

# MOUNTAINS OF HOPE FOR HAITI

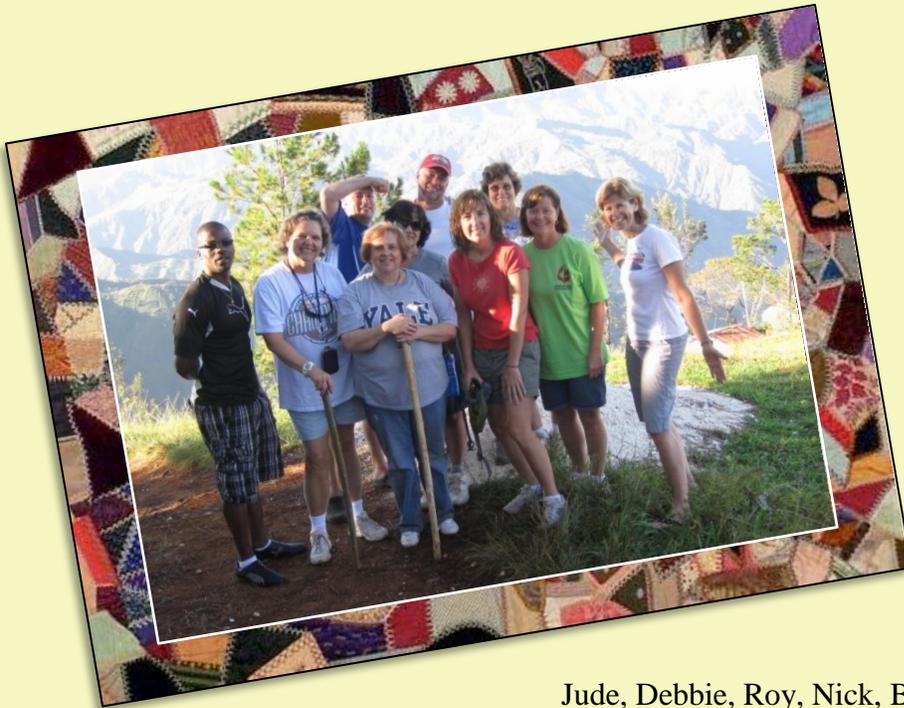
MISSION TRIP NOVEMBER 2012

Joyce E Rioux, EdD, OTR/L

When I was young, I enjoyed watching my grandmother sew beautiful quilts. My favorite—the crazy quilt—was created with fabric scraps comprised of different shapes, patterns, and textures. Each crazy quilt was unique, sewn together using a seemingly haphazard pattern that emerged as a beautiful piece of art. Recently traveling with a group to the mountainous village of Furcy, Haiti, I was reminded of my grandmother's crazy quilts. Similar to the scraps of fabric, our group was comprised of precious individuals brought together to create a serviceable quilt. One pastor commented that we did not choose to travel to Furcy but we were sent by God to have us love each other, work together, and discover how wonderful helping can be.

For some, this was a return trip; for one, this was a new destination in Haiti; and for the remaining, this was a first visit. The repeat travelers realized the work of previous teams—the flourishing gardens, the working clinic, and the existing store. The individual expanding his mission work found a place of beauty within the impoverished country of Haiti. The heart of the Furcy community touched everyone. They say that once this happens, a little part of Furcy becomes part of you wherever you go.

Within this journal, I attempted to capture the day-to-day experiences of our group. Included are those experiences that brought meaning to our day and awakened our senses—seeing, hearing, touching, and being moved by the Spirit.



Jude, Debbie, Roy, Nick, Becky,  
Anne, Laurel, Lisa, Jill, and Joyce

## SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 10, 2012

### Travel Day

Anne, Debbie, Jill, Laurel, Lisa, Nick, Roy, Jude, Jayden (Jude's son), and I met at John F Kennedy International Airport. Some of us were meeting for the first time but would soon become dear friends by week's end. Our flight was uneventful. Our time at the Port-au-Prince Airport was relatively smooth. Our ride to the guesthouse in Pétion-Ville was another story. We managed to get a flat tire most likely a result of traveling the unavoidable pothole-ridden roads in a land still deeply impacted by the 2010 earthquake. Reshuffling the luggage, locating the spare tire, and applying a bit of Haitian ingenuity and bravery for working amidst the city traffic, the driver had us on our way. We arrived at the guesthouse and were met by Tom and Wendy Vencuss. While there, Wendy shared the history of the Furcy community, the devastation of Storm Sandy, and the work of the prior team.

