

June 4, 2022

## *Good News, Bad News*

When I typed the title of this entry my intention was to write about the good news and bad news at Santa Chiara. But then my sleepy brain realized that I've been living in a news blackout for 48 hours. There was a huge storm on Wednesday morning. There was one burst of thunder that sounded as if a bomb had exploded below my window. The rain was so extreme it delayed my trip to the bank in Vero Beach to get cash for Haiti. Of course, during a storm of such intensity, the cable service shut down. It happens when you live on an island. Normally the service is restored within an hour or two after the bad weather passes. This happens all the time in Haiti. But the service has yet to be restored. I had no idea there was another mass shooting, this time in Tulsa, in which the killer used a semi-automatic assault weapon he had legally purchased. I actually enjoyed the complete silence and not being distracted by the dreadful news that dominates life from Ukraine to Buffalo, to Uvalde, and now to Tulsa.

Before 6:10 yesterday morning, I had already received two audio messages from Gabens. The first message was to inform me that the first floor was without power. I'll be honest, I have no idea about all this electrical stuff, the generator, and the solar power, even though I've had a first-hand education on the subject for over seven years. I think much of my confusion is the result of poor communication in the past. Plus, before Gabens the people we hired to upgrade our increasing energy demands were less than qualified. Even in daylight, we operated in the dark. Some months ago, a plan emerged to separate the power distribution going to the first and second floors. This was to ensure that I would not endure endless outages that played havoc with my computers. (There was a time a few years ago, a small gas generator sent power up to my second-floor office; the extension cord from the generator entered the office through the window and provided power to a single power strip into which the computers and light was plugged into.)

I was told that splitting the power distribution would make everything work better. My eyes glazed over while Gabens explained why this was so. All seemed fine. We've known for the past few months that we had to increase the capacity of the solar system so we would need less time using the generator as the diesel fuel delivery was disrupted by the gangs. The batteries that store the energy from the solar panels need to be replaced periodically. They are very expensive and we need at least a dozen of them. The answer was we needed more panels and new batteries. Thanks to the endless "emergencies" and all the time needed to reshape the staff, it took time to get around to getting the electrical stuff we needed to purchase. Because the system began failing in the last few days, Gabens rushed to the huge hardware store on Thursday after he finished at the hospital with Jinette. He spent \$6,000 on solar panels and batteries. He called to tell me the credit card needed to be paid down, as he would be going out later in the day to purchase the welding material needed to fix the power problems. Ugh.

Minutes later there was a second audio message from Gabens. My phone plays a soothing piece of music by Mozart to alert me to a WhatsApp message or video call from Gabens or Stéphanie. The second message was more pleasant. Gabens detailed some administration chores that ate up much of his time while I was in Florida. Gabens hired a new night supervisor, a teacher. She will

begin her work day at 3:00pm. She will spend the first hour meeting with Madame Frances our primary teacher. They will discuss the educational needs of the children. When Frances leaves at 4:00pm, the new lady will work with the kids on their homework and special tutoring. By six o'clock she'll shift from a teacher to child care worker for the remainder of her shift, monitoring the evening light meal and preparing the younger kids for bed. This is part of our overall plan of replacing all the uneducated staff hired by the previous corrupt and dysfunctional Haitian leadership team of mother and son. Undoing years of hidden and unknown duplicity is very difficult. In the coming months the rest of the uneducated staff will be dismissed and replaced by better educated and more committed staff to help shape the children in a better way that will give them the tools to survive when they leave Santa Chiara and venture into the wilderness of Haitian life. In the same second audio message Gabens said when I return, we will meet with a child psychiatrist we will hire to help the children deal with their emotional pain. The woman doctor was recommended by the social services ministry.

All of this so far has nothing to do with the "good news, bad news" implied in the title of this already too long journal. Mercifully I've forgotten what the original bad news was as it had been overtaken by the fresh bad news of the power situation and the kids in the dark. But here is the good news, the kind of news that really pleases me when we reach beyond our mandate to care for the children and are able to extend a compassionate hand to someone needing to be removed from a dangerous situation and given a chance for a more peaceful life. In a way, the help we offered one person is connected to the emotional well-being of one of our kids, namely Naïve.

Naïve loves her grandmother and misses her dearly. I know when she is sad. When I talk to her, the sadness is usually connected to missing her grandmother. During a Journal sent weeks ago while I was in Haiti, I expressed my desire to find a better place for grandma to live that is closer to Santa Chiara. I hesitate to use the word "apartment" as it connotes a far different impression for an American. One of the ladies on our staff (someone we recently helped get an apartment near us) was in charge of finding a place for grandma. Gabens nixed the first two places she found. But at last, she found one he approved. The rent is \$500 for the year. We paid it. But we had a hard time getting grandma to come see it, as the violence in Cité Soleil made it too dangerous to leave her shack of a home. Finally, she made it safely to Santa Chiara last Monday. She was with a young man who is a distant relative. He escorted her to Santa Chiara.

