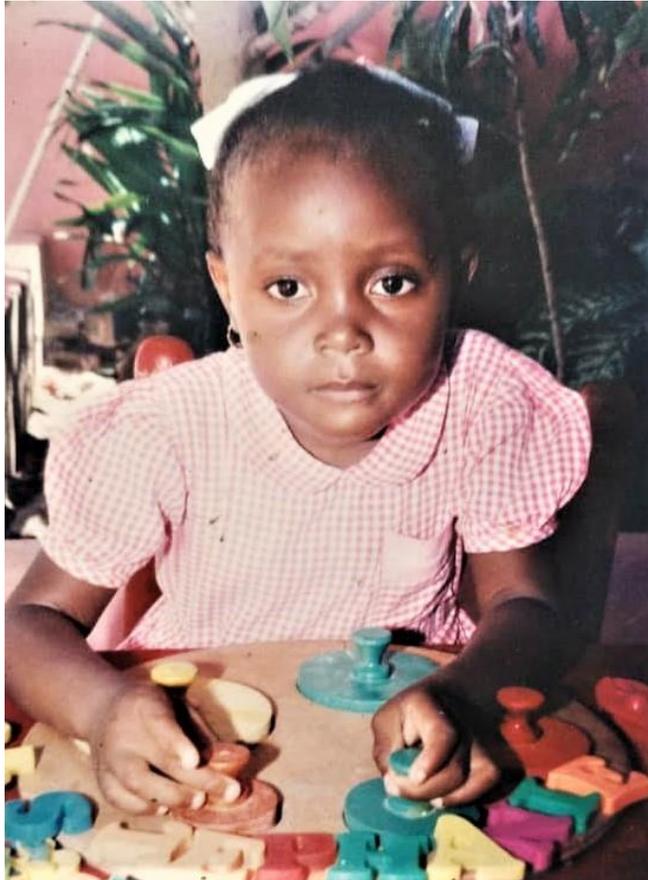


December 8, 2022

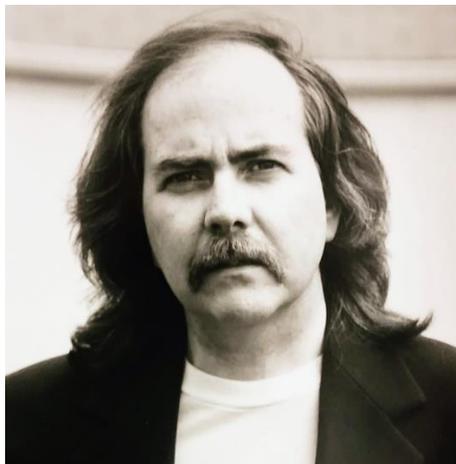
Photos from Long Ago

A few days ago, I shared some photos of Bency when she was a tiny, abused 7 year old who had learned to survive by rummaging through the garbage in Cite Soleil. A Journal reader wondered if there were any photos of Dr. Stéphanie when she was a child. Well, here is one:



Mom, how do you spell medicine?

While I was in Florida, I spent a little time cleaning out my storage unit and found a photo from my TV producing days...which Steph loved:



A Sea of Tears and Loneliness

A few days ago, on December 2nd, many marked the 42 second anniversary of the brutal killing of four American woman missionaries who abducted, raped, and killed in El Salvador by Salvadoran troops. Two of the women were Maryknoll Sisters and one was an Ursuline Sister. The fourth woman was a lay missionary named Jean Donovan who was only 27-years-old. She had struggled with the decision to leave El Salvador in favor of the possibility of marriage and a lucrative career. She stayed in El Salvador. Two weeks before her death, Jean Donavan wrote: "Several times I have decided to leave—I almost could expect for the children, the poor bruised victims of adult lunacy. Who would care for them? Whose heart would be so staunch as to favor the reasonable thing in the sea of their tears and loneliness? Not mine, dear friend, not mine."

I doubt Jean Donovan wanted to be a martyr. Still, she was aware of the dangers of staying, as thousands of civilian "subversives" had been slaughtered by security forces for supporting the poor. Many Catholic missionaries who embraced the "option for the poor" had been slaughtered. Jean Donovan had to be concerned she might meet the same fate. Yet, she stayed, not because her faith compelled her to do so, but because of her love and concern for the children.

I understand this. For the past two or three years, at least once during my monthly three-week stints in Haiti, I'd scream to the night air, "I want to get the hell out of this insane place and never come back." But in the morning, I'd see Peter or Baby Ruth or Izzy, or Clare Marie, or Teresa Regina, or Wally or Naïve, and dozens of other kids, and I knew I could not leave. During this last year when the violence has become more widespread, more brazen, more brutal, I feel a pinch of nervousness as I board the plane for Port-au-Prince every month. I know that Officer Richard and his gun can not stop our car being hit and pushed off the road and riddled with bullets and set a fire. I do not think this is going to happen. On December 2, 1980, the four women driving in El Salvador had no idea they would end up in a shallow grave alongside a remote highway.

