

Haiti, Part 1

Hello Fayerweather!

We do have email, but not all the computers are able to log on and things are a little hectic with each of us doing different things and going to our host families at slightly different times, so I asked that those in the group email me and I will forward their emails when I get to a computer.

The trip from Boston to Haiti was uneventful. The only glitch was that American Airlines took extra time to balance all the luggage in the plane- we suspect because of all our extra stuff we were bringing to the school! Actually, it is very common for family traveling back to Haiti to bring goods so I imagine everyone had the same idea.

We were met at the airport by Chris and her daughter, Julia, along with a friend. Connie had asked that we take a taptap to our first place. A tap tap is a converted mini pickup which has had the roof raised and the tailgate converted so you can climb in. We filled it with luggage and people and headed to Chris's friend's house about an hour outside of Port au Prince. I was in the back of the taptap and therefore technically was outside of the truck. The roads were well paved, with dozens of people walking along the road. As darkness fell you could see lots of little shops and houses that were also roadside to light oil lamps and candles. Once outside the city, we began to climb and the road eventually became dirt and quite rough. Eventually we arrived at our guest's house- an American couple who has lived in Haiti for 24 years. They live in a joint compound with a Haitian family, working to bridge Haiti and the US. It was a simple, but beautiful place. What struck me most was seeing an ibook under a grass hut, with a generator buzzing in the background.

Dinner was a typical Haitian meal of polenta, beans and stewed meat. In the morning we had the ultimate kid meal- spaghetti, bread and peanut butter, fresh fruit (and super sweet coffee with milk right from the cow)

The 2nd day, we headed for Matenwa. Connie had told us it was an hour ride, then a 2 hour ferry ride and another couple hours on a "bumpy road". While the first ride in a nice chartered bus was as expected, the ferry ride got a little wild- the wind picked up and the 2 story ferry was drench with sea spray. We didn't mind at first for we had been sitting in 90 degree heat for an hour before departure. But soon the spray began to soak our bags that were on deck- including the books we were bringing! Most large bag were brought below, but a few of us remained up top to cover the books with a large blue tarp. It was like sitting in the front row at Seaworld for the net 45 minutes - with a dozen dolphins riding our bow for a few minutes too!

We disembarked, having partially dried and thinking we could relax.... All the bags were loaded into a pick up and all the people in the back of another one!

The trip to the school was over two hours long. An hour into the trip the "road" became more of an idea than an actual road- more like a strip of area that did not have trees. At times it was so rocky and bumpy, I could not imagine the truck could pass.

Having made such a difficult journey actually seeing Mantenwa was literally like arriving at a Buddhist temple on the top of the Himalayas- How in the world did Chris manage to get the materials for a school this size to this location?! And of course now with internet!

Today we spent visiting classrooms in the morning and teaching Mantenwa teachers how to use manipulatives in the afternoon. In speaking with the oldest students, we asked how this school was different than other Haitian schools. (the question we always ask at FSS) They responded that teachers listened to them and did not beat them- further driving home how unique and incredible this place is. While unpacking the supplies, the teachers were enamored with the books the 1/2 classes made that were translated into Creole.

At my guest house, I made friends with a 9 year old boy in the morning. My interpreter was out so we did the best we could. Five minutes into our exchange he showed me his funny face- flipping his eyelids inside out. I countered with my crooked lip trick and we were friends! So 600 miles off the coast of FL, we are a world apart, yet connected by deeply felt values and universal truths- making faces is fun!

Off to dinner.

Cheers,

Ed

Haiti- Part 2

Hi Everyone,

It looks like everyone is either too tired or too busy to send the note again so you get me again! Firstly, due to the connection and all, it is somewhat difficult to reread what I type and correct typos and such so bear with my spelling etc.

The teachers and I have been noticing both the similarities and differences of kids here and at FSS and the States in general. One big difference is the amount of freedom that kids have. For instance, during recess, some kids are playing soccer- with the ball flying over the wall and down the road, or right by the head of someone and into the tree with no teachers supervising- absolutely no orange vests!

