

*****Special Haiti Report from the Carters*****

How can we express our love and thanks to you who have carried us in prayer? Randy and I are overwhelmed with gratitude for the love, concern and prayers of our friends. All through our ordeal, there was never a moment when we did not feel cushioned by God's presence and peace. We knew we were being carried by your prayers. Coming home has been, in the words of one of our team-mates, "like being washed in an ocean of love." We'd like to tell our story to you, who have supported us so well, so that you can celebrate God's incredible protection and provision for us, and share our grief for the people of Haiti.

Our American Airlines flight touched down in Port au Prince, Haiti late Tuesday afternoon. As soon as the seatbelt sign went out, we stood and gathered our belongings and I said to our team, "Let the adventure begin!" I had no idea...

Our team was comprised of 12 members including the president of Compassion Canada, another Compassion employee and three long-term Compassion volunteers, including Randy and myself. Our 21 year old daughter, Kendall, had saved her own money for the trip so that she could meet Sharley, the Compassion child she has been corresponding with for several years. The remaining three couples were key ministry people who were interested in learning more about the work of Compassion.

Because Compassion Canada's president, Barry Slauenwhite, was traveling with us, the Haitian Compassion office had arranged a diplomatic arrival for us. That meant that while other passengers stood in customs lines and fought through the normal chaos of a third world airport, we relaxed on leather sofas in an air conditioned lounge and waited for these things to be done for us. The process took quite a while and by the time we boarded the bus the Haitian office had arranged for our transportation to the Hotel Montana, the other passengers aboard our flight had left the airport.

Randy and I had been to Haiti previously, and we were excited about sharing the unique experiences of this country that God has tethered to our hearts. Our team commented on the sights and sounds of Port au Prince as we navigated the narrow, congested streets; like the pigs foraging on the roadside. The next thing I remember is seeing pedestrians on the road staggering, trees swaying, and dust billowing. My first thought was that a windstorm had suddenly swept in, but then concrete walls on either side of the road started heaving and waving. A woman fell on the road in front of our bus and not a second later a wall came down on her.

Frantic people ran into the streets which quickly become almost impassible. Torn power lines hung down into the street and chaos reigned.

Our bus crawled along for hours trying to make a trip that would normally take only minutes. We wept and prayed as we took in the horrific scenes surrounding us. We kept trying to text our families but were unable to get reception. Finally two members of our team with i-phones connected. Miraculously, within the half hour that communication was possible, we were able to text and hear back from Kevann at home. It was such a relief for each family member to know that the others were all right. With darkness descending, the Compassion representatives traveling with us decided to try to make it to the Compassion offices which were closer than the hotel. Upon arrival there, it was quickly determined that the offices were not a safe place to stay as that building had also sustained damage. Seconds later we learned that the Hotel Montana had collapsed. **Had we not been delayed by our diplomatic welcome, we, along with many of the passengers on our flight, would have been at the Montana.** We would have been checking in or unpacking in our rooms when the hotel collapsed. I knew that out of all Barry's many trips to Haiti, this was the first time arrangements for a diplomatic reception had been made. **We realized in that moment that God had chosen to spare our lives.**

It was obvious that we needed to find someplace to stay the night. One of our team had previously noticed **the Canadian Embassy was right across the street** from the Compassion office. I suggested we ask if we could stay there. Permission was granted and the gate opened to admit our bus. Shell-shocked, we stumbled off the bus to be greeted by the Ambassador's assistant who said, "Welcome to Canada." I don't think we understood the power of those words until a few hours later when crowds of wounded Haitians started gathering outside the gates seeking the sanctuary that belonged only to those on the inside; those blessed to hold that little blue book with Canada embossed on the cover in gold. That night we slept on the ground of the embassy

compound because the buildings were damaged and unsafe. We will never forget the sounds of that night. No sirens. No sign of help on its way; just the loud bang of buildings giving way and screams and wails of the bereaved and injured.

Late the next afternoon we were informed that the UN would escort us to the airport and the Canadian Forces would fly us home. We had just a short time to gather only what we could hold on our laps aboard the overloaded Hercules. The trip to the airport provided our first glimpse of the world outside of the embassy in 24 hours. That is when we saw the images you have seen on the news: corpses lining the side-walks, people trying to walk painfully on broken limbs. Broken hearted parents cradling dead children...The demolished infrastructure and chaos of the streets created several delays. By the time we arrived at the airport the flight crew had been on duty 14 hours. The decision was made to evacuate us to the Dominican Republic for the night. The next day we re-boarded the Hercules for Montreal. There we were met in the middle of the night by Foreign Minister Cannon and the Red Cross who took care of our immediate needs. The next day Westjet graciously bore the expense of flying us home where we were met at that airport by many family members and friends.

These days we are wrestling with many emotions. For Randy, the frustration of not being allowed to leave the embassy compound to help free those buried at the Montana is difficult to bear. We are well aware that of all the people caught in the earthquake, we were the least affected. Nothing collapsed on us. We were not injured. We all are struggling with the guilt of being treated preferentially because we are Canadian while the Haitians received no relief. We have been through a post traumatic stress debriefing and have identified in ourselves symptoms typical of people who have encountered highly stressful circumstances. We trust God will heal those psychological wounds over time. And we are seeking God for what he has for us as a result of this experience.

Words we heard last year in China came to mind. They were spoken by a man who I imagine is the underground church equivalent of the Apostle Paul. He said, "When God shows me something new, I ask him two questions: **Why are you allowing me to see what I see?** and **What do you want me to do with that experience?**" These are the questions we are asking now. We spent only thirty hours in Haiti, most of them in the relative safety of the compound of the Canadian Embassy, haunted by tortured cries all around us. **It seems God put us in Haiti specifically for that earthquake.** Now we are praying for guidance to steward that experience well.

Please pray with us along those lines. Pray also that the Haitian relief effort will be coordinated and effective. Pray that the local church will rise beyond their own grief and be effective in representing Jesus to their communities. Pray that their needs will be met. Pray for the Compassion staff, most of whom are alive, though many are injured and have lost their homes. They are now fanning out across the country to determine the status of the staff and 65,000 children in 200 projects.

We feel so blessed to know that you have stood with us in the past and will continue to uphold us in the future. Thank you for your care. We love you deeply.

With broken but grateful hearts,

Randy and Donna

P.S. Donations can be made for earthquake relief by logging on to www.compassion.ca. The relief delivered through Compassion will be dispensed by local churches throughout Haiti with a high degree of accountability.