone took the cap off of my Limonade Couronne soda and I was happy again. I found that one needed to be sensitive to these subtle mood changes, because the heat is so oppressive that it dulls the senses and takes the edge off of hunger and thirst and your wits. So you eat when they serve you and you drink when you don't feel like it.

Lunch was two kinds of rice: one kind with that tasty sauce and beans and another which was yellow and had beets in it. Beets taste like dirt no matter where they are from. I presume that the Haitians boil their bananas to get them to rootlike consistency, but they taste starchy like potatoes. Although bananas are pretty recognizable fruits, the complete change in flavor, color, and consistency made me doubt that I was eating one. Green vegetables are not allowed in Haiti; vegetables include beets, carrots, and beans.

After lunch, it was back to the orphanage, this time I abandoned the library in favor of mixing concrete for the base of the life size bronze statue of Our Lady. Bob bought it and Gary installed it in the courtyard. I did that until we ran out of sand and gravel and then briefly watched Chuck and Thu construct a bookshelf from the lumber we bought at Discipline (I am sure that I spell this wrong). They were talking more about Robert Service, so I was back to floating. I unpacked the other statues, which were for the chapel, bronzed resin, of the Immaculate Heart and the Sacred Heart. Then we tried hanging the crucifix, but the screws holding the attachment plate on the back would not come out. I held the crucifix on my lap so that it wouldn't get damaged and Gary tried screwdrivers and pliers and pressed, squeezed, and mangled the screw.

Eventually, I grew aimless and just watched the girls practice the songs and dances for the ceremony tomorrow. It was my first experience with liturgical dancing, but more on that later. Though there were two dozen of the orphans there practicing, one of them immediately stood out. Her name, I discovered later, is Nerline and she is 11 and I remember her for smiling at me a lot and then hiding her head when I smiled back. It sounds foolish, but smiling was 80% of my Kreyol. I am the smiling stupid American. Ugh.

Mainly, it was today that God graced me with the courage to overcome my paralyzing fear of foreign languages. I cannot emphasize how important this grace became over the next few days. Today, though, He started simple and I said, "Bonjou. Ki jan ou ye? Ki jan ou rele?" to Marilyn, Sheila, and Daleen. I liked Marilyn; she was encouraging; she must have noticed my courage meter charging. This one small success somehow outweighed years of failure at German in Germany and French at OWC and German at UA. Of course, there was something called Necessity driving me here, because, if you don't speak French or Kreyol, you are not understood, very much unlike Germany, where everyone wanted to practice their English on you after you summoned the moxie to butcher their language, or in the classroom, where the teacher is more interested in writing drills or telling you stupid stories about their lives. Necessity wasn't as pushy as it could be, because Julie is remarkably fluent in French and most of the Haitians speak French.



This must be the day when we were swarmed; my little Kreyol was immediately tested when the girls, suddenly realizing that we were willing to make the effort to speak, all came around and I asked names and ages and stuff the best I could. Thu was airing his best French. Julie was translating the best way she knew how. Finally, when I had exhausted what little Kreyol I possessed, I was inspired to branch out, "Ou ta renmen jwe avek mwen?" which translates to, "Would you like to play with me?" A chorus of "Wi" broke out (For the record, that IS how you write it in Kreyol. I KNOW it is "Oui" in French). So on an impulse, I got out UNO. Bob gave me the wrong information; I thought that the kids already knew how to play, but, clearly, they didn't. I originally thought that I could title the event UNO Craziiness, but it was really closer to UNO Chaos. Thank God for Julie (I say this a lot), because she was able to translate some of my instructions. Alicia is one of the older girls and she is extremely smart and can speak a little English and a lot of French and she was directing and explaining my instructions and Julie's French to the other girls. However, taking turns is a foreign concept for the Haitians (as is standing in line), replaced by the "Free for all". Of course, Kreyol Chaos made me elated, so I was having a blast, especially when I announced UNO and somehow everyone had one card too. It took me several seconds to catch on that they had quickly disposed of all their other cards by breaking the "Wait your turn" and "Discard one card per turn" rules. Colors and numbers still counted. Gary observed later that he had never seen so many people get UNO at the same time. In explanation of our departure, Thu loudly announced "Je vous mangez!", which is "I eat you!", with an incorrectly conjugated verb. At least, that is what I heard, which set me off laughing for a bit. Thu claims he said, "Je veux manger", which is "I like to eat", but either way, he had some confused looks. Thu is hilarious.

Today's dinner was Julie's favorite: sweet porridge. Unfortunately, I didn't care for it because it had that strong spice whose name I forgot. Courtney probably would've liked it a lot. I devoured the shell pasta au gratin with some hot green mystery peppers in it. I'm not sure where they got the cheese, but I'm sure I don't want to know.

Thursday-February 20-This morning Julie and I got up early enough to wait on the porch and look at mangoes before we were off on another whirlwind adventure. Eliane specifically requested our presence, that is, mine and Julie's. Frankly, we were enlisted to sit. I was gonna die of inaction. We met Gerline, who is the eldest, goes to University and sets an example for her sisters. She is very serious and, as I understand, has a sad story. Gerline was sent by Eliane to the market to pick up fruit for the offering. Mass is an extremely important affair in Haiti, owing to the fact that priests are scarce and so is Mass. This Mass was particularly important and I gathered that it was a matter of honor to do it well. Therefore, for the dedication Mass, Eliane wanted fruit for the offertory to give to the priest for his parish. She showed us the dresses the girls were going to wear; they were mostly white and very nice; I am not sure where they got them, but Eliane made a point of informing us that they were pressed. I began to dread the comparison; I was going to look like a slob. (I did request an iron, but I got laughed at by Bob.) Gerline returned with sugarcane, cherry wine for Communion, grenadines, grapefruit, papaya, bananas, melon, and so on and made several baskets. Meanwhile, for at least an hour, Julie and I were held in confinement near the classrooms in the shade, stuck sitting, because apparently the thought of us working gave Eliane nerves. Finally, after much inactivity and

