

THE EX-PRIEST

Churches unite against fear

Violence, blight turn faith toward politics

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti — It's clear Ron Voss has trouble telling this story. It's a painful memory. The images are too fresh; the wounds haven't healed.

It's a horrible situation. Just terrible. The repression is like something you couldn't read about in Nazi Germany.

— Ron Voss, spokesman, Haiti Parish Twinning Program

Whenever Voss talks about Haiti, he looks close to tears. He looks that way now. Tall and thin, so soft-spoken that nearby noises drown out his words, Voss, 52, was a Roman Catholic priest until last year, when he left to direct a program providing aid from U.S. churches to Haitian parishes.

An assassination

Last Sept. 11, he was among many people crowded into Sacre Coeur Church in a quiet, upper-class section of Port-au-Prince. The Mass was organized by wealthy Haitian businessman Antoine Izmerly to honor victims of a massacre at a Haitian church five years earlier.

There were threats against the Mass, Voss says in his quiet voice. They said the blood would flow if we had the Mass, and we had decided to cancel it. But Antoine came in and said, 'If we let these people tell us we can't even pray in our churches, we have already lost everything.'

Some changes were made in the service. Izmerly had been the major financial backer of President Jean-Bertrand Aristide. Plans to hang Aristide posters were canceled. But the service went on.

In his sermon, the Rev. Antoine Adrien called for "a suspension of killing." He called for tranquility, for peace, for justice.

Right after he said the Mass, the attaché came in with their weapons, Voss says. They took Antoine Izmerly to the altar, in front of everyone, and put a gun to his head and lambasted him for two minutes with all kinds of foul stuff. Then they pushed him down the stairs and out the door and into the streets and shot him twice in the ear.

Sitting in the dining room of a very simply furnished home in a nice section of the city, Voss motions around the room. "This house was his," he says. "He offered it for us to use. He became a very good friend of mine. I was devastated after they killed him. We had to hide, of course, for several hours in the rectory of the church, and the attachés kept driving by. We called the United Nations for help. They were at church that day and watched it all, but they couldn't help. Eventually, I took the priests home in one

of our cars." Voss first became interested in Haiti in 1974 when he visited another Caribbean island and found a group of Haitians living there in squalor. He wondered how bad conditions must be at home to make them want to leave and live in a place such as that.

He came to Haiti and saw. He has been involved ever since, much of it with the Haiti Twinning Parish program in which U.S. and Haitian Catholic churches are paired for culture exchanges and aid. He works full time handling the Haitian end of that operation.

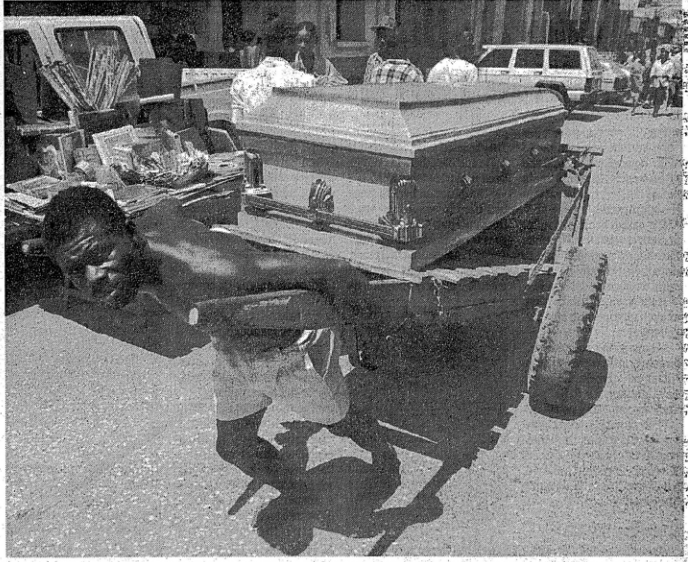
He quickly became politically involved when he first saw the living conditions in Port-au-Prince. "It was clear to me that what this country needed was a Gandhi," he says. "And then this Aristide thing happened."

