



A monthly newsletter to report on developments of the Volunteer Ministries in Haiti, a program of the Xaverian Brothers supported by the Diocese of Richmond. Further information is available from the Haitian Ministry Commission, Diocese of Richmond, 7800 Carousel Lane, Richmond VA 23294 (telephone: 804-359-5661) (fax: 804-358-9159) (e-mail: pschwermer@richmonddioocese.org) (website: www.richmonddioocese.org/haiti/hat111.htm)

LETTER FROM BROTHER HARRY ECCLES

GET THOSE CHILDREN OUT OF THE MUDDY-MUDDY. Today, September 11, it's still muddy. No football today! But the place is coming back to normal. We've been getting sand and gravel for areas that are still water-logged, but in general, we survived, even if the clean-up will take some time.

THE BOYS AND GIRLS are happy to be back after their week at St. Martin de Porres. It was an adventure for them -- a new place to explore, a jolting ride in a construction truck, etc., but they look and sound little worse for the "ordeal"! There are some who line up at Katie's clinic, but nothing grave, I think.

OUR NEIGHBORS were not so fortunate. Some came here with what they could salvage, and Jean-Louis and his team worked around the clock to help them to safety and then to provide comfort.



The Guayamoc River upstream from the orphanage

ORDINARILY THE GUAYAMOC RIVER is an unimpressive stream at the bottom of a valley with maybe a 20-foot rise on our side. The opposite bank is much higher. For several days, however, the river was truly a raging torrent, visible from the guest house, but the actual flooding was rather moderate, and the water receded from the campus surprisingly quickly. The basketball court was under water for only a few

hours. Jean-Louis had elevated the generator, so we had access to electricity, even if not 24/7. The internet signal was also irregular, and for a week I was disconnected. What an ordeal!

WE WERE NOT THE TARGET OF Fay, Gustav, Hanna, or Ike. Our rainfall was not exceptional. but we could not absorb the rainfall that stormed down our little river.

MORE THAN ANYONE ELSE around here I was NOT a victim, and certainly not a hero for choosing to stay in my second-floor sanctuary! Friends did come looking for me, concerned for my welfare, and Jean-Louis was not to happy with my decision to stay here.

SOMETIMES A CRISIS brings out the best in people, as I've already noted. I want to include others whom I observed--and my perspective is quite limited. Father Jethro Noel was a life-saver in welcoming the children to St. Martin's, as was Sister Alcide from the Normal School in Papaye, who sent food for our makeshift kitchen.

WHILE I THINK OF BEHIND-THE-SCENES people, I want to say thanks to all of you who were listed as supporters of VMH in our recent newsletter, and I also want to thank those who send their support directly to me, along with greetings and encouragement, and our office staffs in Richmond and Baltimore for the bookkeeping etc involved. God bless you all!

MORE HEROES. Yesterday I visited the Azil, Mother Teresa's refuge for malnourished children and incapacitated adults. I wasn't sure that I could get in. The Missionaries of Charity made their campus available for emergency distribution of food. The sea of people did part for me, but it was about as crowded as I've ever experienced. In spite of the numbers and the urgency, however, there was no rough stuff, entering or leaving.

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LETTER FROM CAITLIN GORDON

Katie has been in Haiti since July as a Xaverian Volunteer. It has been a more eventful two months than she anticipated. Her letter this month focuses on the flood and then fills us in on her life at Maison Fortuné since July.

First, the deluge

I know you have heard the news of the flooding here at the Orphanage. The children are all fine at Maison Fortuné, though many people around us in our neighborhood have been left homeless. Many towns are suffering from flood damage and a number of people have died. Roads have been cut off and getting clean water and food to many people is not easy. We are lucky to have great and fast support in the US for situations like this. I know it is extremely difficult, but we have not seen the government here do much of anything for the people in Hinche, so I can't even imagine how people in other towns that have received much more damage are coping.

