

VBS Unique and Overwhelming

Vacation Bible Schools in Haiti are unlike any attended at our local churches. A team of young adults from St. Louis, MO returned to LaGonave the last week of June and first week of July for another year of enthusiastic activities and spiritual discovery. These young people made their first trip to LaGonave as high school teens, returning each year, now as college students and young adults.

The first Bible Schools were held several years ago using the old sewing school building which has since become a storage depot. The team developed crowd control techniques for managing the unexpected numbers of children who wanted to attend. These children came mostly from the saline area (salt flats at the seaside). However, one thing this group has learned is that you can always expect more than you expected!

Two years ago, at Donna's suggestion, the team held a Bible School for the children in the very poor area at the outskirts of the village near the island airstrip known as Be Torti. At that time, they had no building to meet in so they used the ground in front of someone's stick and mud house. Last year a large tarp was used to provide shade at the entrance to the drainage tunnel under the airstrip and the children sat on the rock walls. This year, the airstrip terminal building was remodeled in preparation for the arrival of the Bible School team and a very exciting week for this much-neglected area of the village. A partition was removed to make one classroom. Decorative blocks were added for security, light, and ventilation. Repaired and painted benches from the former WISH sewing school filled the classroom.

Once again, the group was overwhelmed by the numbers that arrived for the youth clubs. They had planned for a maximum of 120 and easily had 180-200 children. This year also included a women's ministry program. Most of these women had never held a needle and thread in their hand until they were taught some simple craft projects.

Bible lessons and worship were another unique and exciting experience for these ladies. They especially enjoyed the singing. In Haiti, churches don't provide hymnals so people who can afford them buy their own. Others go without. Donna buys Bibles and hymnbooks in Port-au-Prince and a couple of WISH employees sell them to earn extra money. Donna had extra books which she was

glad to share with the ladies of Be Torti. They truly enjoyed the privilege of holding hymnbooks in their hands as they sang.

The group showed the JESUS film in Creole using a sheet for a screen hung at the entrance to the tunnel. Donna says that the group related to the stormy Sea of Galilee since these people depend on the sea for transportation and fishing. They were awed by the many fish in the boat after Jesus' miracle of the fishes in contrast to the few fish they catch with their spears and dugout canoes. However, the most amazing thing was when Jesus was agonizing on the cross and He prayed, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." To see someone so kind being treated so cruelly, then asking God to forgive His oppressors was inconceivable to them.

This small community of "Turtle Bay" is without the basic resources of water, school, or a church. But for a short time this summer, it was touched by Jesus' love through the lives of some very dedicated college students from the St. Louis area.

It All Started with Love and Prayer-

The Story of Beatrice and Jamie by Donna Doan

The story I'm about to tell is true. If you don't believe that God chooses us to be partners with Him, read on. He delights to do the impossible when we set His hand in motion by doing our part praying!

One day, as Dick and I were riding together in the Toyota truck, he showed me a row of stick and mud houses next to the airstrip. He said he felt they were an overlooked part of our village. Without water, schools, stores or attention from the American visitors to LaGonave, I had to agree. My heart was drawn to these poorest of the poor in Turtle Bay. We had heard that some of these homes had lost their men in the boat sinking a few years ago. I did not know what could be done for them, but God had planted a seed of interest in my mind.

Little by little, as toys and clothes were given to me, I gave them away to the people of this community. Two years ago, when our annual St. Louis youth team arrived to hold Vacation Bible Schools in the neighborhood of the WISH house, I asked them if they would also please go out to "my" community and do a short VBS. They agreed.

Obtaining permission from a man to use his grassless yard, we set up for a two-day VBS under the tall shady thorn bushes. With great excitement, the

children AND the mothers gathered around to find out what Vacation Bible School meant.

