

January, 1989  
Trouin, Haiti

The relentless sun had given way to a restful glow overhead, and the barren mountains stood like wizened giants looking over the peace-filled countryside. It was eventide in Trouin, our favorite time to take a walk.

So, as usual, we began slowly winding along the rocky paths of Trouin. We were a motley crew, a band of unlikely companions --- Fr. Marat, the beloved Haitian priest of the village, a couple teen-age boys who lived at the rectory, and the two visiting "blancs", as well a few of the villagers who joined us along the way. Except for the young men eagerly practicing their textbook English, there was little conversation. Yet, paradoxically, there was good communication of feelings and attitudes as walked along. It felt good to be with these people drinking in the quiet. We had just come from choir practice at the church, a very joyful experience. The exuberance of the music and the joy on the faces of the choir members made me feel good deep inside.

So, as we walked I began to hum "Holy God We Praise Thy Name, and then I realized that our Haitian friends recognized the melody. Suddenly our quiet walk became more like a triumphal parade, and we all began to sing the praises of God together --- "Holy God We Praise Thy Name," "How Great Thou Art," "Amazing Grace". We sang them all, the Haitians singing in Creole and Don and I, in English. We were one, children of the same Father, rejoicing in His love.

As we neared the rectory with dusk quickly fading into dark, a young man approached us. I recognized him. It was Leslie. Earlier in the day Father had introduced us to him. He was a young man, 12 years old, whose Father had just recently died. He couldn't attend school because he was too poor to pay the \$8.00 tuition. Now that situation we could do something about --- a concrete need that we could meet! We gave Father money to cover Leslie's tuition. He, in turn, converted our American dollars into Haitian bills and gave them to Leslie's mother. In one way it seemed so little to us, but in another sense we knew how important that sharing would be to Leslie. Now he walked toward us, obviously ill-at-ease, and silently handed me a small package wrapped in used school tablet paper. Inside the paper were three eggs --- the gift of the poor Father said. I swallowed hard and stammered, "Merci" (thank you) in my best Creole. A broad white smile lit up his whole face, as he bowed and ran away. I thought of the widow's mite in Scripture, and I smiled too, as tears ran down my cheeks. A real bond of love was created in my heart that night for Leslie.

Later that night, after I'd gone to bed, my thoughts wandered back to those first few hours I had spent in Haiti. A chill ran through me as I remembered --- the crush of people, the smell of charcoal stifling in the air, the dust, the dirt, the garbage, the music blaring from the speakers as we jostled along in our colorful open air "tap-tap." I remembered how I'd braced myself in the seat and stared out into the darkness. I thought, "Why on earth had I ever chosen to come to this awful place???" "Why would any sane person freely choose to do this crazy thing???" I was shocked, frightened, almost angry --- at whom I wasn't sure. It was my first visit to a Third World country --- real culture shock. Over and over I asked the question, "Lord, why did I come here?"



It was at Mass in St. Anne's Church that first morning that I got my answer. The words of the Mass were in Creole, of course, but the message of unity, the experience of Eucharist, hit me over the head. These were my brothers and sisters in Christ. I didn't know their names or understand their culture. They were so black and so poor and so hopeless --- so unlike me. Yet, I felt one with them, so whole, as we worshipped our Father together.

During the next few days that feeling of unity persisted despite the vast volume of our differences. What a gift Jesus had for me! I thanked him for calling me --- for prodding me --- into taking the risk to come. Each day the joyfulness of this destitute people seeped into my being. I learned lessons in faith and simplicity I would never forget. And I would never forget Leslie and his magnificent eggs. Other images pushed into my thoughts --- Fr. Marat proudly playing "Silent Night" on his broken down concertina; the ragged beggar who sat at the rectory steps all day; the sardine plate served for breakfast; the smile on our cook's face as she proudly showed us the kid goat they had slaughtered in our honor; the bright voices of the young school kids as they sang for us; Martin's peaceful eyes; Serge's broad smile; the giggle of the lady who danced when Father promised her money enough to roof her house; the man with one leg struggling along the road; the empty eyes of the women squatting in the market; the rudeness of the young boys at the airport demanding, "Give me dolla!"; the persistent raucous roosters who clamored, "Wake up!" through our open-air window long before dawn.

At last I fell asleep. The next day we were going home, back to the familiar comforts, language and food. But I would be a different person for I carried with me a whole new family of brothers and sisters in my heart. I carried with me their struggle, their joy, and their love.