

Haiti Mysteries – final thoughts - or questions.

I intended to write a final blog to summarize our experience in Haiti. I found it hard to pull together the threads of our experience there. It was great to watch God at work. It was great to be with our super team. It was great to be with the Gambrills. It was great to be in Port au Prince. But I just don't know how to do a summary. While I don't have a summary, I do have some questions.



How do they get their clothes so clean?



I really appreciated being in Haiti and can find some words to describe it but clean and neat would not be among those words. Streets are dusty. Litter is everywhere. You can see an occasional trash pile being picked over by cows, pigs and goats which seem to get their nourishment from something in the piles. Occasionally, you can see someone trying brush away the dust from the front of a shop or living place. So, it raises the

question how, with all that dust, people can seem to get their clothes so clean. White shirts and blouses are really white. You would think that somewhere there is a washing machine with super detergent but I can't imagine the average Haitian having access to a washing machine that good or super detergent that powerful. Their Sunday clothes look so fresh and neat you just have to wonder. For those traditionalists who want to bring back suits for men and hats for ladies, those traditions are alive and well in Haiti. They look like a million, as the saying goes, but it is a complete mystery to me how they do it.

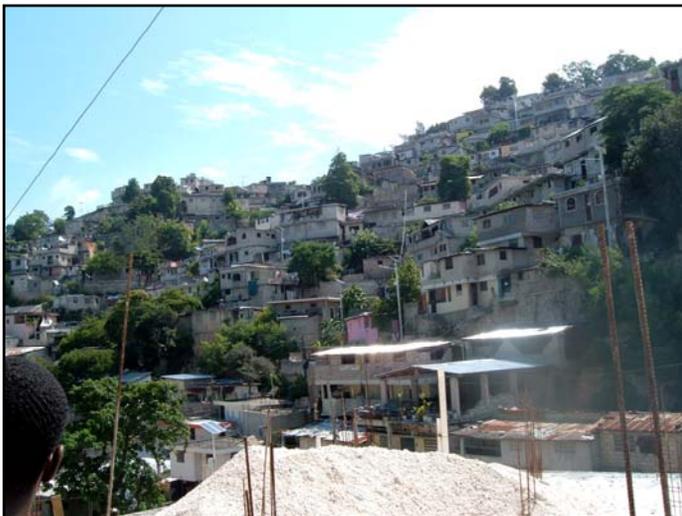
Why do they have a driver training course?

We traveled each day by a circular course where we could see people practicing driving. I have tried to ponder what one might practice to drive a car in Haiti. I suppose one skill would be how to fit your vehicle through a space that is at least 3 inches smaller than the vehicle. You would have to practice squeezing your car through what looks like an impossibly small opening while trying to



miss another car that is trying to get through the same opening at the same time. I guess that means you have to practice at “playing chicken.” Who is going to yield first? You can ask the question but it appears that you must never ever yield or at least that seems to be the rule. You should develop the ability to avoid potholes which are plentiful. When you swerve to the right to miss a hole, you should remember that probably someone is swerving to the left to miss the same hole. After it rains, you may have to go through a pothole which makes you wonder if you are going to need a lifeboat to get out the other side. You should also work on your patience. The narrow streets have only two narrow lanes so you wait in line to get through an intersection. Often when you get to the intersection, you see policemen but it is hard to know if the policemen are there because of the traffic or if the traffic is there because of the policeman. What are people practicing on that driver’s course – a mystery?

Why don’t they fill the gaps between cinder blocks?

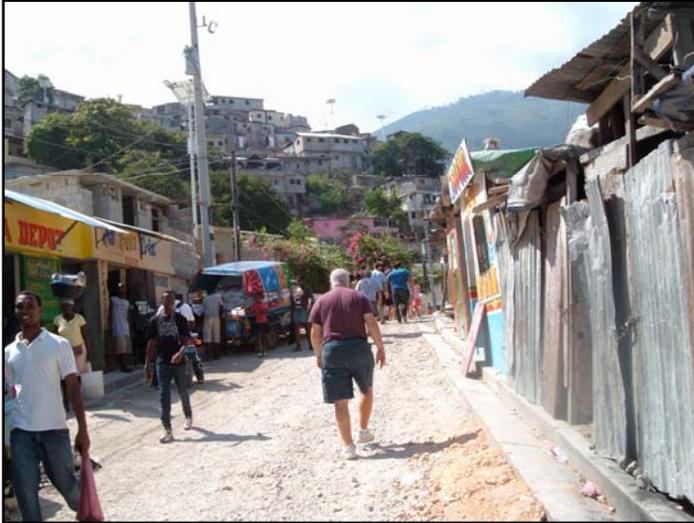


Cinder block construction is the most common form of building to be seen. Wood buildings will be consumed by termites pretty quickly. I am used to seeing the gaps between cinder blocks being filled and flat and neat in American construction. In Haiti, most of the walls have just enough mortar to hold the blocks together but never is the gap between blocks filled with mortar and smooth and certainly not neat. I haven’t decided whether

they are trying to make the mortar go farther or whether this is a “what’s the use” thing. I suppose that much of what is done in Haiti has a “what’s the use” quality. I suspect that many of the people we observed have given up hope. The poverty and lack of opportunity must be devastating. The unemployment rate, I am told, is 85%. Perhaps it doesn’t matter whether the mortar in the cinder blocks looks good.

Why don’t they use price tags?

I didn’t see even one price tag but I may have the answer to the question. If there were a price tag, you wouldn’t pay that amount anyway. I know that much of the world does business by haggling and you are not going to pay what a person asks. That is true and may be more so in Haiti. The announced price is not what you are going to pay. I suspect two factors contribute to the price of things, deceit and desperation. I loved the Haitian people I met but I am not so naïve as to think they would not try to separate you from your money by taking advantage of you. They tend to think all Americans are rich



made a bad situation even worse.

and, of course, we are compared to most of them. So, we are fair game by that kind of thinking. We have lots of money. But, many of them are desperate. There's no excuse for deceit but you can feel the desperation. Sometimes we were asked for money and often asked if we could offer any work. The poverty is pervasive. The mystery is that they are able to survive. Haiti was in bad shape before the earthquake which

Will I ever go back?

I guess I should say up front I would not want to live in Haiti. The Gambrills believe that God has called them to live there. They have moved along in the process of adjusting and almost seem at home. The heat and humidity would be tough for me. I would never survive the process of buying things when I would have to know not to pay the asked price. I don't know how I would ever jockey a car through the narrow streets and traffic. The Gambrills seem well on their way to mastering such things. But the question is not would I live there but would I go back. If God shows that I could make a contribution and makes it clear I should go, show me the way to the ticket counter.

