

Guanín Center in Action

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Haiti Relief.

I hope you have enjoyed reading about my experiences and also hope that you have felt something of what I felt, although I am certain you will see things from a different angle than I did. I ask with all my heart that you help us to paint a picture of hope for those boys and girls, not only in the Republic of Haiti, but also for our own poor boys and girls here in the Dominican Republic.

28/01/2010

My lived experience during my second trip to the Republic of Haiti after the 7.0 earthquake that devastated Port-au-Prince and nearby regions on January 12, 2010.

This was my second trip, in which I went accompanied by some friends and North American doctors in order to contribute our energies to the relief efforts, providing basic supplies and necessities, including medical health and foodstuffs. Above all, we were collaborating with the Department of Health together with the Centro Bono of Santo Domingo, Chelsea McGuire, y Angel's for Haiti, a group of Canadian medical staff (this was the first trip for the latter).

Today, the 28th of January, 2010, accompanied by my friends and associates Guarionex Heredia (Dominican), David Palmer (U.S.A.), and a married couple, Rosette and Stephan (U.S. citizens, but Rosette is of Haitian descent). We left Santo Domingo at 1:00 AM for Haiti, arriving in Jimaní at 6:45 AM, and went directly to the gas station beyond the Fortress of Jimaní to fill up on fuel. After filling the tank, we returned to the Dominican Red Cross, located in the Fortress of Jimaní, where we were vaccinated before crossing that Haitian frontier. It was 8:45 AM when we cross into Haitian territory, where we did not have to pass by any type of paper check because an officer of the Dominican Guard ordered the enlisted man who was on duty at the gate to let us pass through without asking any questions. But two days before trip, I had sent a list of our names and contact information via e-mail to Sr. Rafael Jiménez, the contact person for permissions through the Commission for Humanitarian Aid to Haiti from the Dominican Republic.

The information that we had sent affirmed that the staff of the Red Cross vaccinated us with two different injections and two pills against tetanus, malaria and other illnesses, together with our personal information, thus providing us with permission to cross the frontier into Haiti. En route to Haiti, we could observe the mass of water that forms the Haitian Lake, and could also observe the change of climate and vegetation, the treeless hills, peeled like a bald head—this is the image of those trees on the Haitian side of the border.

The stretch of road from the Haitian Customs building was completely destroyed for about 5 kilometers. We had been told that we were supposed to wait for the U.N. guards, called “blue helmets,” for protection from the criminal activities that were happening to others who carried contributions along the route to Port-au-Prince, but we were alone all the way to Port-au-Prince

and never saw anything strange or dangerous, along with the vehicles that passed both before and after us. We did not have to wait for the convoy that the local news had mentioned.

We arrived at Port-au-Prince at 10:15 AM after a long traffic jam in all directions, traffic jams that often lasted 5 to 10 minutes without our being able to move. En route to Delmas, we interviewed a man who worked for the Dominican Red Cross, who informed us that we could get more help for the encampments that we were going to visit. We detoured to the U.N.'s Help Center to seek drinking water and food for the homeless in sections Delmas 33 and Delmas 31. ¡Aiyee! When we entered the U.N. encampment, situated on the same land as the International Airport of Haiti, we could see many tents from different international groups. We asked many different people for information about how we could locate the office of Humanitarian Aid, a Haitian man married to a Dominican, refugees... on the other side of the encampment, we were directed to all the offices of the various international organizations, including the World Hunger Organization, the department of homes for refugees, among others. We did everything we could, talking with various persons and visiting office that dealt with the distribution of donations.

The lack of organization on the part of the office workers was amazing. When we asked for something, no one knew anything. All worked in the same place, but no one knew what was happening. It was crazy. It was like a game of basketball of everyone against everyone else. We were sent to one place and that place sent us to another place. Finally we arrived at the first place where we had asked! We were in layers and layers of offices and no one could tell us anything, all our intents to speak to a responsible person were in vain, which was extremely frustrating. It was now 12:35 PM, so we decided to leave there and continue to Delmas 31, following Toussaint Louverture Avenue, and then turning to the right at the rotunda... when we should have turned left. We were lost for around 30 minutes, until we asked some people who guided us again to Toussaint Louverture Avenue, and this time we arrived at our destination. In all my life I have never seen anything like I saw then. Traffic looked like a herd of frightened oxen loose in the street, looking for the slightest opening through which to escape. We had to go both there and back on that crazily crowded avenue in hellish heat, where every 15 minutes you could move maybe one yard ahead, where a lane with the capacity for only one vehicle had four in it, and the other direction of traffic didn't have any lanes in which to move. Along the roadside were thousands of people on foot, most of them, principally women, carrying more than 100 pounds of cargo on their heads.