On Tuesday, September 8, I didn't think we would get flooded out because we did not receive that much rain. I remember looking at the water flowing into the back of our orphanage where the land is lowest, not thinking it would come over onto the soccer field and into the administration and school buildings and the three small dorms and dining hall. Nor did I think we'd have to put all the boys and girls into a dump truck to take them to safety.



The orphanage school building

Early Tuesday evening when the river behind us was high we thought it was all just fun. Before I went to bed around midnight the water had filled our garden, but hadn't come over the 3-foot wall onto the soccer field. Waking up at 3:00 a.m. to the sound of many voices, I found the water starting to seep into the administration building and creating a lake on our soccer field. That's when everything got crazy! The banks just could not contain all the water from the north flowing into the river. We were extremely unprepared, but luckily we had a place to take the boys and girls, St. Martin (the local high school that some of our older boys attend). They remained there for a week, but we have been able to get the campus sufficiently cleaned up and safe for them to return.

Nationally, school has been put off until mid-October, more than a month late, because several of the private and public schools are now shelters to homeless victims of the hurricanes.

Things are starting to seem somewhat normal again with the sound of the kids outside, but there are still a lot of repairs and cleaning up to do. We estimate the damage at \$20,000. Offices are being reorganized and the school building is being put back together. The three small dorms need A LOT of work. Our water purification system is still not working, and some of our septic systems aren't either. We saved our generator, so we do have power. The cafeteria is usable again. There are still mounds of mud by our mango tree next to the cafeteria. The soccer field is still caked in mud in



The Maison Fortuné campus looking back toward the river

some places or has patches of crackling mud that has dried in the sun we have had in the past couple of days.

I could write a book! I knew that I would enjoy my time in Haiti and have many experiences, but I never thought they would be of this kind!

Backing up

Boy, does the time fly by when you are doing what you love the most! My volunteer experience started out at the Bon Secours Spiritual Center in Baltimore with an orientation week with Brother Jim Connolly, Brother Harry Eccles and Brother Cosmas Rubencamp along with my fellow volunteer Peter Everest. We also had many people come in during our orientation time to talk with us about transition, spirituality, personality, etc. It was a great time for me to relax after my final and very hectic year at the University of Tampa and having to say very sad goodbyes to many great friends.

So here I am now, sitting in my room at Maison Fortuné wondering where all the time since then has gone. Six months ago it was hard to believe that I would actually get to spend a year in Haiti. I had always found it very difficult to get included in any trip that would take me back to Haiti and to the boys of Maison Fortuné who had completely captured my heart on my prior visits. So when I was told that I was accepted for the Xaverian Brothers Volunteer Program and that I would be living at the orphanage for a year I had to do my best not to think about it so that I would not get my hopes up—just in case someone changed their mind.

For my first month in Haiti, I found it slightly harder than I thought to adjust to life here. I loved every minute of it, but the question of where I could fit in and what I could do to help was always nudging at me. Answers seem to come at a much slower pace here. At times I felt that I was being forced to find the answers, but knew that it wasn't quite where I fit in yet. I had ideas of what I wanted to do, but how I was to start it and keep it going seemed to be the challenge. I found myself using my first month as an adjustment period for getting to know my fellow volunteers, Ilsa Leon and Peter Everest, getting reacquainted with the kids, learning the language, the town and what was most needed here.

As the month of July came to an end so did many other things. I had to say my "Goodbye's" to Ilsa and Peter, and that was much harder than I expected. One could easily see the great impact that they had on the kids by watching the faces of the children as Jean-Louis drove Ilsa or Peter to the air strip. The kids continually ask about Ilsa and Peter and when they will return, and this only makes it harder. I realize that even though life at the orphanage does go on after a group of volunteers leave, your name and face will almost never leave the children. I now know what happens after the times that I have left from my previous visits here. What makes it even harder is when the kids continually ask if I am leaving and whether, when I do leave, I will return. They just tell me that I am not allowed to ever leave.