observation and meeting little Mama, we had to return to the new orphanage to go back to the monastery for lunch. I learned that showering during the day is much better because the water is actually lukewarm. However, it is even more futile than showering at night. Again with the sunscreen and DEET, this time covering more surface area because Julie and I were wearing dresses. In Haitian patriarchal society, dresses to Mass are a must. I wore the dress that I just got for Christmas that matches Sarah's. Julie and I qualified for the privilege of the Supremely Beautiful and therefore were invited to sit up front for the journey. Once there, we had a few hours before the 400pm Mass, so placed because the heat of the day would be over. So during the heat of the day, Julie and I sat in the sweltering library and used two dictionaries and a lot of teamwork and brainwork converting SORRY cards and board into Kreyol. Julie is a born translator and God was with us. What dictionary uses "Take another card (Pran yon lot kat)" as its example sentence for the verb "take"? We also finally finished the inventory on Eliane's computer, which had to be redone because the books I had inventoried did not all make it to Haiti because of the weight restrictions. We were so dedicated that we missed the beginning and hurriedly ran out. The ceremony began with Pere Jasmin. Mass in Kreyol (and I mean ENTIRELY in Kreyol) is beautiful in the same respect as any other foreign Mass. No other church has the same universality that the Catholic Church does (catholic means universal). The Mass was exactly the same; I knew when to bless myself, when to sit, when to stand, and so on. I even knew exactly where we say "Lord, I am not worthy that You should enter under my roof", though that was Providentially thanks to my tapes, because one phrase I learned from Pimsleur was "lakay mwen", which is "my house". The same Mass allowed for cultural differences; for instance, the music was extremely catchy. In fact, as I write, I have the French "Chanter alléluia au Seigneur" stuck in my head. Eliane hired a local musician, which made me think "drums" when I heard it, but turned out to be an electronic keyboard. On our keyboard at home, you can get it to play rhythms to accompany you and he used them. Man, did he use them! However, the sound was very Haitian. The choir members kept time by shifting their weight from one leg to the other in rhythm. So one of the Universal Church topics for debate is "Liturgical Dancing". It is my STRONG and UNCOMPROMISING opinion that liturgical dancing in the Mass should NEVER be allowed in the States, where we would only sensualize it, as we have already done with singing, or Protestantize it, but I have preached against that another place. Recall that the United States is a melting pot of cultures and that liturgical dancing is far from being cultural and natural and an infinity away from holy. That being said, it appeared perfectly natural and perfectly reverent to have liturgical dancing for the Gloria and for the offertory in Haiti. Of course, I could never narrate a dance, so you'd absolutely have to see it. Fortunately, Gary caught it on camera for you and, if you ask me, you can see for yourself. During the Offertory was the only other part that had dancing and it was really something to see the older girls, dressed traditionally perhaps?, carry the baskets on their heads, processing slowly and rhythmically down the aisle, with two of the older boys carrying the sugarcane with a neat two step. My last observation about the Mass has to do with Communion. It was only the religious and the white people who received the Sacrament. None of the girls, not even Eliane, received Communion. This confused me exceedingly; later, we asked Bertone, who is not Catholic, who explained to us that most people cannot go to Confession and cannot receive the sacramental preparation because of the shortage of

priests. This started Julie and Thu and Gary and I thinking. Now that the physical needs of the orphans are taken care of, perhaps it is time to think about getting them catechized.

Last, I am not sure if giving kids candy during Mass is wrong, but I did. To my right were some wooden benches on which sat some of the street kids (which here means “not from the orphanage” as opposed to “homeless or without families”). One of the littlest ones was crying. Bob warned me too late because Schneider, I think, had already seen them. God was with us; there was no candy riot; I am stupid sometimes. Anyway, this act of foolishness won for me the friendship of the Jean Baptistes. So after the speeches (which made me pity poor Bertone, who was stuck translating from Google Translate output), I was immediately bombarded by a stream of Creole and cries of “Sirets!” Julie was nowhere to be found. Mihael was the first and he introduced me to Cavincia, his sister, Donalson, and his little brother, who was the one crying during the ceremony. It was very difficult to communicate. Finally, he grabbed my hand and led me off to meet Manman, his mother. I met his mother, whose name I forget, and his sisters, all of whom were extremely nice and obliging in clarifying the relationships between them, their names, and how old they were. They were standing, with some of the other neighbors, right outside the opened gate. His family, the Jean Baptistes, were very patient. Eventually, though, I was at the end of my Creole, and knowing full well I couldn’t ask Manman her age and lacking any conversation, I did a lot of smiling and laughing, especially because my valiant efforts were sort of funny. I imagine that I sounded very much like “Me Amber. What your name? Me want food now.” I was given an opportunity to escape by the food being served. I had no way of saying “Nice to meet you” in Creole, so I felt really stupid and hoped “Enchantee” was correct. Mihael and Donalson and Cavincia scampered back, while I walked back rather stiffly, chuckling hysterically, and whimpering “Julie...” I found Julie and she helped me communicate with my new friends. Then my slightly older friends informed me that food was now or never, so Thu and Julie and I experienced the smorgasbord of Eliane’s cooking. You get really close really fast in Haiti, so we did a lot of sharing. I particularly recall Thu’s mystery meat horn pastries, which were another “Whatever” moment. They were delicious and we did not think about what was in them. Haitians love noodles, so we had so many different varieties, and there was some form of Haitian pizza, fried plantains, and other interesting things. My brain was rather fevered, all during this time, because I was exhilarated. I think it was tonight that my reservations were conquered. What did it matter that I sound like a stupid American, I get credit for trying, right? What did it matter that I had a huge bug bite on my forehead, angry and red? There aren’t any mirrors, so forget your vanity! What did it matter that I was probably ingesting parts of animals I would shudder to know? Ignorance is bliss. I care not! It was no coincidence that bagpipes were blaring in my head with the cry of “FREEEDDDDOOOMMMM!!!!” That’s what Haiti taught me. Americans overcomplicate their lives with too much information and too many things. Let me tell you: I had no cell phone, no laptop, no mirrors, no plan and it was bliss...

Huecco and Laura accompanied us back to the monastery, where we ate AGAIN. Actually, Eliane gave Huecco a cake for our group and so Bob cut me a massive piece of cake and I ate that instead of supper. Despite looking like an American cake, it was not an American cake. The flour used in it was probably the same flour that makes the yellow rolls from the

boulangerie, the sugar was evidently not refined like Domino's, and the frosting, though blue and white and piped, was clearly related to the meringue family of frostings. It was delicious and I ate it all, only half listening to Huecco's explanation of song writing (You can just feel it). I did listen to his story of another orphanage he services. Last visit, they requested some chickens, so Huecco bought them 200 chickens. This time, he wondered where they were and asked. They ate them all. Sustainability is another foreign concept in Haiti. Fading fast and aware that this was our only chance for a group photo, I took one. Bob saw an opportunity to be funny (he wasn't) and said, "Alright, we all know you just want a picture with the rock star." Trapped, I could hardly say "No!" in politeness and my protests of "Man, I haven't even heard your music!" were insufficient. Huecco replied, with his Spanish accent, "I will fix that"; he did give us several dozen promotional CDs the next day. However, I had to grit my teeth and sit down next to Huecco, the Spanish rock star, to the laughter of my backstabbing companions. Bob said something like, "How do you feel?" Responding immediately, a half-hearted scream of AAAHHHH came out. Huecco was quick; the next second he was screaming good-naturedly beside me. The picture is a good one as we are both screaming.

Our nightly rosary, now a routine, ended the day properly and, per intention, it was a roach free night and we had Olizard's promise of mosquito nets for tomorrow. I forgot to mention that Thu and Gary talk late into the night about, in their own words, "deep subjects". It is really funny how much they have to say and what they talk about, mostly religious questions like free will. Every night Julie and I heard them talking later than we were awake. We had better conversations, Julie and I. And shorter.

