

The Real Startup of Institution Univers was September 9

(A Story by Pam and Dave Mann)

7:30 a.m. Sunday, September 13, 2009

It was Friday afternoon, our first week of classes at I.U. behind us. Thankfully the striking public school teachers were placated by the newly formed private school association's gesture. We took Tuesday off in support of them and then they did not harass us when we resumed class on Wednesday. The upper grades were at nearly perfect attendance while the elementary classes were about 80%. Late arrivals often blamed their tailors for not having their uniforms ready.

I happened to be in Dave's office when Hugues brought in all his receipts from escorting our eleven students to the U.S. this summer. What a stack that was! Mementos of answered prayers, reminders that God delivers.

The date was September 11th. I told Hugues and Dave that I'd explained the sad significance of the day in the U.S. "It was eight years ago," I said. My eleventh graders were in elementary school. I described the attack on the twin towers in simple English. Everyone was attentive but I could tell that it was unknown history to them. It made me feel old – disconnected and foreign, I thought as well.

"I was here when it happened," Hugues said, "but only a few days before I had been in New York with students. People told me the two towers were gone. I couldn't believe it. It was several days before I saw the photos of the destruction. Even seeing, I couldn't believe it."

Silence. It was still incredible. That was our shared American memorial moment for Patriot Day. Dave and I talked of how we felt that morning of 9/11/2001, Dave actually on a 9 a.m. flight from Columbus to Chicago. Then it was on to the business at hand. Hugues and Dave counted reimbursement money and discussed the past week.

Wednesday, our "First"-day-of-school—Take 2, actually took. We had a full auditorium for the opening assembly. Girls' skirts were at last at regulation length, knees covered. I.U. administrators pushed this, with huge parental support, during the spring and summer. Other high schools in town have allowed a mini-skirt uniform of which evangelicals strongly disapprove.

As always, Hugues led us in singing *Bondye kap fè* – "My God Can Do Anything" – our *de facto* school anthem. We had a worship time and several talks. Mèt Joe introduced our new school nurse, Emmanuella, dressed in the traditional white nurse's garb, complete with white stockings despite the heat. The students applauded warmly for her. She's fresh out of nursing school, very personable.

Mèt Joe got even louder applause when he announced that breakfast, served 6:30-6:50, would be coming in weeks ahead. I knew how Dave struggles to have funds for rising food costs in the lunch program. Seeing his expression on stage, clearly he too wondered who would pay for this. Joe didn't stop there. Next he inspired cheers when he announced soon there'd be juice with lunch. Dave looked decidedly paler, no doubt feeling the weight of his commitment to support and not to control. Later, we learned that *Aide et Action*, the same group which gave support for our first high school graduation, had pledged to provide the lunch drink and a nutritious pre-packaged breakfast. *On verra.*

For me, the most vivid visual imprinted in my memory of the past week of class is Dave hopping on one foot across the stage before the 1000+ students in the assembly. He was determined to keep his message short and clear. After his initial prayer, he placed an I.U. ball cap on the center podium. On a mike stand, far stage left, he had a cowboy hat, purchased in Dajabón. At far stage right hung (some of our KY friends will love this) a blue UK ball cap. Dave's point was that the excellent Univers student is balanced on two feet. He does not, like

some, put all his weight on his academic efforts, nor only on his personal character and religious practices. Dave donned the cowboy hat and managed to hop on one foot the entire width of the stage and back again – in his suit and tie, preaching seamlessly, with more than 2000 eyes attentive to a possible trip up. He made it. Even the kindergarteners craned their necks to watch. “Hi, I’m Mr. Academic. I love to study math, science, reading, and social studies. But I don’t have time to read the Bible or pray. And it doesn’t really bother me if I lie and cheat. I just want those good grades.”

Gee, what this guy won’t do to drive home his message. Afterwards, he told me that one Kindergarten teacher was his most enrapt listener, oblivious of her charges, almost awestruck in her attention. He preached for her from then on.

Stowing the cowboy hat, he then walked to the blue UK ball cap, stood on his other foot, put on the cap and starting hopping. We all watched him, his coattail flying, bouncing from one end of the stage to the other. “Hi, I’m Mr. Religious. I like to pray and read the Bible. It’s very important to be a person of honesty, morality, and personal integrity. But I really don’t like to study math, science, French, English, and social studies. All I care about are religious things.”

Finally, standing on two feet in the middle of the stage, Dave put on the white Univers cap. I suppressed an urge to applaud. “Hi, I’m Mr. Univers. Moral integrity,” Dave stamped his right foot; “Academic excellence,” Dave stamped his left foot, “together make for a well-balanced Univers student.

He must have ended more abruptly than the audience expected. An absolute silence accompanied him to his seat. Then came the applause. Nothing like a foreigner for the unexpected.

Afterwards I heard many teachers congratulate him on the effectiveness of his talk which is like having the choir thank the evangelist for his altar call. To know the effectiveness of anything we’re about here, we need to watch the lives led around us. May we be thankful and tireless regardless.

Concerning Univers Medical Clinic, the staff seems undaunted by the demise of our big generator. The little back-up is getting quite a work-out, attached to the well pump first thing in the morning so there’s running water, then dedicated to the lab and the patient record computers. As a result, the second floor hosts a snarl of extension cords to make an electrician weep. Our evenings in the apartment are candle-lit and kerosene-lamped – romantic, yes, if we ignore how profusely we sweat without fans. It makes us very grateful for a shower and the ice that we can buy from street vendors. We’re counting on heaven having no prickly heat.

“You shall love the Lord, your God,
with all your heart,
with all your soul,
and with all your mind.”

Teaching students
to love God
and to live life
with everything they’ve got...

--Dave & Pam