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EXPERIENCING HAITI THROUGH THE FIVE SENSES

I just arrived back from Haiti (May 29-June 6) after my 16th medical trip. It is hard to express everything you experience when you go on a mission trip to a foreign country, especially one like Haiti. You use all of your senses from the sights you see to the different smells and sounds. Things feel different and the foods are not prepared or taste the same, as you are accustomed to. That's what makes a mission trip so special.

A young man who was with us, who was 12 years old, asked his mother if he could go with our church on to Haiti. She asked him, "What is there in Haiti?" Most people perceive Haiti as being a dark, poor, dirty country full of corruption, drugs and witch doctors that use voodoo. That is like saying that all Americans are very rich and don't care about the rest of the world. These are perceptions one gets when they haven't visited or lived with the people they are talking about. They are getting their information from a few people who are think-

ing negatively.

As you step off the plane in Haiti, it is very hot and humid like a sauna and a new smell fills your nostrils as you take a deep breath. The fresh smell of blooming flowers and trees (as one might smell in the USA) is mixed with the smell of burning trash and the stench of rotting waste. There are no sewer systems in Haiti so everything runs into the ditches along the side of the road. The heavy rains provide a temporary cleansing as the water carries the "waste" to the ocean. It is a system that is as old as the world itself, but it is one that could be fixed if the government would provide for a better way of sanitation and better living conditions. The people are the victims of countless years of corrupt use of money by a few individuals (i.e. the government) with a "me first" mentality.

After this initial impression - then one gets to see the beauty and beast of Haitian life. The trees in the country are lush with avocados, limes, cashews, bananas, coconuts and mangos. The pineapple plants are

bursting with delicious juices as cocoa beans, rice, potatoes, sugar cane and cassava spring from the earth. The grass is a dense green, and the mountains are inviting you to climb them. Most of the people are clothed in miss-matched outfits and well-worn shoes, if any. Too many try to scratch out an existence for their lives, selling or working to buy food for themselves and their families. It is not uncommon for people to work all day to be paid in food rather than cash. Forget about electricity, electrical appliances, toilets, radios or cell phones. Only the fortunate, more aggressive individuals have that luxury, which only makes up a small portion of the population. In Haiti, if you're not born into prosperity, it's extremely hard, if not impossible, to climb out of poverty.

I have set down and talked to many Haitians and have operated on hundreds over the years. Most are like you and me. They love their families, work hard and would help you if you



Dr. Harold examining a patient inside the medical clinic.



The entrance to Pillatre Christian Center.



The medical clinic on the campus of Pillatre.



A few of the children who attend Pillatre.

needed anything. They are very friendly and have an inner beauty that is revealed the longer you are with them.

The shouts of the beggar, screeching truck brakes, the laughter of children, people yelling everywhere selling their wares – all the noise can be deafening. The people of Haiti are the most verbal people I have encountered. They love to be very dramatic when they communicate to each other. It is like watching two fighters jabbing back and forth but nobody really throwing a “knockout punch”. When the jesting is over, they seem to smile at each other and off they go. As the day goes on the familiar noises fade away only to be replaced by the sound of loud diesel generators and barking dogs. Fans inside buildings are always blowing on high requiring one to shout in order to be heard.

Have you every walked into an enclosed area where there is a pool, but no venting or circulation to let out the humid air? This is how Haiti feels all the time. It’s not so bad if you are accustomed to it, but miserable if you’re not. Forget about wearing makeup or doing your hair, in just a few minutes the sweat will have you soaked and ready for another

shower as you try to stay freshened up. The people are very hard working and both men and women have tough, leathery feeling skin as well as hard callused hands. Everything and everyone near any road has a dusty look and feel because most of the roads are made out of dirt or gravel. Whenever a vehicle drives past, those near the road are covered in a kind of film. The people never seem to complain about the circumstances in which they live as they have accepted the harsh conditions in which they work and go about their business. The children are covered with bug bites, which cause intense itching day and night.

The tastes of Haiti are juicy and sweet as there are many fruit bearing trees and plants on this island that was once known for its’ vast, rich resources. Many are now gone due to the pillaging of the land by the French years ago. Much of the land is fertile and produces plenty for those who can afford the seeds and plants to farm the land. Most people cook their food over charcoal fires in large pots and pans with lots of tasty spices.

The food is always made fresh with little meat, because of the lack of refrigeration to keep it from spoiling.

It is emotionally difficult to witness the hardship and suffering the people of Haiti endure every minute of every day. They are men and women just like you and I, and they deserve better. I know that God has a plan for each of us no matter where we live or how we live. He provides for everyone who puts his or her faith in Him. He uses those He has blessed to reach out and help those in need, whether they are homeless, sick, poor or being persecuted.

Please learn to love the people of this world as Christ has loved you.

Dr. Harold

If you are interested in learning more about the Pillatre Christian Center and Haitian Christian ministries, or if you want to sponsor a student to attend Pillatre Christian School, visit

www.hcmin.org

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It is our desire to “go green” and we are now asking you to view our monthly newsletter on our website at www.hnordobgyn.com

If you still desire to have a copy mailed to your address, contact our office by leaving a message in Sharon’s voice-mail or email her at sharon@hnordobgyn.com

Beginning September 2009, we will only mail out newsletters to those who have contacted our office via Sharon. Thank you for your consideration.