

Babes' UPDATE

December 2008

Last Monday was a Muslim holiday and I (Rodney) had off from work. Sharyn doesn't have classes on Mondays so we headed out to see a new nursery site. We knew it was a hike. Our Haitian friend who is responsible for that area said it was 45 minutes for him but would probably take us a couple hours to get there. After hiking for about 1 ½ hours in some of the most rugged terrain we have ever seen, we asked our friend to find a mule for each of us. Mounted, three brutal hours later, we arrived. The community was ecstatic. They get few visitors. The community had about 12,000 plastic bags planted already and many were just sprouting. We took about that many more bags and they will have a nursery of about 25,000 trees when they are done.



Dipi community & local school students preparing tree bags for nursery.

Sharyn's ability to interact with the kids will forever amaze me. Their only community school was in a Catholic church and there were perhaps a hundred children present. After their welcome songs and greetings, she engaged each class and soon had them giggling and responding freely. School was dismissed early so the children could help their parents in the nursery. It was so beautiful to see the children sidle up and talk to her or just touch her skin. There was no question that indeed it was Christmas, for God was among us.



The only school in the community lost its roof earlier this year during the series of hurricanes.

Too soon it was time to return. After walking down a nearly vertical rock strewn path for about a half hour, knee pain overcame terror and I got hoisted back on the mule. Usually mules sense my fear and further terrorize by walking as close to the edge of all cliffs as they possibly can. This was a young one and hadn't learned all the techniques yet so I only had to fear sliding over his head, falling off as he made the constant switchbacks or just simply dropping dead from fright. Haitian saddles have no stirrups and are only a wooden frame with no padding. Mostly they are used for carrying inanimate loads, not people. Inanimate loads, properly balanced, seldom shift, so essentially there is no girth strap holding the saddle upright. I stuck up much higher than the inanimate loads and with a poor sense of balance mixed with the fear of heights, mules, falling, and death, had the saddle constantly on one side of the beast or the other.

Sharyn's concern about riding down the mountain motivated her enough to walk the entire way. Her toe nails are all broken from her feet sliding in her tennis shoes but she gloats that her saddle sores are much less pronounced than mine. My entire body is bruised from the inside out from my heart beating so wildly against my ribs. Last night we both had multiple cramps from muscle seizures. We may be getting too old for this kind of excitement.

The area was as desolate as any I have been in. The people were as poor as any I know. Their hospitality was the best Advent gift I could ever imagine.

I wonder if I will ever return to that place. Perhaps with an overnight stay, it may happen but in all truthfulness, I really doubt I will. Sharyn is more than ready to head back, always feeling much more at home among the people who are so needy but so ready to openly share their lives. Like so many in America, it becomes easy for us to romanticize the simplicity of life in this poverty stricken community high in the remote mountains far from the distractions of the world. But I confess, I am really happy I can address some of their needs from a distance.

Our deepest thanks to you that through your support we are able to reach out to people and communities such as this one and help them in many small ways to be part of the Christmas story. A few trees symbolizing a new beginning, a trained teacher to share the good news, a friend to visit and talk and listen, but mostly the Presence reminding each of us we are not alone. No village or no heart is so remote it cannot be reached by your love and prayers this Christmas season.

Merry Christmas
Rodney & Sharyn