## SUNDAY, NOVEMBER 11, 2012

### Worship Service Walking Tour

On Sunday, we traveled to Furcy. At the last bend in the road, a welcoming crowd was there to greet us. The smiles and sense of excitement was overwhelming. Were we worthy of such a glorious greeting? Would we be able to offer enough? Without skipping a beat, helping hands joined together to take our 20 or more overweight suitcases down the steep path to the church where we would stay. A wondrous site to behold as a sea of suitcases balanced on the heads of men, women, and children showed the way.

Once at the church, we met up with Becky, a seamstress, who arrived one week prior and served with the previous team. During her interim stay between teams, a local family, Ismay, Isabelle, and their young daughter, hosted Becky in their home. Becky was now joining our team and shared that Ismay's family treated her royally. Isabelle baked a cake—not an easy feat with no electricity. Meals were served on the best china and Becky felt cared for. This care and sense of celebration was in the hearts of many that we met. Giving their time to show us around, eager to welcome us, practice their English, and point out their homes and gardens. At the church service, people shared their vocal gifts. Singing was a part of a joyous festivity as everyone raised his or her voice in praise. As a group, we offered a simple song, *This Little Light of Mine*, and Pastor Roy provided an inspirational message with the help of Jude's translation. Our hope for the week: to let our light shine.

MONDAY, NOVEMBER 12, 2012

Sewing  
Jewelry Making  
Clinic Day  
Construction

This day was filled with liberation—a day to let go of trivial matters, a day to appreciate simple gifts, a day to welcome the task before us. Early in the morning, a large gathering of women collected. They were eager to learn how to use the four treadle sewing machines under the direction of Becky. As the hours passed, the thread broke frequently, the belt fell off, and the women struggled with establishing the rhythm of their feet to power the machine. Amidst all this chaos, I recall looking down and seeing a woman's feet on the treadle. She was wearing two right shoes. Immediately a moment of sadness fell over me. This sadness was quickly replaced with delight as I realized that the two right shoes belonged to two women working together in harmony. This sign was one of hope that the women would take what they learned, work together, and continue their work beyond our stay.

While the women were sewing, a small gathering of boys enticed Nick to play with a well-worn partially deflated soccer ball. Passing the ball back and forth with a display of fancy footwork, the ball soon became launched over the ridge. Without hesitation, one of the young boys leapt over the edge disappearing into the mountainside to retrieve the ball. The play resumed only this time with a bit of teasing as the boys tried to coax Nick to retrieve the ball as it tumbled down the slope once again. This act of play, laughter, and smiles transcended any barriers and made for a heartwarming exchange.

Jewelry making started as a bit of a translation challenge. It also became a moment to accept others into close proximity as the crowd gathered and people were eager to learn how to make paper beads. How do you describe the steps for paper bead making? After a while with a few fumbles, bumps, and bumbles, people were soon on their way to making necklaces and earrings. The biggest joy: witnessing the happiness and pride as the women showed off their finished products.

At the clinic, the Christian physician was present. He presented as a well-respected, compassionate, and competent individual. He seemed to take everything in stride. A traveling physician amid meager supplies and equipment, he was the epitome of a clinic physician in action—leading everyone in prayer, tending to their healthcare needs, and supporting the work of the clinic. Our nurses, Jill and Laurel, pitched in and gifted young mothers and their children with mommy packs and comfort dolls (items that our caring parishioners assembled back home). Eight or nine dolls were given away this day. The children hugged the dolls tightly and bounced with joy.