The politics of aid

He became a strong supporter of Aristide and dreams of the day he'll return to Haiti. "The situation here is deplorable," Voss says. "I can spend all day at that gate out front responding to people who come looking for work, for money for their kids' school, medicine, for some hope — anything that could take care of them. It's a horrible situation. Just terrible. The repression is like something you couldn't read about in Nazi Germany."

Half of the 1.2 million people in Port-au-Prince live in the worst slums, he says. Most of the rest live in conditions that Americans would consider slums.

In the provinces, in the rural



Long carts with automobile wheels haul heavy loads up and down the hilly streets of Port-au-Prince. Here, a barefoot man walks the hot asphalt streets pulling a load heavier than most.

areas, it's a different kind of poverty, Voss says. "It's people with nothing, but at least they have clean air to breathe and a little land. You wonder why all these people don't go to the provinces. It's because there's no money there. Here they hope to find work or they might have a chance if they're industrious enough or sell their soul."

There's really not much hope anywhere right now. "He's quiet, then speaks again. 'You can't describe a place like this to people,' he says. 'They have to come and see it. You have to see the people like that whom you over there.'"

He points out the front window. It's midafternoon. A neat-

ly dressed woman is walking down the street.

"That woman goes to work all day for someone for a few bucks," Voss says. "If she has to spend any money for transportation, that could take up a third of what she makes, right there. Then she tries to come home and feed a family and pay rent. These people are so faithful and they are so much seasoned to living in this kind of situation that they do it very gracefully."

Church and state

The Catholic Church is the one organization that has stayed firm with the people here, he says. "These people learned their politics from the Catholic Church.

They were resigned to the fact that there was a government here that would take their stuff. Finally someone said to them, 'God doesn't want you to lose your children by the time they're 2 or 3. God doesn't want you to live in misery like this with no place to work.'"

Voss believes people in the United States are not aware of what is happening to the people in Haiti. If they were, he says, there would be an outcry. He hopes there will be an outcry.

He's afraid of the possible results of a violent uprising by the poor. He's afraid of the killing that might follow if people get gunned.

Their passive resistance real-

ly needs to become more active," he says. "But it needs to maintain its nonviolent principles."

Their nonviolence is in the face of violence, Voss says. Last Dec. 27, he says, military-police operatives burned down 2,000 homes in the Cité Soleil slum, making sure the people, including children, were home when the fires started.

He's afraid. He's outspoken about his positions. In Haiti, people die because of their beliefs.

"But it doesn't do any good to be afraid," he says quietly, without showing fear. "It paralyzes you."

"We have to keep this dream alive."

THE TEACHER

Opening eyes to read, think, ask

Plan targets illiteracy rate

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti — G. Jacobson slides back in her chair. Her head relaxes, resting in the evening darkness.

The electrical power is out as it is on most nights. Some light flickers from a lantern on the balcony where she sits, but not much, just enough to light a way to her room, to create shadows on her face as she talks.

At 61 years old, Jacobson appreciates the quiet and soft light of an evening. She's tired. You can hear it in her soft voice.

Sometimes she's also angry when she talks about what is happening to people in Haiti. But this is where she wants to be.

Here in the poverty and the slums and the hunger and the filth, she's found wonderful people. And with them, she says, she feels close to God.

Jacobson is from Milwaukee. She owns an award-winning landscaping business there. She works here in the win-

ter and goes back to her business in Milwaukee through the summer.

Last year she taught in Cité Soleil.

This year she's teaching English to a group of students in a program known as Alpha Tanboula.

The program is being taught in a middle-class area in Port-au-Prince, and its goals stretch beyond teaching people to read and write.

The focus extends to teaching people to think, according to the Haitian director of the program — who, like many people who live here, is afraid to have his name printed in an American newspaper.

"You must understand, we are trying to develop a country," he says. "You can't develop a country without education. To build a society, you need education. To change

values, we need education.

"In Haiti right now, we have 85 percent illiteracy," he says. "This is unbelievable, unbelievable. We think this has to change. With a good education, people will start asking questions. They will ask, 'Why do we have so much garbage lying in the street in this country? Why are conditions here so bad?'"

Without education, he says, people will accept the conditions as they are.

There is little public education in Haiti. There are many private schools run as businesses, but there are no controls or monitors to measure their effectiveness. There are good schools run by the Catholic Church.

