

CHANGING LIVES

Sails for the Fishermen

Jeani O'Neill is one of our veteran mission OR nurses. She also is an accomplished sailor along with her husband Paul. Several trips ago, she made the observation that it would be really good if her sailing club could donate their old sails for those who make their living off the sea in Dame-Marie. She contacted her club and found there was great interest. She gathered quite a few sails from different sized boats in her club and stored them in her house until Kathy Aries and I could make a trip to her home. Many are rather large, so we can only bring two at a time to Dame-Marie with the rest of our surgical gear. At the end of our surgical week, we gathered at the small fishing community that lives next to Pierre Antoine's home. The look on the two senior fishermen was priceless when they opened the canvass bags to see what we had brought. Like Christmas in February. Thank you Jeani and Paul for helping this miracle happen. Every trip we will now bring another sail or two to help outfit their wooden boats.



Jeani is in the middle with two Dame-Marie Fishermen on either side, and Pierre Antione, our Haitian benefactor on the far left.

A gift of Vision

Several trips ago, we started purchasing large numbers of reading glasses for the midlife individuals who work very hard on their trades of shoemaking, seamstress and tailoring, net making and mending etc. As all of us of a certain age know, it becomes hard to see close up, and the different strength reading glasses are very popular. But we haven't yet been able to recruit an ophthalmologist to come and perform more in depth eye care. But an alternative has been found for the moment. It is the making of the prescription glasses that is out of reach of most people, for the eye exam can be obtained in country in some locations. The Dame-Marie dentist on our last trip asked if we could fill the prescription his sister was given for some special lenses that were not obtainable in Haiti. She has a special visual problem. So I went to my good friends at Central Optica in West Hartford Center. Not only was Karl Zyskowski, one of the family owners, able to make the special lenses, he offered to donate a pair of glasses each trip that we made to Haiti when the eye prescription was properly obtained!

Date 09/22/14

Nom du patient Lundy Stephane

	SPH	Cyl	Axe	Prism	Add
OD		-0.75	145		
OG		-0.75	170		

Remarque : Blanc ☐ Teinté ☒ Photogray ☐

[Signature]
Signature autorisée

And our first lucky recipient of his kindness and generosity with her new lenses: Ms. Stephane Lundi.



And the ripples of more and more individuals who are moved to help grows ever outward from the center of Dame-Marie to our homes and businesses her in the North East. Thank you, Karl and your special family and employees at Central Optica.

A Young Life Saved

Haiti is a harsh place, and there are no safety nets of any kind. If you are young, injured, without family or a sponsoring group, bad things happen that sometimes can be worse than dying. We met a very lucky young woman of 14 years this past trip. Daniela lost her parents at an earlier age, and she was kept by another family until she was turned out for reasons, I have no knowledge of at this time. But she ended up on the streets with no means of support, and no way to obtain a steady supply of food or clean water. She ended up in some very rough hands and was brought to the hospital physically damaged in many different ways. The treating doctor happened to be a special woman in her own right. This was Dr. Elinsa Gay, who we first met as a Haitian OB/GYN resident on one of our prior surgical trips. After she graduated, she was hired to work at the Dame-Marie community hospital and try to reduce the maternal death rate that is one of the highest in the world. She happened to treat Daniella, and after she repaired her injuries,

she took her in, and is now making plans to adopt her. Daniella has had very little formal schooling, and like most young people in the countryside in Haiti, there are few opportunities to acquire training or skills to help improve her survival. Now she has a chance better than many. But a severe price she had to pay before a special heart bound with her own.



And if we had not started our regular trips to Dame-Marie three years ago, Dr. Gay would not have trained with us or been asked to work at the community hospital, and Daniela would not have been saved. Looking back on the thin thread of chance that connects all the events that had to happen before she could be saved, speaks to the miracles big and small that all supporters of our program are helping to create. And in ways that are far removed from the medical and surgical changes we are bringing to this community.

A THANKFUL COMMUNITY

A Citation of Gratitude

On our last night, we received a surprise visit from the General Secretary of the County of Dame-Marie, a Monsieur Jhimy St Louis. He presented the group this special award, acknowledging Saint Francis Hospital and Medical Center for their dedication and medical skills being dedicated to the people of Dame-Marie.



This kind of exposure is critical to getting the national government's attention. We would like to have more Haitian resident house staff, and full-time anesthesia services at our growing medical center.

A Community Turns Out

Later that evening Pierre invited us to his home where he put on a party. There was the high school band playing the national anthems of America and then Haiti, followed by the haunting Haitian melody of the Ballad of Dame-Marie played by a local community group. One of the highlights was two of our team members joining the musical ensemble by playing drums and bongos. I am continually surprised by the amazing and varied talents that our team members have besides their wonderful medical skills.



MEDICAL AND SURGICAL ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Statistics

This trip was one of the heaviest turnouts that we have ever seen in our three years at Dame-Marie. There were probably over 100 people waiting when we arrived on Sunday to set up our OR. And for the first time we had a list of patients already prescreened by the two medical physicians on staff at the hospital. Unfortunately, we also had people who had been referred from physicians in villages far away, as well as new patients who heard on the radio station we were to be in town. So, there were three different groups all trying to get their ticket to better health converging on a small central hall below the operating room. It was chaos at its best, and downright scary at its worst. A quick conference was held, a system of tickets were handed out, and everyone reassured they would be seen. At the end of the week, over 400 patients had been seen and treated. 32 major surgeries were performed without complication, some involving tumors as large as ten pounds. We were thankful that the Red Cross had established a presence in Dame-Marie last fall, so that the several patients who needed blood were able to have their surgery and recovery go safer. And at the completion of our week, when we were about five minutes from leaving the hospital area, a patient was brought in near death who had been the victim of a machete attack due to a village Voodoo proclamation. Due to the amazing skills of the surgical, anesthesia, and nursing teams, his condition was stabilized, his wounds closed, and he was sent off for overnight care in a Cuban hospital several towns over where he could be watched. We were gladdened to hear he survived intact with all his faculties. And it reminded us that we are in a very foreign land where the boundaries of civilization as we know it, don't extend too far beyond the community where we are stationed.

Team Members

This trip, like many others, is now filled with veterans who have dedicated a week of their life in service to those with few blessings. The more trips we work together, the more patients we see, and the more

good we are able to do. And not surprisingly the hardships of working in a third world country become almost taken for granted. Our air conditioning failed in the operating room on the first morning, and every member in that room working on the two tables would finish their two or three hour case, soaked to the skin. Only to dry off, and start over again with another major. No complaints were heard even when we were getting to our 10th hour of surgery and the night had long fallen. I am blessed to have been given the opportunity to work with such incredible people. And here they are.



In Closing

I hope you have once again enjoyed reading of life on the mission trail in a land only four hours away by air, but a lifetime away from the life that we enjoy in the US. . During this February week of service, you have read that we were able to bring better health to many hundreds of patients. Every one of these folks has their own unique story of their struggle to carve out a happy life for themselves and their families. Mostly fisherman and farmers or tradesman, their life is a daily struggle with the forces of nature and poverty and malnutrition. Thank you to those of you who have contributed monies or supplies to make these trips possible. We have no bureaucracy to support. Every dollar goes to help those in need. We only give ourselves the necessities to do our work safely and well. If you feel moved to make a donation great, but just as important are your prayers for our teams and the patients we serve. Thank you.

Michael R. Bonnyne MD

Medical Director for MATH Dame-Marie, formerly Saint Francis IMM