Soccer ball fun



Comfort doll receives a kiss

Lending a hand at the construction site for the future guesthouse, Nick and Roy became the support crew for the Furcy workers. Tasked to wheel bricks to the site, carry heavy water buckets, and sift sand, Nick and Roy felt the joy of giving and fellowship as the workers welcomed their assistance. They gained an appreciation for the manual labor involved not only at the construction site but also in working the land. Only a few hours earlier, Roy was watching a farmer off in the distance tend his land. Awestruck by the man's perseverance as he moved along the rows and worked down along the mountainside terrain, Roy watched for a while. He waved to the man and the man returned the gesture. A humble exchange such as this became a valued connection. Lisa came across a similar realization as she showed a group of boys a photo of her son and herself. The boys seemed to look at Lisa in a different way. They seemed to recognize Lisa as a mom. Her take-away from this exchange: we may be from a different country and we may have different colored skin, but our differences do not matter. The simple interactions and sharing allow our differences to fade away.



Sew, sew, sew



Two Right Feet



Jewelry Making



Clinic Consult

TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 13, 2012

Sewing  
School Visit  
Repairing the Store Roof  
Vacation Bible School  
A Hot Meal

There was a cadence of sound from sunlight to sunset. We were awakened to *The Hallelujah Chorus* playing on a radio off in the distance. Quiet footsteps, crowing roosters, and even a cow chimed in. As the morning activities began, a crescendo could be heard with the banging of hammers, the hum of sewing machines, and the sounds of children actively engaged in learning. One could hear the sound of their heart—the tugging of heart strings. Was is happy? The sweet sounds of children were carried throughout the day—joyous laughter, song, and praise. Followed by silence, a most beautiful sound, as the children ate and were filled. The rolling of clouds joined the symphony moving through the trees, below us, and around us. There was a sense of peace that passes understanding down in our hearts.

Our activities of the day were plentiful. Becky remained steadfast in her mission to teach the women to sew. Most of them were finishing their carryall bags and gaining proficiency in straight-line sewing. This is often the trickiest skill to master using an electric sewing machine let alone a treadle machine. While the sewing lessons took place, Laurel, Nick, and Roy joined the crew to repair the farmers' store roof—a roof that was damaged by Storm Sandy and repaired through the monetary contributions of those back home. Anne, Debbie, Jill, Lisa, Jude, and I went to visit the school.

Nearing the school, we were hit with an overwhelming sense of disorder, a disorder created by Storm Sandy just a few weeks earlier. The roof of one of the school buildings appeared as though someone took a giant can opener and peeled it back wedging it between buildings. Outside, children were merrily making the trek to class. Inside, children were learning. The classrooms lacked the frills but were not without the lack of enthusiasm or respect for education. Children were attentive and eager to share a song, demonstrate their work with math fractions, and take notes. Their penmanship was beautiful.

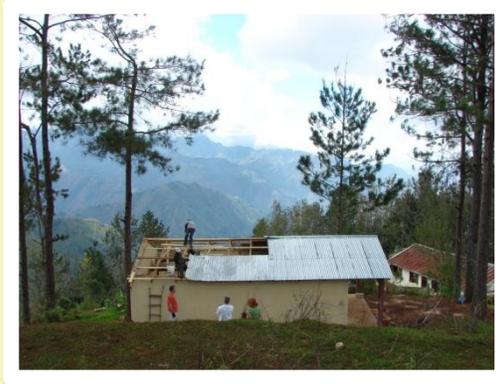
Writing neatly in cursive, they sized their letters small and placed their writing in such a manner as to conserve paper. Nothing seemed to be taken for granted.

Up on the hillside, the store roof was being repaired. Laurel, Nick, and Roy were commissioned to remove the nails from the old lumber and straighten them. Materials were considered precious and would be reused. The Haitian work crew carried on and enlisted the help of Roy and Nick to hoist sheets of metal to the roof. Working in synchrony, the language barrier did not seem to impact the forward progress. Even when a side conversation disrupted



School roof destroyed by Storm Sandy

the flow, a playful run of the hammer across the sheet metal awakened the senses and relayed the message. By mid-afternoon, the roof was complete.



