

Children's Culture Connection

Fostering peace by helping young Americans

Connect with other cultures

And make a difference in the lives of children in need worldwide



Haiti

How To Take The *Bored* Out Of The Boardroom

Children's Culture Connection President Dina Fesler recently returned from a visit to Haiti. Here's what she had to say during her trip:

PORT AU PRINCE

March 2008

As I wrap up a five day visit to L'Athletique d'Haiti, the Children's Culture Connection-supported NGO that serves Haitian children in need, I realize that I need to get this experience written down as soon as possible...partly in fear that I may convince myself that it was all just a dream.

Although I always look forward to my CCC trips abroad to visit the kids served through our program, I was nervous coming here because I really only knew three things about Haiti:

1. It is a politically unstable country in the Caribbean.



2. It is the poorest country in the western hemisphere.

3. 80% of the people live below the poverty line. From what I have seen in only five short days, there is no question that those things are true.

I saw United Nations soldiers patrolling neighborhoods on foot, driving the streets in heavily armored vehicles, and running random check points on street corners.



Haitian's carry buckets of water on their head



Just Plain Water - Unbelievable

All with their fingers on the trigger of their assault rifles, ready to engage at a moments notice. (Apparently all hell will break loose if they were to withdraw, and intimidation remains the name of the game.)

I helped unload a trailer filled with dried food aid from US non-profits and saw it distributed to hungry families with no other options. For people who wonder where all those boxes of food packed by the **Feed My Starving Children** volunteers and **Food For The Poor** ends up, here it is.

I also had the experience of riding shotgun on a water truck that distributes water to a Port Au Prince slum that looks like the aftermath of a nuclear holocaust.

A place where thousands line up to receive a bucket of water that must last them up to a week. Waiting in the oppressive heat for a bucket of water. Not concert tickets, not a Wii,

not the latest video game to hit the market...but water. Just. Plain. Water.

Unbelievable.



FOOD FOR THE POOR

Serving the poorest of the poor

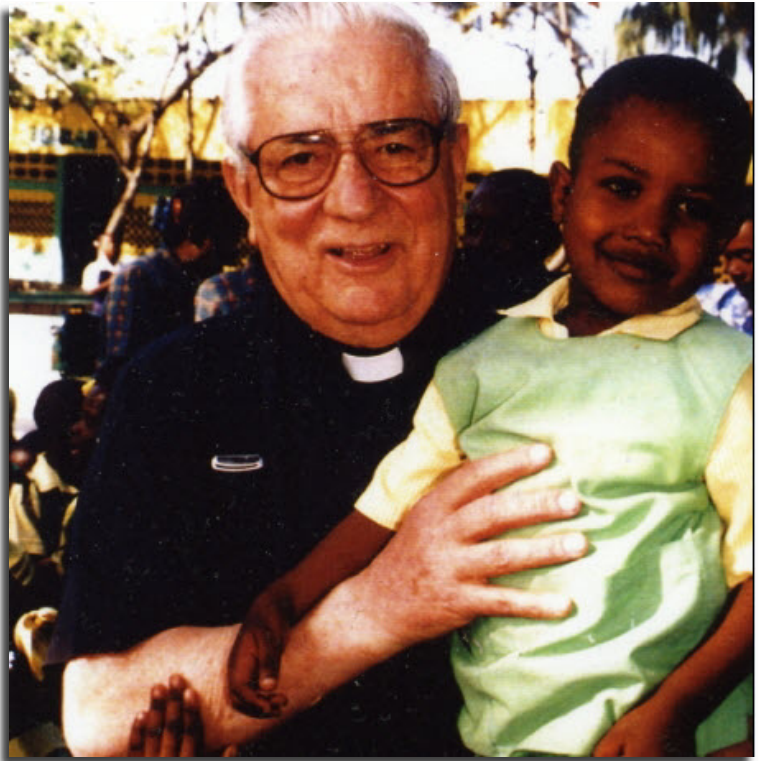


The little red truck that could..... save more more lives every day.

