

Simple Things Mean a Lot to Haitian Children. By: Dave and Pam Mann Nov. 21, 2009

An essay written by Fabienne Poisson, 11th grade, for English class in Institution Univers. The first sentence was the assigned prompt for the student to fill in the blanks.

I won't soon forget my birthday because it was such a fantastic day. I went to Cap-Haitian to visit my grandmother. When I arrived, I said to my grandmother that my birthday would be on August 6th. My grandmother said that she would not celebrate my birthday. That night, while I slept, my grandmother came in my bedroom and she put plantains and chicken and Coke for me. When I woke up, I saw the food next to my bed. I was very happy.

Saturday, November 21

"I'm thinking about Fabienne's birthday story you read to me," Dave said as we walked out the school gate. It was dark. The night guard wished us good night as we left. Fabienne's account, an English homework assignment, revealed what a small thing, small in our view, can make a day great for a poor teenager.

"I had a similarly enlightening encounter with Johndy Joseph today during lunch hour," Dave said, flipping on the flashlight in his cell phone so an oncoming headlight-less motorcyclist would see us. "He comes in regularly to practice his English. So we were talking about our eating habits – just to practice food vocabulary."

Imagine Dave's office: Dave at his desk with his Hummer of a laptop before him, Johndy on the chair wedged in front of Dave's desk next to the door. He's a scrawny round-faced sixteen-year old, his posture always erect, always smiling. "Do you eat supper?" Dave asked.

"No, I don't eat at night," Johndy answers dismissively as if an evening meal is trouble he's escaped. "I eat three times a day. I eat two breakfasts and lunch at school."

"Two breakfasts?"

"Yes," Johndy answers proudly. "When I wake up, I eat a boiled egg. Then I take a shower. And before I go to school, I eat another egg!"

Dave tries to return Johndy's smile while pondering Johndy's regular diet. No wonder Johnny's thin.

"Wow," I said. We had to pause our conversation until we were well beyond Ma Blan's house where her husband sets the volume of the DVD movie at full blast. He probably thinks it's a kindness to the neighbors, sharing audio entertainment for those who can't afford the five gourdes to watch. "That doesn't seem like enough calories for a growing sixteen-year old," I finally said.

"Hardly," Dave agreed. "I wonder how many of our students have little else to eat than the school lunch on a given day."

"That would probably be hard to determine. I don't think kids would admit that they have little to eat." Maybe it's enough to be thankful that they have food to eat.

*Let us thank the LORD for his steadfast love,
for his wondrous works to the children of men!
For he satisfies the longing soul,
and the hungry soul he fills with good things.*

Psalm 107:8-9