Friday-February 21-This morning Julie and I finally made Matens. The morning office was said in the chapel, which is made of plywood and is open air. It is so early that it is still dark, so you require the headlamp to navigate and you hope, when venturing out of doors, that those German Shepherd were actually put up. Matens was preceded by a rosary in French, for which my rosary English/Creole/French cheat sheet was helpful. I think I know the Hail Mary in French by memory now. Je vous salue, Marie, pleine de grace...Yep, I still got it. During this, Julie left, because she was feeling terrible on account of getting no sleep at all. I forget whether that was due to the roaches. Poor Julie...she missed Matens, which again testified to the universality of the Catholic Church, for I could tell, despite the fact that it was in Creole, exactly where we were in the divine office: Invitatory, Psalm 95, and all. She also missed the Communion service. It was not a Mass because there are no priests in the order of the Little Brothers of St. Therese. I hear contradictory reports about why. Some theorized that they don't trust priests and some theorized that there are not enough.

The Communion service was unusual, in that there were no Eucharistic ministers. The ciborium was placed on the altar and then each person receiving took one for himself. Again, if we didn't follow the example of Bob, we probably would have missed it.

After this, I found Julie, who was wandering around, and we went towards the house where Bob and Kathy were staying. On the way, we saw a cat dragging away a mango in its mouth. Then we realized that it was, in fact, a rat of unusual size. "Rats of Unusual Size? I don't think they exist," you say. If this one tried to kill you, it would probably succeed. Unless

you had a machete. Julie obtained two things from Kathy that significantly improved how she felt. One was a Nyquil PM tablet and the other was an Irish Breakfast tea bag with caffeine. As it turns out, much of Julie's suffering over the last few days was caused by a lack of caffeine, which didn't flee, even in the face of three Motrins. It is a good thing that I shadowed Dr. Boulet, because I remember that overdoses that merit the Poison Control Center, which I doubt in in Haiti, are significantly over the recommended amount on the back of the bottle.

This morning we stopped at Discipline, which was one of three stores we actually went in the whole time. Stores are a rarity in Haiti, but the construction store (Haitian Lowes) is one of the few. It was actually the nicest building I saw, minus the brand new orphanage. And it was a rare two stories. Even for such a nice store, most of the items inside were used. For instance, the sink had a big dent in the bottom that had been mostly straightened out, but it was still obviously recycled. We were looking for ovens for Eliane, but Julie and I took more interest in the iron and the new machete on the wall. Bertone summoned us out to the back, where the lumber yard was. Someone pulled the van around and we watched a lady named Soulangie iron mountains of white linen with what we would consider a third world iron. It was not electric, but was heavy, massive, and literally made of iron. The top was hinged and hot coals were placed inside to heat it. I'm sure we made her chores today, because Soulangie was tickled that the stupid Americans thought her ironing was cool. We all gathered around and watched. There was a happy young man in a green shirt sitting next to her, presumably her son, he was very amused as well and they both posed for a photo for Gary. Gary embarrassed me again by poking into places he wasn't invited. However, he more than made up for that with his gutsy pictures, especially when I got a copy of the picture CD.

The iron illustrates a fact about Haiti. Haiti is back in time. People pull carts that look like they should have teams of oxen on them. Sometimes you see the teams of oxens. Real irons, machetes, hand tools, little electricity and running water, hand washing clothes...a lot of work is true labor. Of course, it's weird because Haiti is a paradox. These people hand wash their clothes, which are Hannah Montana and Auburn t-shirts or something. They are out in the field chopping the sugarcane with machetes and then call their buds on a cell phone.

It turns out the mission bought a big water tank to install at Notre Dame. Bob forgot about the Martyrs in the back of the bus and so Thu and I had to interrupt the loading to get in ourselves. The tank didn't fit very well and I had this bad image of the twine (yes, the only thing keeping it in) snapping and the tank bouncing down the road taking out the motorbikes. Fortunately, no one would probably die, because it's plastic and pretty light, other than Thu, who was holding it in (sort of). When we arrived, Bob and Bertone and Chuck put us to work cutting and gluing PVC pipe. The work is sort of obsessive to some degree, because it is like LEGOS, except practical and permanent. The PVC pipe ran from the well, which is really deep and hand dug, to the water tower that makes the Fortress of Notre Dame de la Charite.

In the middle of this sort of work, I heard the call, "Hey you. Hey you. Hey you", announcing the presence of my friend from yesterday: Mihael Jean Baptiste. That's the only English they know and it sounds really rude, chanted over and over. I went over to the gate and opened it a little to find Mihael. He wasn't there for candy, though he accepted it readily enough. The only

part of the boggling Creole stream that I understood was something about “lakay mwen”, which is “my house”. I understood that he was telling me that his house was close and, when he seized my hand again, I understood he wanted to take me to his house.

So...everyone knows that I am an idiot, and also a pushover when it comes to kids. I waved at Gary and Kathy and let them know I was leaving and would be right back. When they didn't protest, I left the security of the compound and permitted myself to be dragged off by a native kid. This was what is called “Amber's Illegal Trip Outside the Compound”.

Mihael led me around the perimeter of the orphanage, along the high wall, to the back left corner if you were viewing the orphanage from the front. Across a dirty field full of sunburnt trash and the remains of some crop, in the shade of some trees, his family was waiting for us. I met Manman again and also Grandma. I saw Cavincia and Donalson and his older sisters, whose names I have forgotten. The older sisters were great sports. They tried their hardest to explain something to me. They could probably tell in spite of me smiling and nodding. Then I saw the baby! Of course, it was adorable and I stumbled along in Creole trying to ask his name and how old. The proud mother, only 19, was thrilled to show off her infant and when I wordlessly asked to hold him, she obliged. I was thrilled. Little Louis was adorable and worth traveling 1500 miles to hold. Louis didn't understand a word I said either, but he had the same intelligent eyes as the rest of his race. I figured he probably understood more than anyone else I talked to. I told him that he was lucky not to be an orphan or Mom's prediction, that I would come back with a Haitian orphan, might turn out to be true. After I reluctantly returned Louis to his mother, her sister presented her son, a little older than Louis, to me. His name was Cavince. He had little black curls for hair which were very soft. Cavince was just as wonderful as Louis. Truly, both mothers and their babies were beautiful. Now totally surrounded by Haiti, it felt very dreamlike and when I came to, I remembered my camera and asked everyone if I could take them. They were very happy about the camera, though you can't tell from the pictures exactly, because they tend to look stoic like in the old fashioned photographs. Anyway, they even tried fruitlessly to catch little Schneider. Schneider was never caught, so he isn't in them. Another character appeared, who may have been there all along, but it would be impossible for me to say for sure because of the excitement. Her name, I learned later was Daflin Louis. She returned the camera to me, took my elbow, and steered me out of the trees and back to the orphanage. I was high up somewhere, thanks to the combined effects of excitement, dehydration, heat, and babies. When I finally came back to myself, I was to receive a lecture about never leaving the compound without another member of the team. I remembered this rule the next time I left.

