

I vividly remember the exact moment my reality shifted. There were nine metal bed frames, some with mattresses, some without. There were twelve patients; three were on the concrete floor. The combined smell of urine, blood and vomit was nauseating. It was almost midnight, and I had just driven through the eerie darkness of downtown Port Au Prince, alone, to bring a patient blood, because she was hemorrhaging. Without it, she would die. Many others do. In this precise moment, in this exact place, my whole world was turned upside down. I still feel the expressions on their faces burning in my eyes, the emotion of their screams ringing in my ears. I still feel rips of their pain digging into my stomach. It is a moment that will be forever etched in my memory, and will forever influence every move I make. No longer was my reality a city apartment and a walk to work in a suit and heels. No longer did life revolve around morning lattes and passing actuarial exams. Life became something new. I became something new. Relationships changed, priorities were altered, and compassion was given a new, extremely personal, meaning.

In 2006, I left my cushy actuarial job in Boston to move to Port Au Prince, Haiti. I had just turned 24 years old. I knew it would change my life, but I had no idea how. I lived among Haitians who became my surrogate family and my closest friends. I came to realize that we are not worlds apart, but that our living situations are.

My reality was altered even further when I arrived in Petit Trou de Nippes. Imagine the previous situation, but there is no hospital. There is no emergency medical care. There is no place to give blood, there is no doctor on call. The women who hemorrhage don't have a

chance. Suddenly, the metal bed frames that had scarred my memory didn't seem so bad.

I have been extremely privileged to be part of the beginning of a public health initiative with The Colorado Haiti Project, to help them move a step closer to providing necessary and basic medical care. I have been given the chance to begin to right the wrongs that I have seen. With Dr. Berggren's expertise leading the way, we have begun working with a group of 34 women we have formed strong relationships with. We have begun the basic training needed to recognize the value of clean water, of pre-emergency health care, and of basic hygiene. The women are then responsible for teaching the lessons we have given them to two of their friends. Each of these two friends are then responsible for teaching two more, in hopes that little by little we can reach the entire area through the Haitian women interacting with one another. The training we give is invaluable, but not formal as there is always the unexpected. The last course we have in hygiene, we had the women give each other manicures and the conversation that ensued was not only amusing, but informative as well! The relationships that have begun to form are powerful, and the women have already invested much of themselves. However, there is always more to do.

A follow-up trip that was scheduled for April was postponed due to violence and demonstrations in Port Au Prince, and Petit Trou de Nippes was once again cut off from the rest of the country due to demonstrations and violent roadblocks. They are hungry. It has become common for people to eat once every couple of days, and they are calling their hunger "Clorox" and "Battery Acid", due to the

strength of the pains in their stomachs. People cannot feed their families and right now they are trying to tell the world. Please pray that a quick solution can be found to help ease the hunger that has become so incredibly acute in the last few months.

There are days when I would love to go back to my old reality, to my child-like expectations that everyone in need will be provided for. But I can't. I can no longer plead ignorance. I wish I could pretend that many of the most basic human rights, things like food, education and health, aren't being denied to millions of people around the world, people whose only difference from me is their birth country. I have realized my own personal, moral responsibility to make every possible effort to change the things I have seen. I haven't yet had the pleasure of traveling to Haiti with Pat, but her presence is everywhere. It is seen in the everlasting hope, the infinite faith, and the true sense of community that the people near St. Paul's have. I hope that tonight's celebration can bring us all closer to a reality the Pat has seen, a reality that we, in this one small region in rural Haiti, have the power to change.

Erin Snyder