Jamie Hammer, a young college girl in the group, saw someone who broke her heart. A young girl, about six years old, was scooting up the stony path on her bare bottom. She wanted to come to VBS too, but with her rubbery, under-developed legs she could not run like the other children. **continued on page two** Jamie *ran* to pick her up and carry her to Bible School. She held her, and held her, and held her. Little Beatrice did not smile or respond. She was at the bottom of the pecking order in this little neglected neighborhood.

Jamie thought, "I must do something, but what can I do?" She thought perhaps she could take pictures and show them to American doctors, but what could they do for little Beatrice so far away? Exhausting her options, Jamie prayed, earnest prayers.

The entry in Jamie's prayer journal for August 3, 1998: *Lord, there is a little girl, Beatrice who had typhoid and now she is unable to walk. My heart broke when I saw her. We found out that both of her parents died and she is being raised by her grandmother. The doctor here, Lydia Schilling, said it would take a miracle to heal her. You do miracles everyday, Lord Jesus. Please do one for Beatrice. Use me, Jesus. Please touch her life. I cannot just leave and forget.*

Jamie wrote "Beatrice" next to Ephesians 3:20-21 in her Bible. "Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we can ask or imagine according to the power that works in us." A life of obedience to God had given Jamie's prayers power that could be unleashed for God's working in Beatrice's life.

When the youth team returned the following year, Vacation Bible School was again held in this community except it lasted an entire week this time instead of only two days. Little Beatrice again scooted to class, but this time she had a smile on her face since Jamie had come to see her again. She remembered Jamie, the girl who had shown her kindness by carrying her and holding her.

Jamie's prayer journal entry for June 29, 1999:

Beatrice came today. Last year she had absolutely no life, but this year she responded a lot. She talked some, and waved, and when Angela and I left, she gave us a kiss.

July 1, 1999: *I decided that I want to be Beatrice's legs for the next few days that we're here. At the ocean today, we waded to a little sandbar. Then I set her down in the water (only an inch deep) and she loved it! She was even running around on her knees! Lord, the*

look of joy on her face! I've never seen a look like that before and certainly never thought I'd see Beatrice like that. Then I carried her out until the water was chest-high on me. The look of ecstasy on her face completely made my day. Even though she still can't walk, what is so incredible about this year is that she has life, she's happy and laughing and funny (she makes hilarious faces) and she's such a sweet girl. It's hard knowing that after tomorrow I'm not going to see her again or be able to help her. I pray that she would know that You love her, and that would bring her life.

July 2, 1999: *I know that Beatrice had fun with me, but I pray that when she remembers the white girl who took her swimming and gave her piggy-back rides and kissed her dirty lips, that she would remember that I love You and You love her.*

Again, Jamie went back home to Missouri. She continued praying, and God began to work. One day, Carol Earl, a nurse at the mission hospital on LaGonave, was waiting beside the airstrip for the Mission Aviation Fellowship plane to fly her visiting sister to Port-au-Prince to catch the connecting airline flight to the United States. They waited and waited and waited. They wondered what was taking this plane so long. But God had a plan. The delay gave the children from the community time to come for their excitement of the day, watching a visitor board the plane! But the excessive delay also gave little Beatrice time to arrive as well. Carol took one look at her and was sure that she could help. Contacting her grandmother and needy brothers as well, Carol made an appointment for them to come to the clinic.

At the mission clinic, Beatrice was given milk powder, vitamins, and moringa powder. This powder is made from the leaf of the moringa tree which grows on LaGonave but whose nutritional value was unknown until it became part of the recent WISH fish project. The moringa protein is like milk growing on trees! Beatrice's brothers also received nutritional supplements.

Little by little, Beatrice grew stronger as she returned to the hospital week after week for fresh nutritional supplies. Kind friends in Michigan sent her two walkers as she gained enough strength to begin trying to use her legs.

Jamie's journal, December 4, 1999:

I found out on Wednesday that Beatrice can walk! Thank You for healing her! Please work in her heart, Jesus, and continue strengthening her body as well. I pray that I would be able to return there to see her, Lord.

To be continued in next newsletter. . .