We were very tired and downhearted. Rosette became ill in the heat and desperate with the slowness of the traffic. She and her husband Stephan had been awake since 4:00 AM on Wednesday, January 27th, leaving Chicago with layovers in Miami and Puerto Rico, arriving at the Las Americas Airport in Santo Domingo at nearly 9:00 PM, when I went to pick them up. They were in bed for only one hour before we left for Jimaní at 1:00 AM.

We arrived, super tired, at Rosette's mother's home. I had been driving for 18 hours without a break and now had a horrible headache and stiff neck. We were received by Rosette's mother, family, and friends, unloaded all the suitcases and packages from the vehicle, and then, after having rested only 30-45 minutes, we left together with Stanley, Rosette's cousin, for the super market to try to find ice, accompanied by Guarionex and David Palmer. Upon arriving at the super market on Delmas Avenue, one block from Delmas 31 Street, we found it full of

international products. It was very surprising, for we had heard that Haitians were dying of hunger because there was hardly any food to eat, that people were so weak and unstabilized that they could barely walk from hunger and thirst, that they were getting to the point of turning cannibal... As I said at the beginning, you had to have been there in order to understand how we felt at seeing the reality.

I bought a very cold Malta Morena, a Dominican beverage, while Guarionex and David bought water and soft drinks. On top of everything else, David, had eaten some *mofongo* the night before at Luis's restaurant in Santo Domingo that did not sit well with him. When we arrived in Haiti, his already ill stomach became worse and he could not sleep because of the pain.

Nowhere in the Delmas sector of Port-au-Prince had there been electricity in any of the houses since the earthquakes, although the traffic lights had electricity. That's why everyone was buying ice in large blocks, to preserve what they had on hand in their refrigerators. But we could not find any ice, although we went to several places seeking it, so returned to Rosette's mother's house. En route, we saw several destroyed houses, three story buildings that had been converted to rubble. I saw things I had never seen before—columns of buildings and houses broken as if they had been pieces of spaghetti. Speaking of spaghetti, when we returned to the house, we found delicious plates of spaghetti and bread waiting for us.

Because of the bad state of the buildings and also because of the damages caused by the earthquake's aftershocks, the property owners and also renters had no confidence in the stability within their homes and could not sleep there. Everyone went to the closest encampments to sleep. In Delmas, the majority of the people went to the patio of the Saint Luis Gonsag School, the most prestigious private school in the entire Haitian Capital. Many of the people who slept there had had very little before the earthquakes, but then lost even that. Some of the refugees were people from other sectors which had not been affected, but all were there seeking an opportunity.

After eating the spaghetti, our companion David got worse and began vomiting, but luckily Rosette had brought some medicine with her that served to cure this kind of digestive problem. After taking the medication, he stopped vomiting, but continued to suffer stomach cramps. At 7:25 PM, we were directed to Stanley's mother's house, doña Inés, who was Rosette's aunt and lived in Delmas 33. Doña Inés's house did not suffer much damage from the earthquake. She received us with delight, then, that same night, accompanied me to go see where 400 other people were sleeping.

God is great, because these people were sleeping near a canyon with filthy water running through it, sewage water from the houses all around. With even the tiniest amount of rain, their problem was multiplied. It was then that doña Inés gave me a class in local medicine and spoke to me of her experiences as a professor and also as a nurse, and she showed me the medicinal trees on her property and what they cured. I felt very happy to have had the luck to spend time with Stanley's mother, doña Inés. But I was so tired that I no longer had the strength to continue talking with her about her experiences and her knowledge of natural medicine. In the patio of her house she had placed a green tarp, where 12 people were sleeping. Stanley had organized

and arranged beds there for each of us. Guarionex had told me earlier that he could not sleep inside any building there, so he slept in our vehicle while David and I slept in doña Inés's house.