The water truck is funded by a Minnesota-based charity organized by **Father Bernard Reiser**, a retired Catholic priest, in response to the lack of facilities provided to the people of this slum.

As I stood alongside the water truck watching the seemingly endless stream of men, women and children hoisting 5-gallon buckets of water up on their head to carry home, I wondered how long an elderly priest can carry on such a major undertaking. I wondered what would happen if the money stopped coming in from his friends and parishioners that support this.

I wondered if I would ever be able to take a guilt free bubble bath again.



However, while Haiti's problems seemed so overwhelming at times it made my head hurt, the spirit of the Haitian people was so overwhelming it made my heart melt.



Despite the harsh realities of their world, Haiti is also a country filled with color, chaos and a passion for life...no matter how difficult the lives there may be. Haiti's winding narrow streets are filled with colorful stores, billboards, bougainvillea bushes, tap-taps (artistic graffiti-covered taxis), and the lively sounds

of Compa music coming from nearly every street corner.

Reiser Relief, Inc.
Helping Haiti

On breezy afternoons, kids fly colorful homemade kites (ingenious creations crafted from plastic bags, a few sticks and some string), and in the evenings, 'rah-rah bands' (rag-tag bands of musicians) stroll up and down the streets in a make-shift parade, playing music, laughing, singing and basically celebrating anything at all. It's like at the end of "How the Grinch Stole Christmas" when even though the decorations and toys were gone the spirit of the people (or the Whos in Whoville) was still completely present.



It is this spirit of hope that radiates off of the Haitian people ...and in particular, Robert Duval.

Robert (Boby) Duval is not only the founder of L'Athletique d'Haiti, he is a one-man revolution bringing hope and opportunity to the Haitian people and their children through his incredible program. (And to any of you who think that that I am high energy, intense, and dramatic. ...just wait until you meet Bobby.) He is a former soccer star, political activist, political prisoner, and humanitarian-turned nonprofit founder.

Twelve years ago he started L'Athletique d'Haiti, a sports



training/education program that captures the dreams of impoverished Haitian kids, infuses their worlds with structure, discipline, team-building and education, in addition to one hot meal per day.

Often the only meal these kids will have. Over the years he has grown his program from one training center to five and he currently serves 1,300 children around the country.



Dina Fesler

His goal is to open 25 centers and give the same opportunity to every child in Haiti. After spending time getting to know the kids in his program I can say one thing for certain: this idea is working!!!

These kids who came from the same slum I delivered water to were some of the most energetic, spirited and healthy kids I have seen ...and they all have big dreams for their futures.

I spent an afternoon with a group of L'Athletique boys who I challenged to a friendly competition. I told them that I wanted to show some Minnesota soccer teams that not only can the Haitians athletes tear up a soccer field, but their creative ingenuity is a force to be reckoned with as well.

So I collected a pile of garbage from around the area (plastic bottles, old rice bags, bottle caps, sticks, plastic bags, etc.), placed them in a pile on the table and told the kids to show me what they

FEED MY
STARVING
CHILDREN



Blessed are those who are generous,
because they feed the poor.
- Proverbs 22:9



can turn this stuff into. In less than 30 minutes, the boys had created toy cars, kites and other imaginative items that just blew me away...although I imagine the Grinch would have been pretty pissed off.

We shall see if I can find a Minnesota soccer team game to reciprocate.

Whether they become the future soccer stars they dream about or not, they are becoming the future problem solvers of their world through their education, life skills and competitive spirit. Personally, I believe that these kids are exactly what can pull Haiti out of the trenches of despair and put Feed My Starving Children out of business (in a good way, of course).

Despite the political instability, unrest, poverty, and overwhelming need, the Haitian people are proud, passionate

and loving people who all want to see a better life for their children. According to Bobby, "kids are the only thing that Haitians can agree on." I couldn't agree more.

~ Dina Fesler

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