Gabens took them to the new place. He recorded a ten-second video to show me. It is the typical "apartment," consisting of one room and a bathroom. The bathroom has no running water. It has a toilet and bathing area. The toilet is flushed with water from a bucket. Normally the waste just flows outside the home. Bathing is done also with water from a bucket. As rudimentary as the bathroom is, it is far better than most people in the area have. Many must just poop and pee into a bucket and then dispose of it somewhere. These are hard things for most Americans to wrap their mind around. I used to joke about the electrical power issues by saying in America I just flipped a switch and the light went on...there was no need to understand electricity to know how this was possible. In America you simply flush the toilet. No thinking or planning involved. I recall once writing in the Journal how some of our kids had never used or even seen a toilet before

they moved into Santa Chiara. I wrote that they came garden trained not potty trained. Anyway, here is a photo Gabens took of grandma's bathroom.



And here is the reason we did this...so Naïve could often be with her grandma.  
And grandma could come to eat at SCCC.



Grandma and Naïve in a photo taken by Steph last Monday.

I wish I had a million dollars I could give away to Haitians in my orbit who are in desperate need. I would even use some of the money to pave the roads in my neighborhood. Everyone comes to me in critical need of help. I can't begin to tabulate the help we have given to people outside of Santa Chiara, mostly in the form of better and safer housing (for at least eight women with kids) or emergency surgeries. I can't meet every need. I wish I could give Dr. Deluc the \$12,000 he needs for his mobile clinics for six months. The need in Haiti is far beyond overwhelming, which is a word that is over used but not in Haiti, where people are devastated by crushing, all-consuming poverty that engulfs all aspects of their daily life...without being worried about being killed or kidnapped by gangs.

I am tired of all of it. However, Stéphanie keeps me moving forward in love and not to succumb to the depressing darkness of life in Haiti. Her smile and humor are a light in the darkness. We are happy in a sea of sadness. We try our best to share the sunshine.

I return to Haiti tomorrow, return to Steph and Moïse, return to Bency and Naïve, return to Peter Francis and Clare Marie, return to Mr. Gabens and Nurse Rose, return to Wally, Izzy, and Ally, return to Naïca and Jinette...and all the other kids. My driver, Dennis, will pick me up at 6:00am for my 10:30am flight to Port-au-Prince. Knowing Dennis, he will arrive at 5:50am and I will be waiting for him in the parking lot. He will have water for me in the cup holder between the front seats. In Haiti, this will be in the cupholder....



...and that is the difference that makes all the difference. Dennis provides water to assuage my thirst. Robenson brings a gun to protect my life. On my trip back to Haiti in July, Robenson will no longer be working at Santa Chiara...as he moves on to try to find a safer home outside of Haiti. He was hired a few years back to protect me from the death threats from...*you know who, a name I no longer mention.*

I'll end with a brief message from Deluc.

## ***Post Script***

*Moments after finishing the writing of this Journal at 7:58 yesterday morning, I received the following email from Dr. Deluc in response to yesterday's Journal which described his needs.*

I just read the journal of this morning, frankly I have no words! all the lines are dedicated to me, what a Focus!!

you have found the right, clear and concise words to describe the situation, and sell the project. You were able in a few words to paint an even too faithful portrait of the socio-economic and health situation in which the vast majority of my compatriots are swimming.

You really are a great engineer/architect of words. I am so moved reading this journal!! Really thank you Gerry!! A thousand thanks believe me, I don't have the words!!



Let's just hope that this cry for health in Haiti reaches the ears of your most generous readers, because even 1 dollar (\$1) can make a difference!

Once again thank you !!!



Deluc

**Note:** this Journal took over three hours to write. My intention upon rising was to work on my Merton book one more time on Friday morning and bring it to Staples to be printed and bound so I could read in on the trip to Haiti on Sunday. After writing the Journal I was, frankly, too tired to work on the Merton book. I toasted an English muffin and started a load of laundry. I squeezed in 90 minutes of work on the book and then headed for Staples and the post office. I never had time for a walk on Wednesday or Thursday. This is the daily grind of my life. I am not complaining. My days are endlessly easy in comparison to my fellow Haitians.

May God give each of you, dear faithful Journal readers, a deeper sense of peace on this day. Take a moment to close your eyes and be thankful for your presence in the magnificent creation we all share. Then open your eyes to the wonder of life...and the misery of others who need your blessing.

**Note 2:** I forgot to mention that Gabens second audio message included the news he had hired a professional cook to be in charge of the kitchen. The woman has been trained in nutrition. She will make sure the kids are fed good, healthy meals that are tastily prepared. She also will make sure the kitchen staff wear masks at all time. Maybe I'll start eating with the kids.

Also, Steph spent a few hours at the skin clinic with Naïca and Moïse. After waiting so long she was informed that the doctor could not make it work. She will take them next Friday...and I'll drive them. The clinic is close to downtown in a not so good neighborhood. I've taken Naïca to this clinic at least a dozen times. In the following photo you can see she looks bored.



And finally, we are getting warning that a major storm is headed to my location in Florida. They anticipate tropical force winds perhaps up to 45mph and up to ten inches of rain which will cause extensive flooding. It is raining as I write this at 3:27 on Friday afternoon. The heavy rain and storm conditions should hit at midnight and last for 24 hours. I went out and purchased a new flashlight and many candles in case we lose power. I'm hoping the storm does not impede my travel to the airport a hundred miles south of us on Sunday morning.

***When it rains, it pours.***

*Oh, what the heck...there is plenty of room on this last page for another photo.*