At Connie's guest house she watched a six year old peel an orange with a huge kitchen knife absolutely perfectly. Kids also walk around with razor blades which they use to sharpen their pencils with- they scrape the blade towards their hands! There is also a 20

foot tree right inside the school gate. At recess you can see 3-4 kids jump up the 6 foot wall and then climb into the branches to hang out. Each child is also required to bring a gallon of water to school each day which is put in to a large reservoir that is used for drinking, cooking, and filling the fish pond that is behind the school. (The fish pond water is then used to fertilize the experimental gardens each class has - something many of the teachers here want to emulate at FSS) . Since there is no running water, each morning all the kids head to the nearest ravine which is quite steep (pictures when we return)- of course with very few adults around.

On the other hand, there are many runny noses and we have heard about some students dying over the last year, said in a matter of fact way, giving the impression that this is not uncommon. The nearest clinic is 40 minutes away by foot with no guarantee that a doctor will be in.

We are off to our evening gathering. Tomorrow we will share some of the lessons we taught today which did reveal the universality of kids' curiosity and ability to cooperate given the opportunity.

Before coming here, Rob and I had begun talks about how to improve de-icing the walk, but now I realize we were on the right track and in fact probably need to water the sidewalk for good measure. :) I hope this email encourages you to ask your kids to help with the dishes and put away their laundry!

Good night.

Ed

Haiti- Part 3

Hi Everyone,

Today, I began my day at 6am walking 1.5 miles to the water source- a spring - with the 14 year old from our host family. She carried a 5 gallon water cooler jug and I two - 1 gallon jugs. Upon filling the jug, she placed it on her head and proceeded to walk up the steep rocky path in flip flops- with no hands on the jug.

Yesterday each of us met with a teacher at our grade level. As a past math and science teacher, I met with the upper grade math teachers who were interested in learning about using manipulatives to teach fractions and decimals. Since they had been taught to memorize algorithms themselves, it was interesting to see them grapple with why these formulas really work. Meg, Kate and Lauren met with the teachers in the younger grades as well to talk about math in the lower grades. On our tour the first day, it was wild, shocking and wonderful to see 4 and 5 year olds in the most remote part of Haiti, doing free play with Duplos (large Legos) I got a chuckle too when entering the 2nd grade and seeing them use the smaller ones, just like at FSS (I also took pictures of 3 boys in

second grade who proudly showed me the guns they had made from Legos- leading Meg and I to talk about the universality of this kind of boy energy, and wondering what exposure these kids would have to guns- Machetes yes, but our Haitian translators said guns would be very rare- there is no TV. (Since writing this, I did find out that portable DVD's are common and kids love action films- mystery solved.) In the afternoon I met with the many teachers who wanted to learn how to use two microscopes that had been donated. Luckily Stacey has been recently doing this very thing with our 7th and 8th grades - allowing me to pull things from what Evan has shared at home. We made slides of onion skins, cheek cells, pond water, blood and more. At the end of our sharing, the teachers asked us if we would do model lessons the next day... did we really know what we were talking about?

My math lessons in 5th and then 6th grade teaching fractions went fairly well considering the challenges of having to have everything that you say (and then the kids say) translated. What interested me the most was to see how quickly despite the language barrier, I got to know the kids- who had strong spatial relationships and could easily move from the manipulatives to paper and pencil, who was shy and who was outgoing. The difference btm the preteen 6th graders and the more willing to please 5th graders.

Lauren and her translator (Sam Slavin, a FSS alum who graduated in 2000, now working in Haiti- how small can the world get?!) taught go fish to the 2nd graders. In Lauren's words, the first lesson bombed! However, repeating the lesson with the second group went great, revealing the subtleties of teaching. Lauren wondered out loud later, "Was it me having taught it a second time or was it the group of kids?" Kate and Meg did an art lesson in the preK and K realized that kids did not know their colors. Connie did paper bead making with 8th and 9th graders who, like our kids, despite themselves, loved it. I saw two older kids with cell phones! Meanwhile, Dorla helped install the Rosetta Stone language programs (which were donated by a FSS parent) onto the laptops.

As you can see rural Haiti is a complicated place- often very basic, but then suddenly modern.

Today we participated in a "reflection circle" in which parables from around the world are read aloud and then discussed in small groups. Again, not just unusual in Haiti, but singular. The story we read was about sharing food and what to do when someone does not share. Should one not share back the next time the occasion arises? In Haiti, sharing food is a given- a Haitian saying goes, "Cooked food has no owner."

