

## Life in Ouanaminthe (northeastern Haiti) 13 Days After Earthquake

By Dave and Pam Mann

First, an update on what has been happening in Ouanaminthe the last week; then Pam's journal.

No photos of the disaster – you've seen enough of it on the news channels.

As you know, there have been numerous aftershocks following the major quake of January 12<sup>th</sup>. The aftershocks have simply caused the rubble to settle a bit more, with no physical damage in the regions a distance from the capital city, such as Ouanaminthe.

Joe succeeded in making his second trip to Port-au-Prince in the school's pick-up despite its questionable road-worthiness. His extended family is now in Ouanaminthe, filling his house. Many, many other homes in Ouanaminthe have found additional occupants as the population continues to leave Port-au-Prince. The city of Ouanaminthe has swelled with many new faces appearing on the street.

The schools continue to be closed. The phones are working again. The market functions here in Ouanaminthe with some slight increases in food and gas prices. It's hard to find people locally who did not lose a relative or friend in the Jan 12<sup>th</sup> catastrophe in the capital.

The banks have recently re-opened, after a fashion. There are long lines in all four of the banks. People do not come to deposit, only to withdraw, which is a banker's nightmare. Consequently, there is a strict limit for withdrawals: 100,000 HTG or \$2,500 USD – two amounts roughly equivalent. This ceiling does not do a lot to help businesses or schools resume their normal functioning, nor does it do much to encourage account holders to make large deposits for fear that they will not have access to the funds when they need them in the future.

We will resume our trips to Port-au-Prince to take assistance and to relocate quake victims who have family here to the north and particularly to the Univers Medical Centre. We can do this once we are able to receive funds from the U.S. through our new financial connection in the Dominican Republic. The physical cash we had in hand at the time of the quake has long since been spent. In addition, we now are debtors toward numerous businessmen in town when we loaded the bus for our first trip to the capital city.

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3 p.m. Saturday, January 23, 2010

Yesterday Dave and I went to the Dutrevil house to visit Lynne-Vie again. She is the Univers graduate who lost her foot, when it was crushed under a falling wall in Port-au-Prince. Dave had chosen a couple DVDs, from the collection provided us by a friend, to give to Lynne-Vie, assuming there's a limit to how many times she can watch *High School Musical*, a big favorite here.

Lynne-Vie was stretched out on the bed as before – still smiling. The family seemed appreciative of our visit. A first visit is polite curiosity for many people. Repeated visits demonstrate concern. Dave gave Lynne-Vie and Madam Dutrevil an update on the prosthesis effort. A donor's been found; the artificial foot ordered, but a professional must be found to fit the prosthesis with a mold made to order. Folks are praying for the miracle of God's provision in that final phase.

With less of an audience than during our first visit, Mr. Dutrevil came out of the back of the house and told his version of Lynne-Vie's heart breaking story. "My wife has been the courageous one through all this trial. I was in denial from the first news of her crushed foot."

My heart went out to him, a respected strict school teacher admitting his weakness. "It's very normal – what you felt," I said. "There's a special attachment between fathers and daughters that's strong and tender. Pastor Dave has had similar strong emotions about our daughter's struggles."

Dave, sitting next to me, raised his hand and nodded his agreement. Madam Dutrevil smiled her appreciation for our affirmation of her grieving husband. We already knew that Madam Dutrevil went alone to the hospital to sign for the operation that took Lynne-Vie's left foot. Mr. Dutrevil expounded further on the emotional upheaval they all have endured.

Dave assured them this, too, was normal and would continue. By this time, a trio of Jehovah's Witnesses had joined us with Creole versions of the Watchtower magazine: *Toudegad*. Dave gave a three-minute review of the stages of grief. Even the JWs were nodding their heads like the white guy might know what he's talking about. After the JWs departed, leaving Lynne-Vie two copies of *Toudegad*, we prayed.

We prayed for healing, for a strong will to battle despair, for insight to see God at work in hardship. I felt hope in the room, not the fluffy stuff of wishing positive thoughts, but the tough rise-up-from-your-gut determination to trust in our unseen God. By God, she'll mount up with wings like an eagle.

Last night I'd made egg salad for supper to put on the cracked wheat bread I'd baked earlier. Hugues called Dave a little before 6:00 for an emergency administrators' meeting – just the four of them. Dave didn't protest nor did I when he told me about it with an apologetic shrug. So much for our Friday date night. There's always something in the works. It's a privilege that Dave's invited – sometimes even I am. You never know, as a foreigner, what constitutes an emergency. What I think is pressing they think can wait and vice versa. We had additional teams coming for quake relief; the clinic generator was getting iffy; Port-au-Prince refugee families in Ouanaminthe would need to send their children to school. Was one of these issues the emergency?

I found out when Dave returned about two hours later. I had listened to *Great Expectations* and played Spidey Solitaire to distract myself from diving into the egg salad prematurely.

"I think we should still have our movie date," Dave said nearly as soon as he walked in the door. "Let's watch the rest of *Gettysburg*."

"OK." Dave was already peeling off clothes to take his shower. I readied the table for our dinner movie theater as Dave said, "You're not gonna believe this. Always something new."

"Yeah? What?"

"There was a radio announcement this afternoon. School directors from the area met and have decided to restart classes this Monday, January 25<sup>th</sup>."

"Huh?" We were concerned they might not re-open in mid-February as previously announced. "So much for a month of mourning."

"Well, Hugues, Joe, and Jaccin were mad!" Dave yelled from the shower. I went in and sat on the toilet to save him the strain on his throat. He's had a cold for days. "Why?"

"They weren't invited to the meeting," Dave explained.

"No kidding?"

"Jaccin even saw the regional inspector on the street earlier today. They greeted each other. The guy said nothing to Jaccin about the meeting or the decision. Joe thinks it's an intentional slight."

"Gee, it all seems so petty – flashback to junior high."

"Well, the administrators decided to meet first with the Univers teachers and then with the parents. Apparently people are swallowing this rumor about an impending earthquake expected here in the north. Nobody, believing that, is going to send kids to school to have our huge building collapse on them."

"Man, what a roller coaster ride life here is. You just never know what you're going to get."

"Well, I understand why people want to leave the country if they can. It's crazy."

We prayed for the meal and the whole school drama, then started the DVD and the egg salad. Before our eyes, Lee insisted that Longstreet instruct the commanders to launch a final day of attack at Gettysburg. Longstreet tried his best to respectfully dissuade Lee, but to no avail. Longstreet was absolutely convinced that it would be a costly defeat.

"For all our getting caught in the middle," I said "it's never been as bad as the military – to implement plans that mean certain death."

Men shouted about honor and then marched out on the Gettysburg plan to kill or be killed. Heaven help us build a better place where the honor is in serving, using words instead of weapons to solve our conflicts.