

October 13, 2020

## *Another Day, Another Crisis*

On Sunday as I reflected on what had been a beautiful day, I imagined creating for today' *Journal* a montage of photos from the cooking lesson and the party staged by the kids. I will get to that, but early yesterday morning I received a very upsetting email from Billy. On Sunday night as Billy was sleeping a burglar entered his apartment. He took Billy's backpack which had his Santa Chiara computer, his personal computer, his phones, and some money. Billy was in shock. He speculated that had he woken up during the robbery, the thief might have killed him. He was unable to come to work yesterday because he had to file a report at the police station. Billy expressed a desire to leave the apartment, even though he had just paid a year's rent not so long ago.

We will have to replace his work computer. The computer had all kinds of important data which I'd bet was not backed up. We'll also need to replace his phone which he needs for his job.

I've thought a lot about getting a little apartment outside of Santa Chiara. I always hesitate because I feel safe within the walls of Santa Chiara. This reenforces that concern.

The problems did not stop with Billy being robbed. A woman staff member had two badly infected teeth that had to be pulled. In the past, we a woman staff member whose tooth was so infected it nearly killed her. She required life-saving surgery which cost Santa Chiara \$2,000. The woman who came to me yesterday morning needed \$400. She has been with us a very long time and she is a hard worker. I gave her the money.

Another woman approached me saying she needed to rent a one-room place for herself and four kids. Two of her other kids live with us. She needed \$325. The woman was the first person we helped when still operating out of a second-floor apartment in a slum. Her twin boys, who were nearly two years old, walked around the slum naked. They both needed surgery for extremely swollen testicles. Before I could give her the money, two staff members told me a horrific story. Two of the woman's daughters, Lovna and Christella, were living with Ecarlatte. The girls told staff member's that Ecarlatte had sex with a man while they were present. Ecarlatte also taught them some very nasty words and conducted Voodoo rituals in their presence. There was more. I will spare you. The woman denied this. But when I asked the girls, they confirmed it. The woman then tried to feed me a story that Ecarlatte took the girls. On my last trip the woman asked me if I would let Lovna and Christella back into Santa Chiara. I did let them come back. We then were able to piece the story together. Ecarlatte had been in the Dominican Republic. Before she left, she told the woman she had to come for her kids. That is when the woman asked me to take them. It was clear that the woman told many lies and she had been feeding Ecarlatte a lot of gossip. I fired the woman. She asked if the girls could stay with me. I gave her \$325 for the rent so that her other four kids won't be on the street. I then held a brief staff meeting and told them what had happened. I also said I was sick and tired of the gossiping, the lying, the cheating, and the stealing. Ecarlatte's disgraceful behavior confirms all the dreadful things she did at Santa Chiara whenever I was in Florida.

And if all of that was not enough, Ecarlatte made two surprise appearances at our gate. It was not confrontational. I refused to speak with her. My stomach was in knots for hours.

Ecarlatte was telling people she was in the United States. This is impossible, as her Green Card most assuredly has been canceled as she has been out of the States for more than two years, far beyond the amount of time a Permanent Resident is permitted to be outside the United States. She had a bag for one of the staff. Someone noticed the bag was in Spanish. We looked inside, and it was clear the merchandise had been purchased in the Dominican Republic. She lies about virtually everything.

In the midst of all this the staff was grumbling about their pay. Most of the staff gets paid by check or direct deposit. They get paid in gourdes. The bookkeeper wire transfers the payroll to the bank in Haiti. Billy pays the staff who have a bank account via a check or direct deposit. I bring the cash for those who get paid in cash; they are illiterate and can't open a bank account.

A few months ago, \$1.00 was worth 120 gourdes. Today, the exchange rate has dramatically fallen. Now, \$1.00 is worth 60 gourdes. So, if a staffer made \$100 a month, a few months ago, they would be paid 12,000 gourdes. Today, at the much lower exchange rate, they will receive only 6,000 gourdes. Meanwhile the prices for items on the shelves in stores remains high, as it was purchased at the higher exchange. For the staff, it is as if they had a 50% cut in their pay. Normally as we came to the end of the month, many of the staff would ask for tap-tap money. Now they are asking for tap-tap money before the middle of the month. I can't double their salaries. The monthly payroll is now \$9,330 for 56 employees. It is a struggle to raise that much each month. I do not yet know how I'll relieve the financial stress on our staff during these troubling economic times in Haiti. There is talk now of an impending gas shortage. Today, we will be waiting on long lines for gas.

*Barring another series of surprises,  
the promised photos from Sunday's cooking class  
will appear tomorrow.*

*It was too late in the day yesterday  
and I was too exhausted  
to slap the photos on to the end of this tough read.*