Before I fell asleep, I saw that doña Inés was carrying in her hands some things for her son Stanley's vehicle, and I lay watching to see what she was going to do. She entered his light grey Isuzu jeep to prepare a bed for herself inside the vehicle, and then she laid down in it. I asked Stanley why his mother was sleeping inside the vehicle. He answered that she had slept there every night since the earthquake. So it was with many other people, like her, who had abandoned their homes at night in order to sleep in the patio or in the streets like refugees, because they were afraid of passing into the next world while they slept, the land of eternal sleep.

January 29, 2010

This morning, we left very early to return to Rosette's mother's house in Delmas 31, where we had left all the packages, in order to organize and carry out a plan of distribution and cleanup, taking the things of major importance to one of Rosette's mother's houses, which had been badly affected and damaged by the earthquake. Rosette was very saddened by what had happened and the fact that her mother's house would have to be completely rebuilt, a two story house valued in millions of pesos (each million pesos equals approx. US\$30,000). She thought her mother also seemed saddened and my companion Guarionex told me he had seen her cry. This was painful, but no one can be blamed, not even God. In fact, I had seen that most of these houses and buildings had been constructed without any iron rods in the cement columns, without quality materials of any kind, and therefore, in my viewpoint, would not have withstood a big fart, much less an earthquake. That is why most of them were now dust.

Rosette commented to me that there had been a tiny earthquake during the night, around 11:00 PM, while I slept. I had felt nothing, for I had been so tired that I think the world could have fallen around me and I would not have noticed. I thanked God it had been a small tremor. Guarionex also told me that the people sleeping beside the tents, on doña Inés's property, began to fight over a small misunderstanding, which had woken him up, but as I said, I slept through it all.

At 10:00 AM, we went to a closer super market to find something liquid like 7-Up because David still was not feeling well. We found fried eggs with herring and bread for breakfast and then we went to Petionville, the higher section of Port-au-Prince where the majority of the rich people live (but poor of mentality). We saw the quantity of people who had accumulated in front of the Canadian Embassy in search of help or visas (I'm not sure what they were seeking). I mostly saw cameramen and journalists with their cameras and microphones. When we arrived up in the hills and were seeking a place to park, we entered a deluxe bakery. Surely it was for the rich, and Rosette said that she had enjoyed visiting it very much in the past. She took advantage of being so close to buy a cake and some buns for tomorrow's journey and for David's birthday, which was the following day, Saturday, January 30th.

Upon our return, we left Rosette and her friend at her mother's house and the four of us continued on to the U.N. encampment, where we filled out petitions for food and family tents for the refugees of Delmas 31 y 33. At the refugee encampment near the Port-au-Prince international

airport, there were some dining trucks escorted by Blue Helmets to distribute food that belonged to the Dominican aid program.

At 4:00 PM, we returned home after a brief stop at the super market to buy cold drinks and Exchange dollars for Haitian *gourde* (37 *gourde* + US\$1). When we got home, we were put to work cleaning up the rubble that had been left behind by the earthquake and we also moved some furniture that we found inside a damaged house to another house.

By 7:05 PM we were ready to take a bath and rest, but since they had not had water for days, we had to economize. It's not easy, after a hot, dry day, working in dusty conditions, to go to sleep without first bathing, but everything in its own time.

With the visit to the U.N. encampment, we could now supply drinking water to the refugees and, near where donations had been unloaded, we had seen both new and empty bottles. Without permission, we drove there and took many of them. That was not for me, it was for all those people who had no water. I know, I did something bad by taking the water without permission, but I did it for them, for God, and for society, and those of you who know me, I am certain will pardon me.

Near Delmas 31 Street, behind the Saint Luis Gonzag School, there are some buildings and houses that were totally demolished. While I walked with David y Stanley to go to an Internet Café, we crossed in front of these buildings and I smelled a horrible odor. I am sure that it was not dead animals! David and Stanley smelled it, too.

We spent our days in the encampments and at the U.N. and at night we slept at doña Inés's house.... At 8:22 PM, we were ready to go to sleep, Guarionex in the vehicle, as well as doña Inés, and the rest of us inside her house.