Store roof before



Store roof after

Moving from one project to the next, we devoted our afternoon to hosting a mini Vacation Bible School for the children with a focus on Noah's Ark or, rather, Noye Ach. The children arrived in droves, up to 200 in all with more on the way. Rotating them through a dramatic re-enactment of the story, a rising rendition of Noah's Arky Arky song, and time to make a treasured cross necklace embellished with animals two by two, the children grasped the story.



Noah's Ark staging

Noye te pran bèt yo, de pa de.  
Lapli te tonbe pandan karant jou ak  
karant nwit. Noye te obeyisan.  
Noye te fè Bondye confyans.

*Noah took the animals two by two.  
Rain fell for 40 days and 40 nights.  
Noah was obedient. Noah was  
confident in God.*

Preparing to eat a hot meal, the children lined up to wash their hands. A squirt of soap, a rinse of water, older children helping younger children, and they were on their way. Madame Lulu and crew prepared enough food to feed over 250 mouths. This was a meal that was funded by friends, family, and parishioners from home. Many thanks for these kind hearted souls. These contributions allowed us to spread joy and ensure a nourishing meal for all.

The day felt perfect. We had the right amount of food, juice, crafts, and time. God's presence was all around. He provided.



Enjoying a hot meal

## WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 14, 2012

Sewing  
Clinic Day  
Women's Gathering  
Construction  
A Hot Meal  
Movie Day

This was a day of awakening. During breakfast, Jean Claude, one of our interpreters, shared his story of where he was on January 12, 2010, the day of the earthquake. Buried under rubble, he remembers speaking with God and God directing him. Jean Claude began waving his hand around his head and slowly cleared the ruins from above. He testified that his belief and trust in God saved him. In many ways, this same belief brought our team together. Each of us made a leap of faith, came to Haiti, and let go of obligations back home. Our journey and work together allowed us to be filled by the Spirit, new friendships, and the beauty of the Furcy community.

To hear Jean Claude's story go to <http://youtu.be/OJXYd32don8>

Lisa and I greeted the morning with yoga out on the cistern. Letting our hearts shine upward, drinking in the fresh air, and preparing for the day. Nearby, the clinic was bustling with energy. Mothers and babies filled the waiting area. Thirty babies would receive their vaccinations. A few of us joined the crowd, passed out comfort dolls, and offered a hand.

The women's gathering, a Holy Spa event, opened with a reading from John 13: 1-15, the story of Jesus washing His disciples' feet. Manicures, foot washings, fellowship, gifts, and good food followed. The moments were powerful. Sitting at the feet of the women, feeling them relax under our touch, caring for them, refreshing their spirit, and refreshing ours in return. We found similarities in our stories—the loss of a husband, waking early in the morning to begin each day's work, caring for children and family members, doing housework, and thanking God. The Furcy women expressed gratitude for past, present, and future teams. They keep everyone and their families in their daily prayers. A special thank you was extended to Becky for the sewing classes. The women have been grateful for the opportunity to learn how to sew and envision themselves working toward making marketable products.



Holy Spa foot washing

While the women gathered, the men gathered to work on the guesthouse. There was a genuine sense of happiness and joy expressed as everyone worked together. When people walked by, the men always extended a warm hello. A sense of community was present—a community where members matter to one another, work together, and have a shared faith that their commitment to one another will get the work done. One person recalled seeing this sense of community in action. The store had 3-inches of water on the floor. Enough people gathered,

grabbed some old brooms and mops, and formed an assembly line. In one poetic motion, everyone worked together to successfully move the water out the door. Even at the sewing machines, a sense of community was evident. Some teasing fun with a mix of French, English, and Creole, “Ah, she goes *vit* (fast).” Everyone was joining in the work and joining in the fun. They had become a sewing community tucked in the corner of the church working mornings and afternoons. They recognized one another’s needs and expressions. Looking over to Becky, one woman asked, “Are you tired?” Becky responded with a weary sigh, “Yes.” This was followed by “I’m tired too.” This exchange spoke volumes about the caring connections that were being made.

Mid-day, the children and youth filled the church to watch bits of the movie *Fantasia* then *The Gods Must Be Crazy*. The room was packed and not a peep could be heard. Popcorn was passed around in cups to 148 takers. As silly antics appeared in the movie, giggles erupted. The church was filled with activity... women sewing in the corner, children watching the movie, people checking their emails, and a few catching some naptime.