Leaving this situation, we walked a block down the dirt road to the local church which doubles as a school during the day. Unlike Mantenwa Community Learning Center School (MCLC) this school had virtually no supplies (the 4th graders had rented math work books so they could not write in them). With cinder block windows it was poorly lit. We also watched the oldest kids correct French grammar on the board, though they don't speak it - one of the biggest problems with a vast majority of Haitian school- The people speak Creole, but often can't read or write it, are taught to read and write French, but don't speak it. Despite the gulf of difference btm the two schools, these teachers have

begun to not hit their students because of Mantenwa's influence and have the kids sit facing each other, rather than in rows. They are part of a network of 12 schools who are participating in trainings from Mantenwa. Ironically, this traditional school is more costly and often seen as better, because it is strict and rote- sound familiar?

Returning to MCLC, we watched their Friday ASM- they even have their own Rob Lee-*Robert*. Just like us, kids presented poems and stories they wrote, did skits and sang. We were unexpectedly asked to sing our own song. Quick on her feet, Meg suggested, *This Little Light of Mine*. - which I must say sounded really good! The highlight however was listening to Millienne (who was in our 1/2 classes this fall) and Lauren read "Fred and George go to California" written by Charlotte Canttaneo in both Creole and English. (Since Millienne's visit to FSS, each 1/2 student wrote a book that we had translated into Creole and laminated). This was so powerful, not only because of the symbolic connection of our students, but because of how rare and therefore valuable books and paper are. Simply put, there are few to no children's books written in Creole. Millienne told us the book she received as a going away present from Mark and Lauren's dissolved after being read so many times. What a great feeling as a 2nd grader to know that your story is being read and read again by children who otherwise would NEVER read a child's book in their native tongue.

We also spent part of our day visiting local artists who are teaching some of the kids crafts like basket weaving and needlepoint so they have a skill to use once out of school. We met the man who built the school and is also responsible for building a soon to be used multi-use clothes washing and drinking water facility funded by World Vision. Equally and perhaps more impressive, he also founded the "Courageous Men's Group" to support the women's group that helps victims of domestic violence and helps prevent it as well. When I asked if such a group was unusual in Haiti, I was told not only rare, but abnormal! The founder said that lately, other men were coming to him for advice rather than resorting to violence. Later in the day we stopped at a house of two teachers who are married. We visited because before marrying they had developed a vision of developing a model gardening program and then set out to buy the worst piece of land- rocky and dry, devoid of trees. 10 years later it is tree covered, fruit bearing with every square inch covered with vegetable gardens and "experiments". So it seems that what appears at first glance to be a typical Haitian countryside, is actually, one filled with an incredible group of innovative and visionary people. I was so impressed with the garden I asked the unthinkable- Does your husband cook and clean too? The answer- Of course!

Good night.

Haiti- Part 4

Ed

Hello Everyone,

I (Connie) offered to take a turn writing to you.

With our time at the school over all too fast, we now have more time to spend with the kids outside school and our host families. A very important component of our experience

(perhaps the most important) is the presence and impact of our translators. They have a wealth of experience working with groups to help foreigners really begin to understand the deep complexities of Haitian history and culture. For a couple of them, bridging the gap between Haiti and the rest of the world is their life's work. They help us move beyond surface conversation with our families and in our group meetings, respond to our observations with an invaluable perspective. For example, in a conversation with the Matènwa teachers about how to plan and how to teach kids to plan ahead, one of our translators explained that in Haitian culture values ancestors and the past, looking at where we've been and what's happening now compared to our culture which is so future focused, that from a very young age kids are taught to consider the future. "What are you going to be when you grow up?" When we teach planning to Fayerweather kids which has its own challenges, they already possess the foundation for this. Lauren and Kate, with the help of their translator were able to discuss curriculum with Millienne over dinner. Many of our questions are answered with fascinating and lengthy lessons about Haitian history which is intimately connected to US history. This morning we watched and participated in the process of making coffee--from roasting the beans to drinking it. We sang the coffee grinding song over and over.