But it's especially hard to educate people in rural areas, says another Haitian man who coordinates Alpha Tanboula.

"The majority of the people can't go to school," he says. "That is a fact. If you leave the cities and go into the mountains, you find few schools. And the majority of the people in this country live in the mountains. We're trying to find a way to have schools in rural centers."

There are several elements to Alpha Tanboula: adult literacy; training of teachers

and supervision of primary schools; cultural exchanges between Haitians and foreigners; and English as a third language in addition to Creole and French.

"We teach adults to get together and solve problems in their communities, to find projects," the coordinator says. "We teach communities to be responsible for themselves."

But educating a population takes much time, generations. And the results are not always obvious to a casual observer.

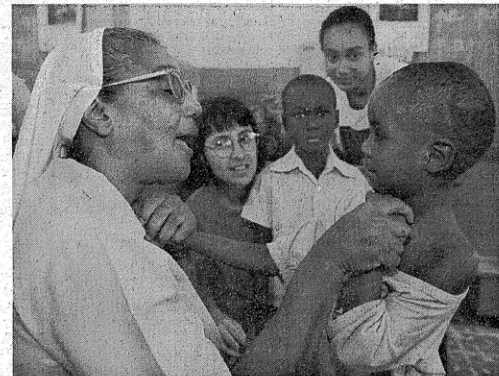
The situation in Haiti is hard now, the coordinator says. That makes social progress especially difficult. Help is needed — but not necessarily from the United States government, these men say.

"We don't want help from U.S. government," the school director says. "We need help from U.S. people."

A difficult year

Jacobson's hair is short and gray. She wears summer dresses in Haiti and doesn't feel as dressed up as many of the people she sees here. Most Haitians manage to dress well, or at least cleanly, in spite of the poverty.

"This year it's been difficult being here," Jacobson



A boy feels the sounds as a nun teaches speech at a school for the deaf and blind in Port-au-Prince.

here with the Haitians. "Some of the help here has been very paternalistic and that doesn't work," she says. "But you can come here and do something and I enjoy the challenge."

The poor need help now, she says. And this country is mostly poor. "I have no idea how long this is going to go on," she says.

"You know, I'm a spiritual person, but I'm not religious," she says, speaking softly again. "It's easier for me to feel in touch with the Lord in Haiti. I feel a covenant with God here through the gentle hearts of my friends."

She sighs deeply and sinks back in her chair overlooking the darkness of the city.

THE PARISH

Doing for the least of these

WL church tied to Haitian parish

The Rev. Jean Theodule Domond sits in the shade of an acacia tree and rests before his long trip home into the countryside. His parish is only 75 miles from the city. But it will take him four hours, perhaps more, to drive there through the mountains on narrow, dirt roads. He's a young man with smooth features and an easy-going way. "I have a very poor parish," he says in slow, precise English. "In the countryside, the people have nothing for their lives. They are very, very poor. The situation is not good for them because the situation of our country is very bad. There is no money, no food, no water. There is nothing. This must change."

A binding friendship
It is Domond's parish in Baudin that is the real tie to a group of people from St. Thomas Aquinas Church who visited Haiti last month. It's Baudin where they've built ties and friendships. It's Baudin that they visit each year, bringing supplies and ideas and friendship. Domond has visited in West Lafayette. "They've given us their love and their friendship and their solidarity," Domond says. "I

feel very close to these people. They're good friends." He and the others in Baudin need that friendship now. "The situation here is more bad than it was a year ago," Domond says. "The oil embargo is very, very difficult for us. The rich are getting more rich and the poor are getting more poor. The military and govern-

It isn't going to get better, not in their lifetime. ... There's too much that needs to be done."
— Jim Altepeter, member, St. Thomas Aquinas Church

ment now in Haiti is bad. They kill people. They shoot people. They're very violent. And there is crime now in Haiti. I'm very much worried about the future."
Increasing struggle
Jim Altepeter of Lafayette, a member of St. Thomas Aquinas, sits nearby listening. He was one of the people who started this close relationship

with the people from Baudin and Port-au-Prince. It's Altepeter's fourth trip to Haiti. The church works with the poor in the Lafayette area, and the first trip to Haiti was an effort to gain a global perspective on poverty. The other trips were a response to the need and the people they met there.