Next I think we had an issue installing the statue, but Gary solved it rather ingeniously. My solution involved wire, thread, and a nail. On our way to lunch, Gary and Thu and I had a great argument about Sacred Music. Thu and I agree almost perfectly, but Gary still needs some convincing. I disagree that, if played properly, the electric guitar could EVER be reverent enough for Mass. Boy, I live for conversations like these. Lunch was delicious and then back to the orphanage, minus Kathy, who stayed behind to work on her cross-stitch sampler, where my loud mouth landed me on a rickety handmade wooden ladder climbing three stories high above hard pavement. I volunteered, on account of being the lightest and least likely to break the

ladder. So I was called on. But I actually did want to climb the ladder. I only had misgivings about halfway up when the ladder felt unstable, but fortunately that good ol' Haiti "Whatever" attitude came back. If God wants me dead, my guardian angel won't save me. Shrug. On top of the tower, I had a magnificent view of Haiti as it is. Far off was pretty, but up close, you could see trash and shacks and skinny animals. If I haven't made a note of this before, I must now. Haitians are skinny people, have skinny cows, skinny stray dogs, skinny chickens. Americans have fat people, fat chickens, fat cows, and fat dogs.

I totally forgot about the English! Alright, so Julie and I expect to teach today, but we didn't. Today had nothing to do with the stress of organizing the ceremony. Eliane had something else on her mind and she wouldn't tell us about it. She and her staff were crying together and they were all silent when Julie asked, in French, what the matter was. I scared everyone by remembering that the doctor had been to visit early this morning for one of the girls and I drew the worst conclusion. I thoroughly scared Julie before we reasoned that she wouldn't keep that from Bob. But we didn't know what, so no English. This afternoon Bob sent us over to look at the ovens that Eliane had in the old orphanage and to ask what she wanted for the new one. The old orphanage has a traditional oven and stove, a charcoal oven, reflector ovens, and a gas-burning oven with gigantic burners. The latter allows for huge pots to be cooked, so Eliane desired this one. When we returned, still confused, without solving the mystery of the crying staff, I was greeted with a call from Gary, "Amber!" My brain moved pretty fast from ladder to tank to their idea. Yes. They wanted me to climb into the tank and clean it. Of course, I said, "No way" in the beginning, but I allowed myself to be talked into it, especially since Thu was my backup and he was not too keen on the idea. So into the water tank I went and wiped the filth out of it. It was a good thing I did too, because the top and the bottom were disgusting and the tank was for drinking water. Then the heat of the day struck and Julie and I found ourselves sitting on the curb inside the walls, sipping water and wishing it was Limonade Couronne, talking about celibacy and the religious life. I was trying to explain how religious life is not a "running away from", but a "running towards" something, that it isn't a sacrifice of happiness or marriage. You give up traditional marriage, yes, but in favor of something higher, a mystical marriage, with Christ as your spouse. I suspect that this is part of why I am in Haiti; God is helping me shape my ideas about religious life by making me explain it to someone else, someone whose background is different than mine.

After this, we heard the street kids again and I asked Julie if we were alive enough to play. She decided we were, so I pulled out my phrase, delivered more confidently this time, "Ou ta renmen jew avek mwen?" They did, so we sat in the library and started with Sorry, since we were now wary of UNO. Those kids are so smart; after a few rounds they caught on quickly and played Sorry almost perfectly. I really liked it when they could call out, "Lakay ou!", mimicking me, meaning someone made a pawn home. Our drive back to the monastery had just Thu and me in the back. We felt a little abandoned by Gary, but too bad for him. He missed out on Amber's latest sermon. I was surprised that both Thu and Julie asked me questions and advice. I am so far from wisdom that it isn't funny. You know, before I left, I prayed to the Holy Spirit for the gift of tongues, but I didn't imagine that He would choose English. The Holy Spirit delivered to Thu, who evidently needed it, a discourse on the Church,

how it is always slow to change, the trouble with the silent majority and how it isolates us into believing we are alone in the fight, how the zeal is there, how the Church must and will be reformed, from the inside, slowly, through us and our children, and how glorious the inevitable triumph of the Church will be. I sort of took a breath at the end and had the peculiar feeling of coming back to myself.

Sometime during the ride, we made a stop for sugarcane so after dinner, we were given some cane to chew. I don't understand why anyone would prefer chewing tobacco over sugarcane, which is far more delicious than refined sugar and is fun to tear off with your teeth. I think it was today that I expressed my desire to climb the coconut tree, which Bob belayed, and my desire for a machete. His eyes got wide with that. The next second, however, you could tell that the idea was growing on him. He said, "OK, I'll see what we can do about that." Bob is like a grandpa, giving me what my parents won't! We did the rosary again in the evening and Julie and I listened to chatty Thu and Gary. The two of us swapped stories of vermin, reminding each other not to look at the spots on the wall. After awhile, everything looks like a roach.

Saturday-February 22-Julie and I both made it to Matens this morning and had some delicious eggs for breakfast. Right before breakfast, Julie and I met Thu waiting next to the food and we had a discussion on Thu's plans. He wants to be a parish priest, I think, but not go diocesan. He wants to go through the single Latin Rite seminary, in California, I think, that has an acronym like FSCCB because he loves the Latin Mass.

In the middle of a discussion of Divine Mercy, which spawned from everyone's sad pagan relations, and as I was relating the promise of Jesus about the conversion prayer, we made a stop in the KIA. This not being unusual, we thought nothing of it until the sight of Bob and Bertone thirty seconds later drove all thoughts besides "YES!" out of my head. Bob passed into the cage a used machete, a 20 inch long orc blade of sugarcane chopping awesomeness! I was extremely thrilled to have my one souvenir wish granted, presumably in one of the fastest transactions in history: we stopped, bought a machete, and all were back in the van in about 90 seconds. Thu was tying the back door shut with the yellow cord, when, suddenly, Bob floored the accelerator and we lurched forward out of a pothole. Thu flew into the back of the cage, Julie flew to the back, I flew to the back, and my machete, which I was holding, came with me. Poor Thu lost a year of his life the second that machete tip made contact with the base of his skull. Providence had other plans for my favorite pre-seminarian and the same fact I was disappointed about a moment ago turned to shaky thanksgiving: the machete was blunt. Thu was justifiably shaken and had reason to be angry with me, though it was an accident, because I did not really get how scary that was for him. I am an insensitive arse, for adopting a "No harm done" attitude about ten seconds later. What a jerk I am. What's worse: I have a machete.

The procession and the crowning of Mary were moved to Saturday because the ceremony on Thursday was too much. So we spent the morning making flower crowns, instead of teaching English. Yeah, forget English, right? No one needs that. Actually, I think today we finally discovered what it was that upset Eliane and her staff, reducing them to tears. It turns out that Eliane received \$450 to buy chairs for the new orphanage. Eliane sent her brother into Potoprens to buy chairs. He bought 15 chairs and stole the remainder of the money, splitting it



with another man who was in on the deal. Eliane took this betrayal very much to heart and felt that it disgraced her and the orphanage. Kathy, when she found out, was understandably angry and told Eliane that that was all the money; Kathy stayed behind yesterday. Obviously, this cast doubt upon the relationship between the mission and the orphanage and it took Bob assuring her that everything was alright before it was.