On Tuesday morning I got into my big Toyota with Steph, Gabens, and Officer Richard. We were headed for the U.S. Embassy, which is located on a very dangerous stretch of road now to the locals as "kidnap alley." People have been shot and killed in front of the embassy. Having Richard with us was essential. I was nervous. I did not tell anyone about the reason we were going to the embassy. I did not want to raise hopes or jinx the what I had hope would be a fruitful meeting with some official regarding Dr. Stéphanie's visitor's visa. While I was in Florida, our social worker told Gabens that on Tuesdays and Wednesdays any American with a valid passport can enter the U.S. Embassy without an appointment. I said we would go on Tuesday and asked Gabens to arrange for Richard to drive with us because the road is so dangerous.

While in Florida I wrote a 2½ page summation of our courtship and marriage, detailing Steph's work at our clinic, her family's ties to Haiti, and the fact that we were both committed to Santa Chiara and she had no plans to move to the U.S. I explained how Steph functions as my doctor and how my personal physician in Florida wrote a letter indicating that my three health conditions suggested that it was best for me to travel with medical assistance. The point of the letter was that we live with great stress during this time of extreme violence, risking our lives to get food and water for the kids. The letter indicated that I spend 20 days a month in Haiti and ten

days in Florida. My time in Florida is spent doing administrative chores. It would be in our best emotional and physical interest for my wife to travel with me.

I imagined that I would sit before an embassy official (with or without Steph) and tell the story of Santa Chiara and our marriage as quickly as possible and leave the letter with the person. I was not expecting a immigration miracle. I simply wanted to know the real fact about how long the process would take...so we could plan accordingly. Our plan b is the option of setting up a residence outside of the US.

Officer Richard suggested we take a route past Aristide University to avoid the road controlled by the gangs. We arrived without any problem. We parked on the street, about a half block from the embassy. Richard opened my door and walked directly behind us. Steph and I entered the embassy and stepped into the security check point area. There was at least a half dozen uniformed guards, all Haitians. There was one man seated near the door. Dressed informally, his job was to question why we were there. He looked sleepy. I tried to engage him in some light banter.

You look tired.

No, I'm not feeling well.

Well, this is your lucky day...my wife is a doctor.

I then explained why we were there. He had Steph sit down to get some info from her. He told me to walk toward the screening area. The security guard asked me why I was there. I briefly explained. He called someone on the phone. Said he had an American citizen with some questions. He handed the phone to me. I told the woman a very capsulated version of our marriage and the need for a visitor's visa. She asked, "She is not seeking residence?" I said no. I explained our mutual commitment to the children, and medical challenges, and our emotional need for my wife to travel with me to Florida for ten days every month. She asked questions about the home. I was able to share many details. She said hold on. I could see Steph. I gave her a thumbs up. I really felt the phone conversation went very well...conveyed lots of information very clearly and in a short amount of time. She seemed impressed and sympathetic.

I was on hold for nearly two minutes when I heard a sound. I expected to hear her voice. Instead, I heard recorded music for about 15 seconds. Then a woman's voice said hello. It was a different woman. She was difficult to understand. Essentially, I was told that the Embassy does not process immigration requests. I had to call immigration visa for information. The woman gave me a local number and a number in the United States, adding it was best to email them; she gave me an email address that was 26 characters long. As I hung up, I felt crushed. I really thought the first woman was going to help by at least providing me with accurate information on how to move forward. Perhaps Steph and I need to consider finding a residence outside of the United States and Haiti. I was stupid and naïve for thinking our case was unique and someone would want to help make obtaining a simple visitor's visa happen before I am too old to travel.

In God We Trust. All Others Pay Cash

On Tuesday morning, Gabens sent me a WhatsApp message saying the Michel was going to get diesel fuel, gasoline, propane gas, and a part for the Xterra...and he needed cash. Even the one gas station that was very kind to us is no longer able to take a credit card. Michel needs \$277 for 60 gallons of diesel fuel (which about \$4.50 per gallon, way down from a month ago when we were paying over 20 bucks a gallon. He needed \$236 for 60 gallons of gasoline. There is an anticipated shortage of gasoline, which is why we need to increase our supply of stored fuel, as soon the price for fuel will begin to dramatically rise. Michel needed \$141 to fill the propane gas tanks. Finally, he needed \$350 for a part (a sensor) for the Xterra that has been on order for many months. So, all that adds up to \$1,004...which is about 15% of the cash I brought with me. I worry that we will run out of cash before the end of the month. There is a limit to the amount of cash that can be carried into Haiti. I exceed that limit every time I come, which is another stress trigger. We could wire funds to our bank in Haiti, but that would mean standing for two or three hours on line to make a withdrawal and be at a high risk of being robbed upon leaving the bank. Officer Richard now accompanies Gabens to the bank. (As it turned out, there was no gasoline available anywhere. Michel found diesel fuel at a gas station in a very dangerous area; they had diesel fuel because few would risk driving to the area. Michel bought 120 gallons of diesel fuel.)

This photo from *The New York Times* vividly captures the kind of thing I see all the time.

