



My 6 months in Haiti by Catherine Savell

I got the “bug” actually over a year ago but I never anticipated how challenging it would be.....Haiti is a complex captivating and heart wrenching country and it has been a privilege to get to know it.

In June 2010 I went there to see if I could set up a service program for Loyola students. Thirteen months later I leave Haiti deeply involved in the construction of a “Village”: a complex for orphans, street children, children placed there by their parents too poor to feed them and abused kids.

When the two attempts at bringing students and volunteer faculty from Loyola had to be canceled for safety reasons, I volunteered to teach with the Jesuit Refugee Services, and when that option closed up, Persistence being my middle name, I looked for another organization that could use my services. What I found was that it would be very expensive for me to volunteer for six months: I would have to pay an average of \$ 300 a week to work!!!

Then I discovered that Relief Team One (RT1), a grass roots operation in the making and its energetic founder wouldn't charge me anything to work 50 hours a week!!!! Ray Arana founded RT1 a couple of weeks after the January 2010 earthquake and showed up in Port au Prince with his tool belt in February. The very day of his arrival, while his hosts, the Jesuits were still camping outside the condemned novitiate he went to work to repair the building and the convent next door. A group of eager unemployed young men signed up to learn all they could about construction technology and he trained them in the shade of the mango tree right on the grounds of the Jesuits. He couldn't speak French or Creole and they couldn't speak English so he started giving English classes and RT 1 became what it is now: a non-profit dedicated to teaching new skills to enable Haitians to get jobs. This spring we had up to 40 men working for us and gave accomplishment certificates to 27 of them: they had taken classes, practiced their new skills under strict supervision and have a job on our project: the “Village Notre Dame de Lourdes”. This exciting project combines educational initiatives and micro-enterprise for sustainability and includes a complex with an elementary school, a vocational center, a dormitory and a large bakery/kitchen main hall facility. After researching different options, in particular for building clinics, thanks to the faith of a young German, Marcel , who advocated for RT1 with Hoffnungszeichen, construction on the village started March 15, 2011. The challenges are unbelievably complex and would take a book to describe; suffice it to say that though work is in progress it takes 4 to 5 times as long to accomplish what could be done in the western world, because of the anti-seismic and anti-hurricane standards we are using, the lack of technology and quality supplies, and because the crew members are still learning their crafts. However as of July 20, 2011, RT 1 has managed to restore an existing classroom building, build a septic system and a bathroom facility, provide running water and start on a main hall which is ready for its roof.



My role in all this ? Well.... the owner of the “Village”, the team leader of RT 1, and the nuns witness of our project have told me that without my bilingual ability to communicate with potential donors and my reports and requests, nothing would have been accomplished. I have been able to raise funds for myself thanks to my wonderful friends and as of today, I have raised \$ 175 000 towards the construction of the Village. I went to the job site everyday with the crew, ordered supplies, translated orders, did payroll and took care of first aid. I learned a lot about construction, found it a lot of fun and above all I developed a rapport with the Haitian crew working for us. They taught me about Haiti and its culture. They were the sweetest, most respectful men I could ever hope to work with. The project still has a long way to go, but the momentum is there and support is trickling in steadily. I still hope to one day take a group of Loyola students to serve and learn at the” Village”.

What else did I do during my stay in Haiti? Well, I taught English to our crew, Advanced French grammar to novices



Did extensive interpreting and consulting with the Bishop of Jérémie to plan for a **Center for Innovations and Micro-Enterprise**



In Jérémie, I also created a **Craft Center at the Centre Saint Jean Bosco**: I brought practical ideas, taught them to the staff, brought lots of start-up tools and supplies thanks to donations from friends and Roland Park Country School ,and finally I hired an instructor and left her a salary for the rest of the school year. This is a work in progress and monitoring will need to continue.



Friendship bracelets at Jean Bosco



Teaching bead work

I would like to thank all of you for your generosity which has made my work possible. I am very very grateful and will always remember your support. I am now back in the US trying to readjust, but Haiti is never far from my mind and heart. I keep thinking about the children, their trials, their needs and all that is still ahead to make the Village a reality! Haiti will see me again soon!