We had to leave the next morning at 6:00 AM for the province of Gonaives to visit the home town of Rosette's parents. Since we had to leave early in the morning, before going to sleep we had checked the vehicle for motor oil, brake fluid, water level, tire pressure, jack, and spare tire. We checked everything in order not to have something break down en route. Rosette had informed me that we would have to drive at least 3-4 hours, but she never told me that the roads were in such bad condition.

I met Rosette several years ago, when she participated in an exchange between the Dominican Republic and professors of Millikin University in the U.S. I was coordinator of activities in the D.R., and since then we have had excellent socio-cultural and educational relations with this university. In 2005, we received a group of 40 students from the Music Department and organized a free concert in the little plaza of the Church of San Antón in Santo Domingo's Colonial Zone. Rosette is a very intelligent woman, friendly and helpful with clear vision of helping the Haitian people, where she has already planned, together with her husband Stephan, to construct an orphanage. She is simple, caring, and very attentive to her family members and friends.

January 30, 2010

Today we had to get up at 5:30 AM in order to leave by 6:00 AM. At 5:57 AM, we were already leaving the house en route to Gonaives. The highways were in good shape, although some were being repaired, until we reached St. Mark Province. From there, because our vehicle was very small and low, we had to travel at only 20 kms. per hour in order to arrive well and return alive.

In one of the towns through which we passed, whose name I do not know, we could see the local market with great quantities of people. It seems that Saturdays are the days when they go to market to buy and sell their products, and people from all around gather. Just guessing, I'd say there were at least 3,000-4,000 people at every corner of that market town, and even from within the rivers people were buying and selling. The number of people seated around the bridge and those walking on it made it difficult to cross. The dominant color among a mix of vibrant colors was red, due to all the red headscarves that the women wear on their heads. We bought some sugarcane for all of us while crossing the river, and Stephan paid for it.

Agriculture:

Since leaving Port-au-Prince, we had seen huge plantations of such produce as plantains, bananas, rice, and other agricultural products. There were herds of cattle, goats, and burros in great quantity, and the bald mountains, without a single tree, and looking along the roads, we saw sacks filled with vegetable charcoal for sale, which was very significant for me, a Dominican, accustomed to cooking with propane gas.

We had just arrived in the town of Gonaives, to the south of Port-au-Prince, when we saw the National Independence Plaza, where the Haitian people took their independence from the French in 1804. Within the park, at the end, almost in front of the cathedral, you see a wall in the form of a ship and a statue of Jean Jack Dessalines, with his compatriots at his side. The Cathedral of Gonaives is Gothic/Victorian.

Arriving at Rosette's family house, they received us with much love and appreciation. In less than a pair of minutes, it was hard to count the number of cousins who were coming and going, children of all colors, both big and small. After a short while, we left to visit the town, but before Guarionex and David had left to check out the market that was on the street next to the cathedral. Doña Inés accompanied us to visit a pair of streets that led to the beaches. Rosette was very emotional, since it had been a long time since she had seen her family. They went to all the homes where her grandparents and other family members lived.

We returned to the house to enjoy *lalo*, a creole dish, the specialty of an aunt—white rice, ripe plantain, and red beans, accompanied by ground vegetables stewed with river crabs. This dish is really delicious, rich and flavorful, eaten with hot sauce. I enjoyed it and the company of my friends and Rosette's family. In fact, the food was so good that I had two servings and had to tell Guarionex to leave some for the others or he would have finished it all off. After the meal we were served very cold grapefruit juice.

After eating, knowing that what was waiting for me was a long drive back to Port-au-Prince, I lowered my head to the same table where I had eaten and took a little siesta of about 20 minutes. I woke up because of the noise of them singing happy birthday for David, but they finished

singing Happy Birthday before I was fully awake. But I did share the delicious rum-flavored birthday cake.

From the beginning Rosette had told me that we had to leave at 4:00 PM, and it was already time for us to return by the same horrible road, although now I was not so worried about it because I knew that it got better. But I was still afraid of the cargo trucks and passenger vehicles that traveled the route at around 100 Kms/hour (66mph), leaving behind a road clouded with dust so that I could see neither in front of me nor behind for several minutes. At times we had to stop and pull way over to the right until the dust cleared before we could continue. I also feared that upon stopping inside those dust clouds, another truck would come up from behind and crash into us. But thank God nothing like that happened.