OK, so flower crowns: It turns out that Kathy was the best at this. We used pipe cleaners and the flowers from Mass to construct four crowns, one for the statue outside, one for the statue inside, and two for the girls who carried them. Julie, Thu, me, Daflin, Roslin, and two other girls were in on the construction, until Kathy saved the day, even getting some vine outside the walls to dress them up. Daflin ordered Thu around like her slave, a thought which he only dared express in English. It was obvious that she liked Thu quite a bit.

That became even more obvious during the games that Thu began afterward: Jenga. They caught on to this game very quickly, but either they didn't understand structures and weight distribution or they were risk-takers, removing blocks from the bottom primarily, causing the spectators and players alike to gasp. Daflin insisted that Thu played and leaned on him, while Abibi insisted that I play and leaned on me. Like I said, the American bubble does not exist in Haiti and you can't think too much of it. I really like Abibi Sarangie. Poor thing, I was unaware of the Haitian custom of naming last names first, so I called her Soulangie for days before one of her sisters enlightened me. Stupid American. Bob brought us ice cream for lunch, which was awesome and Haitian. I ate Rum Raisin, Strawberry, Chocolate and Colossal, which nobody could identify except by labeling it tasty. Abibi and I shared some. Then Alicia and Abibi caught sight of the dictionaries and then, using the dictionaries, she asked me if I could dance. My jaw dropped (inside, not outside). Of all the questions to ask! Where is Courtney when you need her? With considerable embarrassment and great foreboding, I replied, "Mwen pa danse." Then, on the spur of the instant, I had another one of those, "Do it. You're in Haiti" moments. I added, "Ou aprann mwen danse?", which comes out to "You teach me to dance?" I figured that it was more embarrassing not to know how than to humiliate myself by learning. And guess what? Abibi was game.

Abibi and Alicia showed me what to do. I learned the liturgical dance for the Gloria, which was perfect: Haitian, Catholic, easy, and very catchy. After I looked like a fool and did a lot of laughing with Abibi and Alicia as they struggled to teach the stupid American, I wanted to learn the lyrics of the song, so Abibi and Alicia both obliged, each recording the Kreyol Gloria:

Gloriya! Gloriya! Gloriya! Gloriya!

Gloriya ann rele viv Bondye nan syel la (Gloria let's praise God who lives in heaven)

Gloriya ann rele viv pou Jezi Kri (Gloria let's praise Jesus Christ)

Gloriya ann rele viv pou Lesprisen an (Gloria, let's praise the Holy Spirit)

Gloriya viv Bondye pou toutan gentan (Gloria to the God who lives forever)

Li kreye syel la ak te a se poun te jwi (He created heaven and earth for everyone)

La biye yo avek bel fle se poun te jwi (He made beautiful flowers for everyone)

Se pou nou li te fe tout sa alelouya (He created everybody for everybody)

Poun te kapab viv byen alez

Bondye te la te ba nou Jezi Kris el pitit li (God gave us His only child, Jesus Christ)

Poun te kapab genyen lavi poun te sove (to give us life eternal)

Se lik mouton sakrifye alelouya (as the sacrificial lamb alleluia)

Li bay la vil pou denye moun. (given for everyone)

I was delighted to have the lyrics, let me tell you, and intended to look them up when I returned with Google Translate, which is terrible, by the way. Next thing I knew, Alicia and Abibi was dragging me outside. It was clear that they were taking me to see Bertone, obviously to get him to translate. I was a little frightened by the prospect because so far Bertone was stoic and, to me, kind of scary and unfriendly. I do not understand patriarchal Haiti enough to know prudence, so I did nothing, rather impolitely. Thu and Gary were a little braver and then Julie and Bob knew him pretty well.

OK, so the girls made it clear that they wanted him to translate. I stood there looking apologetic. But once they got across the request, Bertone smiled, bigger than I had ever seen him. That made me braver and I showed enthusiasm for learning Kreyol, as he walked me through the lyrics line by line, sometimes pausing to think about how to translate and always patiently waiting for my Vigorous Nod O' Comprehension. In short, he was excited that I was excited to learn Creole. I particularly liked the part where he got to "mouton" and didn't know the word in English. He asked Alicia, who looked stumped for a moment, and then dashed away. She returned carrying one of the new statues in the chapel: Jesus the Good Shepherd. Bertone pointed to the lamb in His arms and cried "Mouton!" "Lamb!" I cried, equally excited. Before the girls dragged me back inside, Bertone told me that it makes him happy to see me and the girls dance together. I told him I stink at dancing, but I suspect that what won over Bertone was my desire to learn what Haiti has to teach, rather than teaching Haiti. Since then, Bertone has been my friend.

I was dragged off shortly thereafter to play UNO with Nerline and Dada. However, this was interrupted by the procession, which Thu was placed in charge of. He is discerning the priesthood so he took it very seriously. Thu is an engineer, so he even had a diagram for the procession path, complete with arrows and X's. Gary *had* to say something about how he

wasn't sure we were supposed to bow to anyone but God, so then Thu was concerned about his plan, which included a procession, a coronation, and then each pair of girls bowing, before proceeding to the chapel. I am not sure why he asked me, but he did. St. Louis was pleased for the opportunity to speak. I told him that people bow to each other, they bow to the Queen of England, and they bow to the Lord, for the same reason: to show respect. Our Lord respected His mother; He will not be angered if we bow to Our Lady. The devil tries to stop devotion to Mary by claiming falsely that it takes away from the honor due to Our Lord. Even the kings on earth, he says, demanded that their mothers be respected. Could we dare to say that Our Lord, as the best of sons, would not honor His Mother more than they?

Because we had not returned for lunch to the monastery and could not change into something nice, I was ashamed to be in the procession, but I followed Thu as moral support. The rosary was in French and interspersed with Marian hymns in Creole, as led by Eliane. This was concluded by Eliane calling on Julie's to give a speech in French. Julie has a lot of gumption, I think, and is a pretty decent public speaker. For one thing, we were all tearing up, because she was. And for another, I was hauled up there with her, probably for moral support, because all I could do was smile and look awkward, and I could appreciate the difficulty of making a speech in a foreign language. Bob and Kathy insisted on a group photo in front of the orphanage and then we rushed out of there to get to vigil Mass at Palmiste A Vin. Julie and I rushed, only to wait for Mass. The priest's ride was late. We listened to lots of hymns in Creole and even participated when we could figure out which page they were on. Mass was just to the right and down the stairs of our room, in the brothers' classroom, but Julie and I hurried up to the front gate and did a little panicking, hustling, and application of DEET as we worked our way in a big circle, passing a peacock, to where we started, more or less. I was very hungry at this point and Mass seemed extra long because I didn't understand any of the readings or the homily, though Pere Bleu was very fervent. I loved how seriously the congregation took Mass. Everyone was in their best and participated and received the Eucharist on the tongue. Dinner was worth waiting for: a delicious meat dumpling soup. I felt a little bad because I had seconds. Hopefully, I made up for it by sharing the peanut butter M&Ms, which the Lord graciously and miraculously preserved, through 95-110 degree heat and many miles of travel, in a pristine condition that one would expect after just buying them at the store in the U.S. I don't think the brothers or Pere Bleu ever experienced that hydrogenated peanut butter chocolate candy combo. I passed them around once and everybody took two or three, clearly illustrating their unfamiliarity with M&Ms. Then I passed them around AGAIN, despite my temptation, and there wasn't any left. Thus it was that God taught the Haitians that peanut butter M&Ms are delicious. At dinner, I believe Thu and I disagreed on something, finally, about free will and how far grace could go. I may have to think more on this; I might be wrong. Don't forget the rosary.