The month of August was extremely busy for me and almost non-stop. My birthday came and went so fast I still have not realized that I am now 22. Maybe it's the Haitian culture catching up to me: normally here, when you ask someone how old they are, they will just shrug their shoulders and say they don't know. Some of the kids will tell you they are 12 on Monday but decide that on Wednesday they are 14. Birthdays are not important; many people are more concerned about how to make a little money that day to feed their children than to remember how old they are. With this all being true, I came home from church on the day of my birthday to find a pathway of birthday signs through the administration building that led up to my room. Somehow all the kids knew it was my birthday.

The most important thing keeping me busy has been the start of a new, more organized clinic here on the campus. During a visit from Susan Pleasants, a Virginia nurse who organized our wellness program, we re-organized the clinic supplies and set up a new room. We had our first visit by Dr. Cruff Renard, who gave physicals to 20 kids on Saturday August 9th, and has seen 61 kids to date. After the Saturday visits some of the children require follow-ups of blood work, PPD tests, X-rays, etc. One week we walked to the hospital every day, frustrating for me because everything at the hospital is chaotic and disorganized. We have had the most trouble in getting EKGs and X-rays for certain boys. The technician who does these moves slower than a snail and he could care less if we have been waiting since 8:30 a.m. and it is now 1:00 p.m. and everyone he has taken before us has cut in line. I wish I knew more Kreyòl so that I could butt my way to the front of the line. It is hard for me to deal with the lack of organization and lack of respect for the rules, but I am there for the boys. Even with these troubles,

I really love this experience and the chance to work with Dr. Cruff, who is a staff physician for Zanmi Lasante (Partners in Health, founded by Dr. Paul Farmer). Dr. Cruff volunteers his Saturdays to check on our children.

I now have more of an idea of what my role will be as my year continues here in Haiti. I feel as if I have really become a mother to many of the boys. Many of them call me mom or aunt. I am probably the only person that can play a sensitive and nurturing role to many of the younger boys. A group of the older boys are in a soccer tournament in town and they have told me that I must attend their games because I am their godmother—i.e., someone in their life who means a lot to them and must support things that are important to them. Sometimes, while walking with many of the younger boys in town, I am told that I have many children, and that I cannot deny! I look forward to the boys starting school and helping with homework. I want to set up an English class for the boys a few times a week. I have also completed a new roster of all the boys (I am working on the girls) and will continue to work on biographies of all the boys and girls to help out the sponsorship program. I am really getting to know all of the boys and their personalities.

This year looks very promising and I cannot imagine being anywhere else. I want to say "Thank you" to my family and great friends and to all of you who are supporting my decision to be here. Thank you to those of you who have given me this opportunity. It means the world to me, I am not sure if you all will ever know how much, but nothing could ever replace the way I feel about being here or how much these kids mean to me. I look forward to sharing my year with everyone through this newsletter. Feel free to keep in touch or find out more at any time!

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To see Katie's pictures of the flooding, go to: <http://s306.photobucket.com/albums/nn241/haitikt80/flood/>

For information about the medical folks helping our kids, visit www.pih.org to read about Zanmi Lasante (Partners in Health). They have also posted a lot of information about the recent floods in Haiti.

FORMER VOLUNTEER NEWS

From proud papa Jonathan Dohanich, a former volunteer in Haiti, we have this announcement. Jonathan and Leanna are both veterinarians practicing in Washington, Virginia. Jonathan's email address is jondo@vt.edu. Congratulations to them both!

Jarren Elias Dohanich was born via C-section at 12:33 a.m. on Wednesday, September 10. He weighed 9 lbs, 2 oz. and was 20.75 inches long. Leanna tried to give birth naturally for 20 hours and could not dilate fully thus the need for surgery. Leanna and Jarren are both doing well and are expected home in a couple of days.