En route to Port-au-Prince, Rosette got gravely ill with stomach pain, headache, and nausea. It seems that something she ate had caused it. She was so ill that we had to stop so she could vomit and clear out her stomach, after which she felt much better. Luckily she didn't it inside the vehicle; she had time to open one of the windows. But all went well and when we came upon a small town, we made another stop to buy her some 7-Up. It took us 20 minutes to find a small store where Stephan and Stanley went to find the soft drink.

Night had fallen and the road was very dark with smoke from everywhere that blocked vision, and our lights and those of the trucks that travelled at night at great velocity with their lights on high were frightening. Every time one passed it made it more difficult for me to see and to drive at an adequate speed. We were in no great hurry, so I took my time, anxious that we arrive safely at our destination.

We arrived at doña Inés's house at 9:45 PM—the return trip had taken 5 hours and 45 minutes. We arrived thanks to God, but I had a small headache, neck pain, and my back was tired. I went to sleep without bathing. I barely managed to brush my teeth. Rosette arrived in such bad shape that she had to go to bed immediately, although she had enjoyed her time in Gonaives to the maximum, taking photos of everybody and everything, happily chatting with the young people around the Plaza of Independence, very energetic. She slept in the room all night, being cared for by her mother, while Guarionex and doña Inés slept in their vehicles, and David and I shared a bed.

Doña Inés is the boss, the one who can achieve everything, professor and nurse, mother of three professional children, two boys and a girl. Doña Inés is a dynamic woman with lots of energy, very friendly and caring. On all the various trips that we made about town, both on foot and mounted, I never heard a complaint of her being tired, and she is always the first to wake up. At the moment that one wakes up, she has already had time to prepare a small cup of tea. I commented to her son Stanley that he is the man of the house, and he smiled as he responded—“My mother keeps everything in order as well as mechanical tools and everything else.”

January 31, 2010

Sunday, day of rest. I woke up, brushed my teeth, and took a little bath, since I had not bathed the night before. I approached the vehicle where Guarionex was sleeping and we began to talk about the beauty and misery of the Haitian people, the potential, with fertile valleys and gorgeous beaches, referring to the town of Gonaives where Guarionex took quantities of photographs, photos of the beaches along the salt flats, Independence Plaza, its 18th-century Victorian architecture, its port, etc. We saw all the potential it has for tourism development--a tourist port, hotels on the beaches--plus enough workers for whatever kind of factory work or Free Trade Zones... Above all, from the town you can see the beauty of the blue water and, behind, the beautiful treeless mountains. This town is so mysterious. We were in the 21st century, but they are still living in the 18th century, totally unevolved. They live side by side with filth, with a beautiful beach that only serves them as a trash dump, where children and animals together form part of the society, running together in the streets and along the beaches, nude and barefoot, everyone casually jumping over all the streams of black sewage water. The women still wash all their clothes by hand and cook with vegetable charcoal and firewood, and there is no health system nor educational system. The people are jumbled together in the streets, selling their homemade products and foods.

The rivers are dry and the mountains are totally bald, having lost all their vegetation. The land is rock hard for lack of rain. When you look up and down, you can only see color, the color of misery. When you look around, you see nude children and pigs in the black sewage water. I ask myself what is the color of hope for these little boys and girls who live together with the pigs, goats, dogs, cats, and chickens, with the filth of the beaches and the discharges of black water, the sewers that ooze in front of their eyes, day and night, where they throw most of their garbage so that the pigs can root around in it and eat it. I asked Stephan, Rosette's husband, the same question. A soldier from the U.S., he told me the color of hope is yellow. I asked an artist, who knows what colors are supposed to mean, and he told me it is grey. Not happy with these answers, I asked my dear friend and companion Guarionex what the color of hope was for these children, and he answered, "Only God knows what that color is for each of them, *compadre*. You are free to declare it to be whatever color you want."

This is my opinion then, I believe that the color of hope for these Haitian children and pigs is the same as their future. I am 100% certain that they are fattened up for just one thing, to kill them and sell their meat—therefore the color is red. You are at liberty to have your own opinion. It is in your hands...

I was born to a very humble family, but I have always heard the adults say that children are the future of tomorrow. I would be happy to find anyone who would like to give an opportunity to those poor children so that they could learn for themselves what color hope is. My mother always used to say that the one thing we could not lose is hope. What do you think?