Sunday-February 23-I suspected that the schedule might be different on Sundays, like it is at the communities I visited, so Julie and I didn't get up for Matens. Instead Frere Jonas gave us a botany lesson. First, he showed us the coffee plant, explaining how cooler climates grow better coffee, so mountains are the only places for coffee in Haiti. Then I hugged a tree. Of course, it was the cacao plant. Thanks be to God; He loves us and gave us chocolate. Unfortunately, it is not cacao season and the store is out of chocolate wine. Curses. The biggest tree I'd seen in

Haiti stood in that circle clearing behind the chapel, where the brothers say Matens. It is a mapah tree and looks like it belongs in the rainforest. Lastly, we saw some grenadine vines. Gary, who either is or thinks he is a botanist, was loving it. Oh, I lost an argument to him. I have been deceived by Hollywood all these years and was unable to recognize a coconut when I saw it.

Julie and I were a little skeptical when we were told that today was actually an English day, but the kids did turn up on time. Because it was Sunday, kids were filtering in and out and the environment was not as disciplined as tomorrow's classes were. All the kids regardless of age were in the chapel. I'm so glad Julie was there to help. She took the hardest parts: getting started and explanations were extremely tough. I don't know about Julie, but my courage was failing me, standing up there with little Creole and a whole room of girls, from 18 to 2 years old. Fortunately, Julie did the intro: learn English, get candy! It's a good solid pitch, right there! So I plunged into the first Dialog that I prepared. At first, it was really rough, because I was sort of uncertain about my Creole. My hesitation on expressions like "Di m'", where I was looking for comprehension before I continued, confused them a little. But overall, the format, which devolved into "Mwen" – the American thumps herself with emphasis – "I", worked pretty well. Repetition helped clear up the confusion and the girls, once they picked up on the pattern, were quick. We covered a lot in those hours, hopefully positively reinforced by sirets. Probably the best part was hearing a huge collective chorus of "I understand!" after the prompt "Mwen konprann." Eventually, my voice was cracking with the effort of speaking up over everyone and Gary took over, teaching them a song "Yes, we have no bananas! We have no bananas today!" that gets stuck in my head even to this day. Obviously, they have heard Jingle Bells before, because Gary only got the first bar out before they had the tune. Of course, I have no Creole to know if the lyrics were a translation or not. Since it was Sunday, Julie prepared a treat for the kids: dirt and worms in Haiti. I am not sure if they understood the concept, because the dirt in Haiti looks like concrete mix for the most part (though it was the drought season) and I never saw any worms, but...it was delicious, evidently, and I KNOW the girls appreciated the thought and effort Julie put into it. Thu and I played games at the tables while we waited for Julie and her helpers: Gerline and Defline to come around. Then followed a mad blur of opening bubbles, playing UNO, playing Sorry, catching Frisbees, and getting pulled away by various kids to listen to an alien stream of Creole. Again, just smile and nod! I do remember clearly one of the times I was approached and pulled away. One of the older girls, about fifteen maybe, whose name I learned was Bibi, asked for a drink, so I got her one out of the cooler, hoping that this wouldn't start a riot, and then she talked to me in Creole in a quiet and timid voice. I did the best I could, but I didn't understand and it sounded important and she showed me a band-aid. I fetched Julie, who translated. She also told me that Bibi is special needs, presumably due to physical or emotional trauma. Eliane found her after the earthquake. She couldn't speak. It was only several years later that she began to. Now she is in the second grade. However, tomorrow's lesson proved that she is very quick to learn. She understood what I was trying to do with the English and only once got the answer incorrect.

I admit that I was a little relieved to get back in the bus and take a deep breath from Frisbee and chaos. However, by the time we got back to the monastery, Thu and I were raring to go on

what Bob described as “a brutal hike”. At 1500 we met Bertone, who introduced us to the machete man who was leading us to the well. I began to get excited and pleased that I brought extra water. Julie insisted I take granola bars and fruit snacks. Because we skipped lunch, this was a good thing, though I felt bad snacking the whole time. So we went off path down the mountain, passing shacks and fruit trees. Now the mountain was covered in this dense forest and our guide, who was Providentially wearing red, had to carve us a path with his razor sharp machete. I have a confused impression of foliage and sweat and toilsome struggling against the vines when Bob, who was taking up the back end of the pack, suddenly called out, “Where’s Gary?” The forest was so thick that it took us ten minutes to find him. He had wandered off again, taking pictures of the strangest fruit we had ever seen: a dragonfruit, which looks unbelievable in bright pink and green spikes. It was no wonder that we never saw it coming. Bertone was the first to hear it and he called out to the machete man, who immediately dropped his machete and climbed a coconut tree in a flash. I never saw him do it, because I was then fixated on the snuffling and moving undergrowth that spoke of a monstrous beast. All those years of fencing came back in one petrified instant and I knew that a machete was better than no machete. That was confirmed when I saw the first glimpse of a gigantic boar. Actually, all I saw was the tusks. All I could think of was the tusks in my internal organs. But I needn’t have worried. It charged Gary, who automatically raised his camera for a picture, and the next thing I knew--there was a cloud of dust. It was Providence that killed the beast, because I don’t recall throwing the machete. But the carcass was there to tell the tale. The machete was buried between its eyes, which were now blank and staring. I told you you’d never believe what happened in Haiti. To complete my fiction, I will say that Bertone called his buds on his cell phone and they came and dragged the boar up the mountain, where it was roasted in celebration, along with mangoes and peppers.

Alright, so that whole thing was a black lie. The mountain was very open and rather like the hills in Germany, because they had crops growing on them with harvesters using machetes to chop the sugarcane. The vista was incredible. The machete man hardly had to use his machete at all and no one got lost. We saw people balancing buckets on their heads, a man and a woman. Bertone asked me, laughing, if I could do it. He must know me pretty well, because I was thinking of trying. I told him I needed one of the hats and he replied that you don’t need one to balance. It is just to cushion the skull. Oh. We checked out the wells, one of which had a tripod over it, not for buckets, but for men. Men dug it and you have to be able to get them out again. We were investigating these water sources for the monastery, which was some several hundred feet above us. We hiked back up the mountain and we briefly met Bertone’s brother, who Bob claims was pushed off a roof by Bertone and that’s how he broke his arm. Bertone says he just removed the ladder for a jest and his brother broke his arm by trying to climb down without one. Bertone identified for us the papaya and avocado trees. Then we all went back inside the compound, Thu and I giving Bob a hard time because the hike wasn’t brutal at all (we were asking for more), and up to the top of the monastery to see the water tank. There I saw my first calbas. The tree grows massive soccer-ball sized fruits directly out of its trunk, rather than on the branches. I had to ask Bertone. Thu asked, “Can you eat it?” Bertone hastily told him that you cannot. Calbas is poisonous; you use it to make bowls, not eat it. Bowls? My ears perked up. Make bowls? Bertone could sense the enthusiasm and

