

December 8, 2023

## *Looking Back*

In the last few months, I had ideas for three books I wanted to write that got me very excited. I feverishly typed pages on each idea. Each was on fire with enthusiasm. Each had what I felt were terrific opening paragraphs and road maps forward. During this little bit of extended time in Haiti, I focused on the last of the three ideas and made modest progress, enough to see the way forward and estimate the amount of time which I would need to devote to it to complete each of them.

Yesterday morning, I felt that in my last full day, I needed to forget about the promising book—based on the poverty films—I made which could easily and completely arrest my attention to the exclusion of things I needed to do before I leave. So, I took a backward glance at the other two ideas. I forgot how much I liked them. One was—this will be hard to believe—was yet another book on St. Francis, my third. The other was on mercy and compassion. It was in connection to that latter idea that I went fishing for specific photos from Uganda: one was of a man dying from AIDS and the other was of a child dying from hunger. As I shifted through hundreds of the best photos from three trips to Uganda, I came across two photos that riveted my attention...and felt the impulse to share them in today's Journal from Haiti.





Why did I want to share these photos? First, they put me in touch with all the suffering I witnessed while making two dozen films along poverty road. Second, after eight years in Haiti where I endured a steady stream of heartbreaks and hardships, of betrayals and setbacks, of stress and violence, I feel it is time to change my focus from serving to writing...as my filmmaking days are over. What does that mean? For the last year, I have been deaf to advice from close friends to cut back the time I spend in Haiti each month for the sake of my physical well-being. But in the last few months, I have realized that what was best for my well-being was to write more and serve less. Focused, concentrated writing requires time, stillness, and attention. For the last year Haiti, with the dramatic increase of gang violence, was pulling me in multiple directions at the same time and thus preventing me from giving my writing the time and attention it requires and demands. The antidote was simple: spend less time in Haiti and more time in Florida. Besides, at 76, Haiti is increasingly bad for my health, especially my breathing and my skin. Burnout is one thing; breakdown is much worse.

*Peace be with each of you.*