Returning to the refuge that morning, near Stanley's mother's house, I saw a girl about 12 to 15 years old with reddened eyes and a pallid cast to her skin, vomiting yellow phlegm. I went up to her and asked if she were all right, if she wanted me to take her to a doctor, but she ignored me and walked away. I wanted to ask what color she used to paint hope when she woke up each day beside an arroyo full of black water and oinking pigs seeking food?

After our visit to the encampments of Delmas 33 and 31, we decided to go, accompanied by Stephan and his brother Harry Toussaint, an assistant to the city commissioner, to the center of operations of the U.N. to seek interviews with Mr. Luis Huffman, chief of the division of family tents. We were lucky enough to see him this time, after having gone twice before, and to talk with him. He explained that the distribution of tents had been suspended by the government. What they wanted was to regroup all the various smaller groups of homeless people into one large encampment, where aid would be easier to distribute to all, and that is why we could not get any tents before our return to Santo Domingo.

We saw Mr. Humberto, chief of the department of food. The previous Friday we had spoken with him after having filled out the forms to get foodstuffs. He told us that if more aid did not arrive in the encampments of Delmas 31 and 33 before Sunday, to come to see him again. But when we got there, he was so busy with meetings—meetings with various organizations and ministers of the Haitian government—that his schedule was full and he could not see us. Finally, all we were able to do was to leave the names of the people in charge of the encampments.

¡Well! A young blonde Englishman spoke with us about the aid efforts and promised us that he would see that the refugees in Delmas 31 and 33 received food. I don't know what his name was, but he told us that the World Food Bank was working with the ORG directly, so that they were in charge of food distribution to the various refugee groups, escorted by Blue Helmets and the North American Guards. The good thing is that he gave his phone number to Stanley so that they could stay in contact. Stanley is an honest man and I know he will do a good job when help arrives and ensure that food will be distributed where it is most needed.

In my research, at the time when I was coming and going within the encampment of the U.N. operation to get aid for the homeless of Delmas 31 and 33, I never observed even one department that was headed by Haitians. This indicates to me that the international organizations did not trust them. I only saw Haitians serving as drivers and assistant to the coordinators. Nothing else. I also never saw any Haitian government officials there, just those of many other nationalities.

On our last visit we were accompanied by Mr. Harry Toussaint, a functionary of the Haitian government (he works with the Port-au-Prince commissioner). He told me that there were brigades of men and women cleaning the streets of rubble and that he had no idea of what was happening or who was in charge of the aid efforts.

I want to thank all of my companions, Rosette and her husband Stephan, their family members, my friend David Palmer, and my *compadre* Guarionex, and my dear mother-of-my-heart, Dr. Lynne Guitar, who has constantly phoned me to see how things were going and to find out about the situation in Haiti, for being so persevering and having confided in me.

Since Rosette was still not feeling well, she and Stephan stayed home in Delmas 31, while Guarionex, David and I went to sleep in the home of doña Inés. Arriving at the house, I showered and tried to relax a bit before going to bed. Human that I am, I had a small necessity. I did not want to use the bathroom in the house, so I went to the patio of the house, where they had a latrine in very good condition, the type of latrine that is used at camps and also at the home

of my mother Luz, which I used growing up, the kind we called “fetid mouth.” This latrine was not very high nor very wide. I’m 6’5” tall, so I had to duck my head down to enter. I sat down, calm and patient because no one was waiting for me and because this was nothing new to me. On this type of latrine, I was taught to never sit on the platform where the hole is, a platform which is made of wood or cement. I was taught the custom of putting your feet on the platform and crouching down, thus there is no direct contact between your hind end and the cement or wood base. That way you stay far away from the antennas of the cucarachas inside.

But I had no other option than to sit directly on the platform because I am so tall that I didn’t fit in a standing, crouched position, so I used some newspaper as a barrier between my hind end and the cement. So there I sat, calm, my mind empty so I could empty my intestines... but suddenly I felt something tickling my behind, touching me with its antennas. It took me back to Cotui, to my life there with my dear Mother Luz. You cannot possibly imagine the situation, how horrifying it is. You have to have experienced it to know!