he offered, "Tomorrow I will make bowls for you." Bob disapproved. We had plans for tomorrow that did not involve making calbas bowls. Bertone capitulated, "We make bowls today." I was so thoroughly excited that I kicked a dead calbas. It hurt, because it was hard. Obviously, it would make a good bowl. The brothers sitting at the tables on the top observed, "Calbas." Thu replied, "We're gonna eat it!" The brothers' eyes got big and they waved their arms, crying, "No, no, you don't eat it!" For a pre-seminarian, he sure is a stinker. Funny, though, even if he isn't helping the Stupid American...So we found a saw and we gathered around the side of Bob and Kathy's guest house, towards the technical school, and we sliced them open to reveal what looked like grayish-white spoiled oatmeal. It smelled weird; it felt weird. The juice and slime, which was clear, dried brown and does not come out, something that we only found out later. Ruined clothes were nothing compared to the glory of a handmade Haitian kui. (Although, when I wore my stained shirt to fencing, I observed that it looks like I got stabbed and then the blood dried.) We scraped and scraped those calbas. Gary, Thu, Kathy, Bob, Julie, Bertone, and I were all scraping and scraping out calbas junk. Bertone told us you could carve your name into the bottom. I wanted to write "Made by Amber" in Creole on the bottom, so Bertone held an impromptu Creole lesson using a Sharpie and a plastic cup. Mwen te fè kui. I made bowls. Mwen te fè yon kui. I made a bowl. Li fèt pa Ambè. Made by Amber. Julie and I were excited to have our names Haitianized. Julie is Jili. Bertone also taught us a proverb which he used a lot whenever I did anything: Twòp grate kui konn krève kui. He couldn't explain it exactly in English, but Julie think it means, "Don't push your luck."

I felt no remorse whatsoever when I crushed the roach under my heel. Actually, Julie and I were in the bedroom with the light on, knowing that the light normally keeps them at bay. I went to go out the door and then I froze, because just inside the doorway was the most massive roach outside of the Underland. I debated quickly. I really did not want to squish it, but I didn't want it to get away either. What if Julie saw it and she couldn't sleep because I was too wussy to smush it? I went for it, but it ran, so I ended up stretching out and more sliding on top of it than crushing it. That was extremely nasty. After that, Julie and I fell asleep almost immediately because we were so wiped.

Monday-February 24-This morning I did Matens and taped it for the audio, which explains why the video part looks accidental. We had goat soup for breakfast, which was delicious in spite of the bones and something that looked suspiciously like an intestine, until I remarked it was hard. Thu was thinking of going hungry because that was it. He braved the goat, in the end. Thanks to Bertone, without whom we would never be so foolish as to stop in the market, we were introduced to brown sugar cakes called dous makoss. They are delicious. Bertone gave me a look when I said I needed ten. I never got the chance to tell him that I intended to share them; I never got the chance to share them, but more on that later. We stopped at Disciplin, where I was persuaded to pick up the third world iron. I knew somebody who would really like something as strange and random as that. We cried out in chorus again with "Where's Gary?" when he vanished across the street. Another stop was at the Boulangerie Eva for grapefruit jelly to go on our Haitian PB & J. Then it was off to the orphanage, where Julie and I found we were teaching English. First, we had the 5<sup>th</sup> grade class, together with their

teachers. I was a bit discouraged when I saw that the participation was far less lively, because their teachers were there. Julie had already explained that discipline in Haitian schools is far stricter than in America. One girl, however, was not bashful and quickly earned a lot of tootsie rolls, which she kept in her skirt. I learned that there is no concept of hand-raising and that it was far easier to pose a question to each girl in turn than to pose it to the whole group, because that meant chaos. After an hour of an exhausting, but rewarding English lesson, I had to turn around and do it again for 4<sup>th</sup> grade...and 3<sup>rd</sup> grade the next hour....and preschool the next hour...until I was exhausted and tired of shouting "Mwen konprann!" at the top of my lungs. What a relief...I was done...oh no...another class!?! You can't be serious...oh, but Julie was. Oh, let it be the end! 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade was last. It was worth it, because Shelove and Bibi were in this class and they are pleasures to teach. The headmaster stayed all the way through. Julie had his personality nailed in a minute. He loves being involved and being the boss. So he helped me explain the troublesome issue of communicating which language I wanted the responses in. For instance, I would say, "Mwen se..." and instead of providing "I am" the kids would get confused and complete it with "Ameriken!" So after five consecutive hours of English lessons, I was finally relieved. Julie was occupied most of the time with Bob's assignment of taking pictures of all the kids individually and getting names and ages and talking to the teacher in French and discovering things about their curriculum. She discovered a very important thing: the way I was teaching (which I copied from Pimsleur) is exactly the way that Haitians learn everything. The headmaster was very into it and excited about it because it was familiar and he was convinced that it works. This will be critical when we develop a sustainable English program. Julie found out all of the important stuff, like whether they have a VHS player or CD player, what their textbooks look like, etc.

I think my favorite part of the lessons was when I was in the middle of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, I think, and I turned around and there was Bob, kneeling down with his hands outstretched and a boo-boo lip on his face. With the laughter of all the girls ringing in my ears, I prompted him, "Ou konprann..." He didn't know the correct translation, but I gave him some tootsie rolls anyway.

After class, the groups surrounded me and supplied the answers to questions about what a hat was in Kreyol and so on, which made me feel akin to a really dumb celebrity. I used the Haitian-English dictionaries to communicate with Nicodem and Junior, who were coveting the flashlights that Gary brought. I tried to ensure that they were left with the boys. Since this was our last day in Haiti, I wished to say goodbye to the Jean Baptistes and to dispose of the last sirets and Hot Wheels in my possession. So I asked Julie if she would walk with me on the way to the new orphanage, where the rest of team was headed in the KIA. Julie called upon Dafline and we ended up with a train of the girls following us. The poor Jean-Baptistes were not so much visited as invaded. I explained, in very poor Kreyol, that we were going back to America tomorrow and distributed my goodies and turned to go. But Manman protested that they were changing the baby. I was pleased; I love holding babies. However, it did get a little awkward after some time, wondering how long changing that baby would take and, after all, we had to go to meet Bob. Who knows what he would do if we didn't return? But finally the baby was brought out. To my surprise, this was not Louis or Cavince, but a third baby whom I had never laid eyes upon.

It was no surprise that no sooner was the child in my arms than he fell asleep. Julie's attributed it to my natural gifts with babies, but I think, practically, it had more to do with the intense midafternoon heat. Of course, I was delighted to hold a baby and I had even looked up Kreyol for "adorable", so I could tell the mother, who was standing there, that her child was a "tres bel pitit". I asked his name. Wensley, she told me. It sounds very Haitian when they say it, so it took me a minute to figure it out.