A Busy Clinic



Sweet Joys



Precious Moments



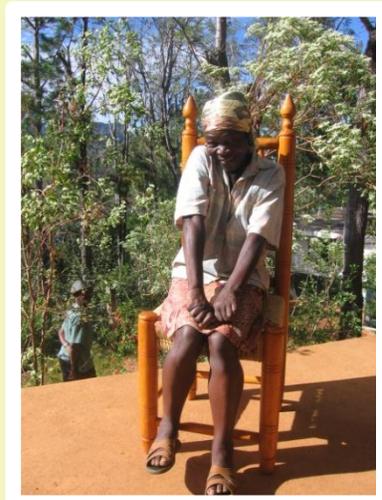
Girl Talk

## THURSDAY, NOVEMBER 15, 2012

Sewing  
Construction  
Game Day  
A Hot Meal

A simple touch has the power to warm one's heart, reduce stress, and nurture a special bond that alters our perception and view of the world around us. Thursday was filled with moments that touched us all. One woman, an adorable fixture at our doorstep each morning, got her toenails painted by Lisa.

The woman responded with delight radiating from the top of her head straight down to her brightly colored toes. Becky's moment appeared when she took a breath, stepped back, and looked around. She saw the ladies sewing away and no longer dependent on the instruction of the teacher—she knew she could rest and all would be right. For Debbie, a young child was looking sad and in need of some comfort. Taking some crayons and paper, Debbie sat alongside the child and colored. The child so enamored by this act reached over and hugged Debbie's leg saying, "This is my Debbie." Nick, working day three down at the assembly plant (guesthouse), took a moment to relax. Then all of a sudden, he heard "Nick, Nick". He was late with the cement and the crew was calling him to get back to work. This moment made him realize that he was now one of the crew. Anne, not used to the physical closeness that surrounded her, realized that she was getting accustomed to having people in her space. She even likened her new comfort to the Furcy ways when she realized that she most likely came in contact with every child in the community as she adhered temporary tattoos on their arms. Jill's moment was with Marie Marthe, the clinic nurse. Jill gave Marie a care package for the clinic that included a nurse's lab coat. In thanks, Marie



Delighted from head to toe



Dress completed!

embraced Jill. This embrace, while welcomed, caught Jill off guard. It was such a genuine moment that warmed her soul. Roy, working hard all week, sifting sand, and transporting the sifted sand to the guesthouse worksite, appreciated the patience that everyone had with him. The work crew taught him a lot and together they seemed to enjoy each other's company. Nearing the end of his shift, he started toying with his co-worker and spontaneously challenged him to a wheelbarrow race. Neck and neck they rounded the corner only to have Roy bump into an obstacle and get beat at the finish line. This silly moment of messing around and sharing a good laugh was heartfelt fun. So many moments like these and more made for a blessed day.

We started our day with Jude, one of our leaders and interpreters, sharing his story of where he was the day of the earthquake. His story was as equally moving as Jean Claude's

story that we heard only one day prior. Jude told how a stranger appeared out of nowhere, gently holding him steady, and reassuring him that all would be okay while chaos and confusion erupted around them. Hearing his story, one can easily make a connection that the presence of the Lord was before him in his time of need. You wonder how many people shared similar experiences that day.

At the close of school, game day began. Hundreds of children arrived at a nearby field. Arming ourselves with soccer balls, footballs, Frisbees, badminton, jump ropes, coloring books, temporary tattoos, and more, we were ready. Everyone scattered and began the fun—a rousing game of soccer, a toss of the football, some badminton volley, jump rope rhymes, and a chance to color. The energy was palpable and all were having a good time. Just as we prepared to venture back, Mother Nature joined in on the fun... drip, drip, drip. The children squealed and ran. The skies opened and down came the rain. Safe in the sanctuary of the church and the clinic, the children settled in and prepared to take in a hot meal. Every mouth was fed and if the sun were not to set that evening, the children would have stayed. They were happy. The church had become a special place—a place for shelter, food, fellowship, activity, and worship. God was present.