Pile pa gen kamarad.
Kou wè li kwit gen kamarad
Pounding, you have no friends.
When it's cooked you have friends.

The process took several hours during which we had more mind stretching, culturally challenging, heart breaking conversations about race, cultural differences, oppression, changing customs and traditions, rural life and city life, power and its uses and misuses. Robert Cajuste, the teacher who visited Fayerweather last year, spoke about his experiences in Cambridge and how it felt to come home.

Afterward we walked to a bat cave. I walked in, said in a loud voice, "Where are the bats?" and out flew a swarm of them to our shrieks of delight. Everywhere we go we are accompanied by kids from the school and from our families. From there we walked on to the water where we met our families and did laundry with them.

This afternoon we walked to a waterfall and swimming hole.

We are full of appreciation of the magic of this place and the opportunity to be here.

Thank you!
Connie

Haiti- Part 5- the final report

Hi Everybody-

This will most likely be our last email before heading out. Saturday evening we had the unique privilege to attend a Vodou ceremony held by a family in the community. Since Vodoo (notice the different spelling) has many negative connotations in the US and abroad, before attending, one of our cultural translators who is well versed in Vodou,

gave us a 2 hour mini course on what we might see, its significance, and how these traditions evolved.

The ceremony began at 9ish with a variety of ceremonial activities with 3 large drums pounding in the background. Imagine the drumming from Ingleed's dance troupe under a star filled sky, with a hundred people of all ages dancing and singing until midnight. Actually the party continued until day light but we turned in "early". Part way through the drummers moved to the main road under a Mapou tree. This was especially exciting to Connie as she has been reading up on the different aspects of this celebration - I will let her relay its meaning when we get back. To add balance to this experience we attended a Baptist church service from 8:30 to 10 this morning. Again great singing and clapping!

We spent the next few hours making peanut butter from scratch, beginning with green, raw nuts, shelling them, roasting them in a pot over three rocks and then grinding them into paste. In addition to regular peanut butter, they also make it with a hint of hot pepper. Since I was chatting during this part, tasting it caught me by surprise- yummy, nonetheless.

For our last activity of the day, we headed over to the Art Center- a non-profit started 8 years ago. At the center we saw women making a variety of crafts that are sold in the US including beautiful silk scarves, and beaded & embroidered wall hangings. The profits from these benefit the Mantenwa community. After taking a quick tour we watched two performances by two women's groups who do "popular theater" which entails acting out parts of everyday Haitian life. After these 15 minute skits, the performers invite the audience to engage in conversation about the skit, and its relevance to their lives. Both of the skits we saw were about "restavec" children- Haitian children who go live with other families to lessen the economic burden on their own family with the hope that they are better cared for and educated. During our stay we heard about this regularly- with one of the classes at Matenwa performing a skit about this at ASM as well. While some children do benefit from this system, we were told that there are many cases where the family receiving the child does not send the child to school and often times treats them badly. After the skit at the art center, a 15 year old girl in the audience shared her own story of being a Restavec in Port au Prince and running away after being beaten for not doing her chores. I won't say more about this topic at this time, as with many issues in Haiti, there are many layers of complexity about how and why these systems developed and why they continue. And while these issues are real, as a group representing FSS, it is important to us that the primary focus of these email reports are positive. On that note, it was no surprise that many of the incredible teachers and other we met this week were also working at the Art Center and part of the Women's Groups.

We are about to sit down together for our last meal as a group - pumpkin soup, a traditional soup served on January 1st, Haiti's independence day! The story goes that after Haiti gained its independence, vats of pumpkin soup were served at every intersection to help the people re-nourish themselves. Prior to this day, the soup was only served to the white masters! Then we wake up at 3 am, climb back into the pickup trucks that brought

us up the mountain and head back down in the dark under star filled skies. This will get us to the ferry dock for our 6 am ferry crossing.

We will spend the day at a hotel on the beach outside of Port au Prince and view the local Mardi Gras celebration area before heading to the airport on Tuesday.

Love to all of you. Thanks for all your support in helping make this trip a reality. We look forward to sharing loads of photos, sharing more stories and thinking about ways to continue and extend our relationship with Mantenwa and Haiti.

Drive safely tomorrow and remember that slipping on ice is now a good thing!

Ed