February 1, 2010

Anxious for Monday to come, I had dreamed many times of this day, for I missed my best friend, Luis Arturo, my son. We checked over the vehicle again before leaving. I woke up at 7:00 AM, and at 7:15 AM, was ready to begin the checkup. When we were last in Santo Domingo, we had heard that there was no fuel in Haiti. So we were prepared and had brought enough fuel for the time we were in Haiti. But by the time we arrived, we found that all the gas stations were open and had plenty of fuel.

My *compadre* Guarionex was still asleep in the vehicle and snoring soundly. I took several photos of him while he slept. He is one of my “friends of confidence,” but when he sleeps, he is like an old truck without a muffler. You could hear his snores from quite a distance, and the funny thing was that with each breath, he made a different sound, five different sounds—you could make a reggaeton record from them!

I had thought that Guarionex chose to sleep in the vehicle because of his fear of another earthquake, but this morning it dawned on me that he slept in it so as not to bother the rest of us with his snores. He is a man with a conscience and I thank him for this. If he had not slept in the vehicle, no one could have slept through his reggaeton.

I woke him up and we checked out the vehicle before leaving at 7:45 AM to collect Rosette and Stephan on Delmas 31 Street. When we got there at around 8:00 AM, they were not yet ready to leave. It was about 15 minutes later that we loaded the suitcases into the vehicle and, en route, picked up three more members of her family.

Doña Inés, the boss, fixed us a small breakfast of fruit, bread, melted cheese, butter, and milk. While we ate, she told us about her experiences. She is not young, but is very strong spirited and active. I never heard her complain about anything, despite the long trips to and from Gonaives and the walk around the town in the heat of mid-day, she was always very attentive with her old friends. She is adorable and very much appreciated by everyone. Thanks for giving us the opportunity to share with you, doña Inés!

We crossed the frontier into Dominican territory without any problem. Because it was so easy, I didn't worry about getting Rosette's and her other three family members' passports stamped. We continued on toward Santo Domingo. At the military post leaving Jimaní Province, they stopped us to check us out and the officer noticed that their passports were not stamped. He requested that we get them stamped, but he let us pass, so I thought it was nothing serious. Upon arriving at the next check point, the same thing happened, so we continued on. An hour and a half later, almost at Duverge, we stopped at another check point and they made us return to Jiminí, to immigration, to get the passports stamped.... We returned to the frontier and had to cross back into Haiti in order to buy the stamps, which cost \$100.00 gourde per person (about US\$3), and then on the Dominican side, they had to buy Tourist Cards, which cost US\$20 each, and they had to wait in a very long line. Guarionex slipped an official US\$20 so they could get through the line faster.

We left that hellish place, but Mondays are free market days at the Jimaní frontier, so there was a tumult of vendors, buyers, middlemen, transport people, porters, etc., of both nationalities, and a great number of foreigners from a wide variety of other countries, volunteers on both sides of the border who were leaving or entering Haiti. It was total chaos. On the Haitian side, we could move neither forward nor backward because of the giant traffic jam in front of Haitian Immigration, where several trucks were parked, blocking traffic in both directions. Having been in similar traffic situations before, I managed to make my way out of the chaos.

Because we had already passed through the majority of the checkpoints, we only had to show officials that we now had the stamped passports and they let us through. We arrived in Santo Domingo around 7:00 PM, where we took David to the bus station for his return to Santiago (Guarionex accompanied him inside to make sure he would get back fine), and then we took Rosette's three family members to Cuesta Hermosa in Arroyo Hondo, in front of the Super Market Nacional, where another family member was waiting for them. Finally, we took Rosette and her family to the Hotel Europa in the Colonial Zone. After they were checked into their rooms, and we certain they were safe and sound, I left to take Guarionex home. I arrived at my house around 9:00 PM.

Tuesday, February 2, 2010

I went to meet Rosette and her family to take them on a tour of the 16th-century buildings and monuments of Colonial Zone, and later we shared some papaya juice blended with Carnation milk. When they went to eat, I left to meet a friend at the Hotel Mercure Comercial and took advantage of the opportunity to buy a blender, for I had none at home, at the Cuesta hardware store on the Calle Conde.

Wednesday, February 3, 2010

At 10:30 AM, I picked up Rosette and her family at the Hotel Europa and took them to the Las Américas Airport.