The mother watched me for a minute and tried to wake the baby up. Wensley stubbornly refused to wake up. She began talking to me in French and gesturing in the direction of the orphanage. I had a feeling of foreboding, which the heat deadened. I have observed before that the heat shuts the brain down. You can't think very well. So I called upon the Indispensable Julie to translate, while I began talking to Wensley. I told him solemnly he was an adorable baby. Julie, meanwhile, was looking confused and asked about four times for clarification, double checking with Daflin.

Then, weakly, Julie informed me, in the middle of one variation of "You are adorable", that the mother was asking me to take the baby home with me. She was gesturing towards the United States. My brain, which was already feverish because of the heat, was stupefied by the sudden and urgent presentation of a terrible temptation.

I love babies. The strongest desire I have ever had is to have a baby of my own, not necessarily the fruit of my womb. Here was a baby, offered to me freely. It was a terrible choice, in spite of the fact that there was no choice. There seemed to be, but it was an illusion. I wanted to take the baby, for selfishness and unselfishness combined forces on this point. I wanted to give him everything. But I couldn't. I could not take Wensley from his mother, even if she offered him to me, even if the government would let me...which Haiti would only permit if there were papers and trials and \$15,000 in a bribe. I could not, even if I had a father to offer little Wensley, because if my dad has taught me anything it is the importance of having a real father. I felt numb when I gave Wensley back to his mother. I felt numb when I could only repeat, "I can't take him." I couldn't even give a reason to the mother because I lacked the ability. And as I was walking away, I had the nasty feeling that I was walking away from my dream, which I had to force out. For days afterward, the devil and my mind rebuked me for my lack of charity and generosity and with the very real fact that Wensley had no future in Haiti. This fact is obvious to anyone who visits. Wensley was by no means a starving baby; on the contrary, he was a well-fed, well-loved infant. The mother was trying to give him a future, which she thought that she could only give him by giving him away.

This made me think about the situation of the orphans at Notre Dame de la Charite. These girls are amazing and beautiful and smart and full of life and innocence and simplicity in a way that children in the United States are not, for the most part. More than half of them are up for adoption. Their futures are even bleaker than Wensley's, because Wensley is a boy and has a family. The situation for them will be hard, because jobs are scarce for women in Haitian patriarchal society. The alternative to a job is marriage or the streets. On the other hand, being a boy and an orphan isn't much better. Gavin is the only boy at Notre Dame de la Charite orphanage and he has three years to find a new home. When he is eight, he has to be moved,



either to a home in the states or the other orphanage which sends its kids to Notre Dame to get their only meal a day.

On my way into the old orphanage compound, Abibi met us. She grabbed my hand and as we went inside she asked me another question that was a first in my experience: Was the Asian guy next to me my brother? I suspect Daflin put her up to it. Thu thought that was pretty funny and later on, when I needed something out of the KIA, I asked Thu to accompany me outside since he was handy and was clearly having way too much fun using his Haitian translator to talk to the girls. Of course, he would; after all, older brothers do that sort of thing. I had a passing regret that I never had an older brother, but then I would probably not be the boss. I retrieved the Hot Wheels I left in my backpack and gave them out to the two boys. Gavin had his "bleu machin" and Mikessie somehow appropriated the orange one. Mom's idea was a hit; no sooner had I made the highway in the dirt inside in the compound than we heard the sounds of crazy Haitian driving, with the long horns. Alicia ordered an impromptu performance of the dance I had learned. I'll tell you, a week ago, if you had ordered me to perform a local Haitian dance all by myself, for a large audience of Haitian teenagers, I would NOT have had the guts to do it.

All of us were saddened by the farewell and I speak from the heart when I say that I was hurting. There was an empty spot there. I was not the only one. We made a stop at the monastery store, which is primarily stocked with liquor. Hard liquor puts the hate in Haiti, in every outlandish flavor you can think of: citronelle, basil, cinnamon, mint, cacao, tamarin, coconut, mango, banana...why did Bertone have to tell me that the brothers were out of chocolate wine? Oh, I desired chocolate wine! Instead, I bought kasav in the sugar and salt varieties, grapefruit jelly, a large jar of honey, and three bottles of Haitian vanilla extract (made by the brothers; I am giving one to Lindsey, my twelve-year old friend who bakes). Shortly thereafter, Julie agreed to accompany me to the coconut tree so that I could illegally climb it. I got about a third of the way up before I couldn't get any farther. It did not have anything to do with upper body strength; that tree trunk was so slippery I couldn't get a purchase. Julie took my picture and then looking down, I noticed that the brothers who were in the chapel had come out to laugh. Frere said to me, shaking his head, "You do not climb the coconut. It is too slippery." None of them had ever climbed one. At least I tried. Julie and I starved. Bertone said, "Twop grate kui konn kreve kui." We had our last dinner in Haiti and said goodbye to Bertone, paying him well for putting up with us and helping us to make our kui hats. Julie and I are thinking of telling everyone back home that calbas are for making hats out of. It would be a very plausible lie. They wear wonderfully. 2 or 3 roaches later, we said our last rosary together. I emphasize again how much I enjoyed the nightly rosary. Julie and I swore that Haiti has done what God neglected to do in the beginning: made us sisters. There are some things that you just cannot go through together without getting close. Haiti is one of them.

Tuesday-February 25-Julie and I happily saw our last roach this morning. The brothers considerably turned on the generator so that we could maneuver at 430. Fortunately, we packed the night before, so all I had to do with dress and brush teeth, reapply DEET, and throw my BOUNCE sheets back into the box. It was still dark when we left. Only Thu and I were in the back of the cage and we probably got the best views of the ten villages, the national theater

(which speaks volumes of the country's poverty; my elementary school on the base was nicer), the pigs. I am very glad that I did not see the body lying in the road that Julie reported. At the airport, we picked up souvenirs last minute and went through security twice. Gary was unable to sneak his Haitian hammer past security. Julie and I bought snacks in the airport, particularly a Vanille Sport Drink that was tasty, which was coupled with kasav and a croissant. I saved the peach nectar and the Langue de Bouef (beef tongue cookies) for later. The most notable part of the return flight was that behind me, on the plane, was an American couple who had adopted a small Haitian boy, who was both physically and mentally handicapped. He was making gurgling baby noises and had oxygen tubes coming out of his nose. But this kid was the happiest child I have ever seen. From when the plane started moving to the end of the flight, he never stopped smiling and laughing. It was obvious to me that this boy was a huge blessing to his new parents. I wanted Wensley. Also, Julie and I had a discussion about her work situation with Northrup Grumman that kicked off a quest for a new job that has progressed to this day. Julie never told me that she interrogated terrorists. We also ate a group lunch at Chili's. I ate so many chips and salsa. I love this group. When we finally returned to Huntsville at 1100pm, I was wiped, but that only made Thu's suitcase even funnier. My suitcase was so heavy in PAP that I moved some of the heavier items, like the iron, into his empty suitcase. We opened it up to reveal every one of those brown sugar cakes crumbled up all through his clothes, mixed with the liquor that had also broken. He is going to smell like sugar and booze at work tomorrow. So on April 1, I finally finish my account of the February trip. Ha! Bring on the next one!