

# Haitian Hospitality

By Kaci Thiessen

*“Climb every mountain, ford every stream.”*

It seemed like that’s what we were doing as we trekked across Haiti, from Port au Prince to a village that we could not even identify on the map, although “The Sound of Music” song that was running through my head was not quite so upbeat and inspirational. It was very nearly the longest 6-hour drive I had ever experienced, as we bounced along in our open-air, metal-seated truck, on roads that would not be called roads in the U.S. We were loaded down with everything necessary for putting a tin roof on a church. It was not the first time this task had been done, of course, but it was the first time that the church site was not accessible by vehicle. In fact, the church’s location required a 7-mile hike through the mountains to an elevation of over 5,000 feet. To put it mildly, we did not know what to expect. What we got was far beyond my expectations, as we witnessed and experienced the greatest examples of joyful and sacrificial generosity that I had ever seen. We saw Ephesians 5:2 [NIV] in living color, through these humble Haitian people: *“And walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.”*

We pulled up to the drop-off point and were greeted by 12 mules and many smiling Haitians. These church members had traveled down the mountain to donate their labor and, more sacrificially,



the use of the only mode of transportation and labor assistance that was available to them—their mules. It did not take long before everything was loaded onto the mules’ backs or the heads and shoulders of the Haitians. Even the 50-pound generator was soon heading up the mountain on the shoulders of a man who looked like he weighed about the same. Thankfully, with a mix of Creole and French encouragement, our supplies and our team made it up the mountain in one piece.

The next two days developed into a pattern. We were awakened by the church’s very enthusiastic pastor, who brought a bag of freshly picked produce and vigorously shook each team member’s hand while smiling the biggest

smile I’ve ever seen (that early in the morning) and repeating, “Bonjour, bonjour, bonjour!” His bag contained enough food for his family for the day, but he always offered it to us first. We knew this village did not have a lot of provisions; mostly because its location was an hour from any trade market, but also due to storm damage and the long hike to the nearest water source, which was more than a mile down the mountain from the church site. But the lack of water led to perhaps the most impactful evidence of the community’s selflessness.

Knowing that drinking water – and more specifically clean drinking water – would be difficult to come by, we had carried some with us. However, working in the sun and dust, getting splattered by paint and other miscellaneous work-site debris, left us rather sweaty and dirty by the end of each day. The Haitians were unfazed by this while we were, of course, used to nightly showers and going to bed clean. We certainly could have survived with some grime and unpleasant odors, yet this community chose to show further sacrifice by providing us with water for washing. It was not enough to fully bathe in, but we got the unexpected luxury of washing our hands and our arms each evening.

That they would sacrifice the time and effort (in the peak of the dry season) for something that they viewed as





unnecessary and wasteful made the water even more precious to us. We used it judiciously, knowing, but not even fully understanding, the effort that it took to provide this for us. Their sacrifice was a clear demonstration of Galatians 5:13 [NIV]: “You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love.”

The organization with which we traveled required the local people to complete the church walls and floor prior to sending a team to complete the roof – not only for logistics, but also as a way to instill a sense of pride and ownership in the people. We learned during the dedication service that this task had been especially challenging at this particular location since the materials for making bricks were not readily accessible. As mentioned, the trip for water was not a short one, and sand was equally as difficult to obtain. The sand they used was acquired over a mile down the mountain from the church site, or slightly shorter if you were willing to take the steeper, more treacherous route. We were introduced to the church members who had carried the majority of the sand and water. One particular family with two kids who were only ten and twelve years old had done the brunt of the labor, sacrificing significant time, energy, and strength—all things that could have been conserved and used to care for

themselves in the difficult environment. We were amazed when we heard the feats that this family, and the children in particular, had accomplished. They were a prime example of Philippians 2:3-4 [NIV]: “In humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others.”

The morning after the dedication service and celebration, as we collected our belongings and put them on our backs, we noticed a large crowd of Haitians slowly gathering around the church, mules in tow. They were motioning to us to load up the mules and hand over our items for them to bear the load of our belongings in our place once again. They also donated more produce to us, including several avocados that were bigger than our heads. The most incredible feeling, though, was when they started to pray for us. We had been with them during other prayer times, of course – like the dedication service, which was filled with animated prayers and praises. But this prayer time was different. The pastor began to pray, and soon the whole crowd was joining in, each praying his or her own prayer. We could understand nothing of what they said, except for the occasional “Merci, Seigneur!” But we stood in awe, listening as these brothers and sisters in Christ praised God for His work and prayed for us and our journey. It was one of the best moments I have

ever experienced.

Shortly after, we headed back down the mountain and loaded everything into our truck. We exchanged sincere hugs and smiles with the church members before they sent us on our way. But I will not soon forget the examples of sacrifice and generosity that these joyful Haitians had shown me. I pray that the promise of Jesus in Luke 6:38 [NIV] will be theirs in abundance: “Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.”



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