Ten percent of the money collected at St. Thomas Aquinas on one Sunday each year goes to promote programs in Baudin like scholarships for children to attend Haitian schools.

The fund — 100 percent of which goes to students — also continues with contributions from others in the community.

"I think it's much worse in Haiti this year," Altepeter says. "The poor are getting poorer. There is a much greater struggle for them everywhere."

"The thing most missing in the people from last year is their immediate joy," says Sally Scholz, another member of the Lafayette group making her second visit to Haiti. "I really see a tension in the people that I didn't see last year."

Some of the sights Altepeter saw this year in Port-au-Prince were overwhelming, even for a man used to the overwhelming sights of this city.

"The sewers are open in Port-au-Prince," he says. "There are open trenches through residential areas that spill into other open trenches that get everything. Some of them get to be 25 feet wide and they get garbage, trash, everything. Sometimes they get clogged. This morning as I was walk-



Men haul 50-gallon drums of gasoline to a black market near the harbor of Port-au-Prince as armed police stand nearby. A long line of trucks carrying more of the black market gas waits along the waterfront.

ing over this bridge over one of these open sewers, there must have been 75 men all with shovels and all with nothing on but shorts and they were all down in the sewage trench, dredging out the garbage onto the bank.

"They had opened it up to let this oily sewage water flow more freely. At least a dozen of these men were standing up for their waists in raw sewage."

Altepeter told this story calmly. And when he finished he choked back tears. He didn't speak for long moments.

No hope for tomorrow

"It isn't going to get better, not in their lifetime," Altepeter says. He speaks very softly. "There is a whole generation or maybe two generations that I know in my heart are not going to be able to rise above it. No — there's too much. There's too much that needs to be done."

We must do something, he says. But we only come for a short time, while the people here face these hardships every single day of their lives. Hardships like clogged open sewers. Hardships related to

daily life.

"I know children in Baudin who walk four hours to school each day and four hours home," he says. "They leave at 4:30 in the morning and they get home at 7 at night and they walk the hills in pitch black darkness."

"How they do it is beyond me. But they do it. And they do it with a smile on their face — every time, a smile on their face. You've seen that smile on the people here in Port-au-Prince."

Haiti, Altepeter says, is like

the open sores and wounds he saw on people at a medical clinic in the slum of La Saline.

"It is the wound we all dab at," he says. "It is the wound we would like to heal. But it is a wound that continues to fester."

"Now, I try to tell myself that I did not take part in the undoing of Haiti, but is that really true? I think not. Perhaps my responsibility is greater because I have been allowed to see it firsthand."

"If only I could say I did not see or know."

THE BUSINESSMAN

Nation careens out of control

Up in the mountains above the city, the steamy air turns cool and free of smog. The view is of blue-aqua ocean below and fertile, green rolling farmland all around.

Bright green lettuce, still fresh with dew, grows in the red-brown soil. White stone fences separate plots of ground.

Some homes are small and simple. A few others are spectacular and grow out of the hillside to capture views of paradise.

This Haitian businessman loves the mountains and he's happy to talk about his country. But he's not willing to have his name published. Few Haitians are. "You can be killed for what you say in Haiti."

"Haiti is just dying. It's just dying out," the middle-aged man says. "Especially the ones who are poor. The ones you see in the streets today are former workers. Now, they do nothing. In the last several years we've lost 60,000 jobs in Haiti."

Some put the figure at 100,000. "Nobody is running this country," he says. "The country is running itself."

Embargo affects all

A peasant farmer from the mountains joins the conversation. He farms several acres of vegetables with hand tools and takes the produce down to market in town.

He grows lettuce and cabbage and onions and green beans. But the U.N. embargo on Haiti is hurting him. It would cost him more to drive his produce to market than he could make selling it. So he gives it away to neighbors or works it back into the soil and doesn't plant new crops at all.

"The farmer wears blue pants and a blue work shirt, his brown leather boots furrowed with cracks. He smiles while he talks about his problems.

