



When the trucks stopped coming

"Tink, tink. Tink, tink." That's the sunrise sound at the Fish House Mission House in Montrouis, Haiti. Rooster crows and rock crushers.

In the fishing village, survival work like this is sadly common. People eking out an existence, hopes hanging on the chance that the next hungry dump truck will find your pile of rocks. My wife has had a heart for the rock crushers since her first trip to Haiti. Our mission teams brought them snacks, water, gloves, better hammers and tarps for shade.

We've traveled with a lot of people in Haiti. None has been a more faithful friend to me or to Haiti than Stephen. On his first trip, he heard what he calls "a calamity of sounds like old iron hitting something hard." He followed the sound to a man drenched in sweat, sitting on rocky ground beside small piles of stone organized very neatly by size.

Ewol and Stephen built a friendship through the language of labor. That day, Stephen watched him breaking larger rocks into smaller rocks and sifting the remaining pieces down almost to grains of sand. Ewol sold the rock by the wheelbarrow load. Stephen is a contractor. He recognized the sizes of stone Ewol was making because he used the same sizes on construction projects back home. These two working men started talking shop.

At the end of their first conversation, Stephen stuck out his hand.

Ewol didn't shake it. Instead, he grabbed Stephen by the forearm. Stephen later understood that Ewol didn't want to put his dirty, rock-crushing hand into Stephen's clean hand. From then on, that was how they greeted each other.



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For years, we employed Ewol every time we returned with mission teams and had work for him. Their relationship grew. Stephen even went back to sit with him and break rocks.

We suspended trips in 2022 because of the gang violence. There is a photograph of Ewol seeing Stephen arrive with one of those teams. It crushes me now every time I see it. Ewol has both arms wrapped around him and you can see the look of love, hope, and friendship.

It is the embrace of one working man to another, sharing the common struggle of labor and the dignity of providing for their families. This wasn't ever about economics. Supply and Multiply has always been rooted in deep relationships. Gang violence stopped the planes, the hugs, the children's laughter and the sound of men working together. We didn't hear the news until months after he died.

The World Bank estimates that nearly half of Haiti's population now lives below its \$3-a-day extreme-poverty measure. Ewol

was surviving on one of the lowest rungs of that economy. Then even that rung became unlivable.

The spirit of despair took his life, and it used his own hand to do it. In a time when Haiti needs less loss and more growth, she has one less man, one more widow and one more fatherless child.

Roadblocks and rubble made his road impassable. Weeks' worth of labor in the sun lay as he watch the trucks slow then pass the only rout that led to his pile of stone.

This is what Haiti's violence looks like when you zoom in. Not only the masked man, the burning tire, the gun or the barricade in the road. Sometimes it is the brutal reality of a little pile of rocks by the side of an unusable road in the Artibonite, and an occasional truck that cannot even reach him.

Stephen told me Ewol was always easy to find: "Just had to follow the sounds of hard things being broken." Whether its big rocks being turned into little rocks or the grinder of daily life chiseling away at the human soul, it's not hard to find broken breaking things in Haiti.

I can still hear it. And it sounds like, "Tink, tink. Tink, tink. Tink, tink."

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