That evening, we celebrated our time in Furcy and reflected over the week. Some of the men from the community joined us in this celebration. We shared songs, laughs, snacks, and stories. The men thanked us for the week's events. Ismay told of his witness to many women in the community giving testimony including his wife, Isabelle. She was so excited to sew a dress for their young daughter Isadora. Isadora looked beautiful in the dress. Pastor Elias shared his perspective and pleasure in seeing how we worked with the women. He values the contributions of each team. He recalls in 2004, a team helped put in the footings to the store. Another team contributed to the next layer of construction. The next team brought seeds. The team after that was eating off those seeds. Each team builds on the next and allows the Furcy community to become a better and better place—a community that will sustain and thrive.



Game Day



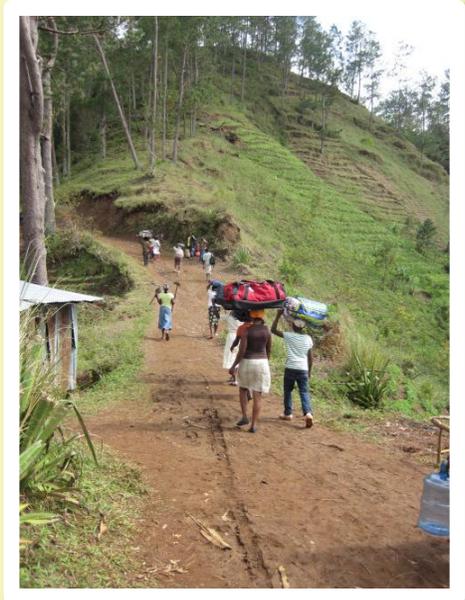
Safe, Dry, and Ready to Eat

FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 2012

*Saying Goodbye*

Our week was packed with emotions. We laughed heartily at the silliest of things and invited others to join in our fun. We cried as the Spirit moved us and comforted those in need. There were smiles of recognition and friendships that grew. We received many gifts during our stay—gifts of song, hugs, stories, and a community that opened their hearts and opened ours.

As we prepared to leave, the village came out to say goodbye. They hoisted our belongings atop their heads and walked with us side by side up the path to where the vehicles awaited. Joining our hands in prayer, we praised our time together and celebrated the gifts that were shared. The send off was as beautiful as the welcoming we received just six days ago. Only this time forward, we will carry with us the light of Furcy wherever we go.



A trail of helping friends



Using her head to help



A hug goodbye



Help all around



While watching the women learn to sew on the treadle machines this past week, I thought of an analogy to our mission trip. As we have all witnessed, it takes great patience and perseverance to make the wheel spin in the right direction. Our work in Furcy, reminds me of this wheel. Each mission team helps that wheel take a few more turns. All tasks, large or small, keep that momentum going forward. There are obstacles, such as the damage experienced from Hurricane Sandy, which temporarily stops the wheel or makes it take a few turns in the wrong direction. This stop of the wheel becomes only a minor setback. With God's help, the wheel starts slowly moving forward again. As we leave Furcy, I am proud of our accomplishments and know that we helped to advance the wheel.

--Lisa Limeburner

### Our Team Gifts

- Sewing kits, fabric, patterns, notions, and more
- School supplies including paper, crayons, pencils, markers, scissors, and erasers
- Clinic supplies, such as, gloves, gauze, band aids, and over the counter medications
- Mommy packs
- Work crew gloves
- Comfort dolls
- Flip flops and ladies scarves
- Soccer balls, footballs, and a pump
- 2 hot meals for the children and 1 hot meal for the women (500 mouths were fed)
- A treadle sewing machine
- Supplies and labor to repair the farmers' store roof
- Scholarships so 13 children can attend school for 1 year and receive a hot meal as part of the school program

### Our Team

Deborah Draizen, Co-leader  
Jude Exantus, Co-leader

Pastor Anne Bracket  
Nick Franco  
Pastor Roy Grubbs  
Rebecca Hein  
Lisa Limeburner  
Laurel Reagan  
Joyce Rioux  
Jill Wilson



The setting sun in Furcy, Haiti