"If it gets any tougher here, we'll all just drop dead," he says. The businessman also has been affected by the embargo. His business is not



Farm hands, crusted with soil, hold a sickle worm from use.

operating. He keeps only a handful of key people on the payroll.

There's a lot of talk about how to solve problems, he says, but no money. "The big guys eat it all up," he says.

"They all want democracy but democracy for their own people and not for those who disagree."

"The United Nations talks about making a coalition now, but it will never work," he says. "The sides are too polarized, and we the people are caught in the middle."

Haitian military and political leaders, he says, are like crabs in a basket. "Each one tries to pull down the other trying to get to the top," he says.

Aristide's future

The businessman says President John-Bertrand Aristide would like to turn the country into another Cuba.

"Under Aristide, it was class war. The English is very good. He talks about the police and military and members of an organization called FRAPH. "They kill people," the man says. "Especially members of FRAPH are killing people. This morning there was a corpse on the street. Last month there were four corpses. Two of them were my friends."

"They shoot guns into the air every night to make people afraid," the man says. "Some of them

THE SLUM DWELLER

Surviving day by day

Man views life without illusion

Dressed in a pure white shirt and carefully ironed slacks, he looks deep into your eyes.

He speaks in English, slowly, making his point as though he's trying to print it on your soul.

"You cannot use my name," he says, although he has given it freely. "None." "If they knew I was talking to a journalist, they would kill me. They would kill me."

It's that simple. He's that sure. He's a handsome man, probably in his 30s, tall and lean. Almost everyone here is lean.

He lives in Cité Soleil, a slum filled with dirt, mud, garbage and sewage. But his shoes that shuffle through the dusty streets are clean and polished.

In Haiti, just because you live in the slums doesn't mean you're of the slums.

'A bad place now'

"Cité Soleil is a bad place now," he explains, sitting in a chair in the shade of a hot afternoon. His English is very good. He talks about the police and military and members of an organization called FRAPH.

"They kill people," the man says. "Especially members of FRAPH are killing people. This morning there was a corpse on the street. Last month there were four corpses. Two of them were my friends."

"They shoot guns into the air every night to make people afraid," the man says. "Some of them

are burglars and thieves. They steal.

Members of FRAPH are civilians. They dress like everyone else. You don't always know who is FRAPH, so you have to be careful who you talk to.

"I know two members of FRAPH. They tell me I have no problem — just don't go out at night. "It's a hard life. It's a very hard life."

Life in Cité Soleil

Homes in Cité Soleil are made of concrete block or cardboard and scrap metal. The roofs are rusted metal. Buildings are wedged one right after the other. Sometimes the homes are separated by nothing more than a 3- or 5-foot walkway with an open sewer between them, leading to bigger open sewers.

When it rains, the sewers flood into the streets and the homes and into the market places where people buy food.

"There are no toilets in those buildings. They have to go very far to the toilet," the man says. "There aren't enough in Cité Soleil, and sometimes people take a piece of plastic and, you know ..."

Sometimes they use a bucket. It all goes into the open sewage canal that runs by their homes. It's common to see men and women stop to urinate in crowded streets.

There is little running water. After it rains, people go through the streets with cans and buckets, scooping water out of the gutters. They stop to wash their



The metal gates to the Church of St. Joseph in La Saline are closed with a choir singing inside as a woman rests exhausted at the step and an infant wrapped in a pink blanket lies nearby, covered by flies.

feet in puddles.

"We haven't had electricity for five days," the man says. "I don't know how people eat. They eat some bread and take some water and go to bed and maybe tomorrow they will find some money, or maybe they will find nothing."

And the killings continue. "My uncle was assassinated," the man says. "We never found his corpse. Just the blood. They tied his wife and daughter together and took him out and killed him."

There was a body in Cité Soleil the morning he spoke, lying in the street on top of blood, a black and red bullet wound behind an ear. A blanket had been placed on the body, partially covering it.

Some people say most of the gunshots at night are fired into the air just to scare people and keep them from sleeping.

"No," this man insists. "The guns make people sleep. Do you understand?" "It makes them sleep forever."

THE SENATOR

Political foes polarized by history

Efforts to find a compromise between Haitian President Jean-Bertrand Aristide and the military leaders who overthrew him are 'dead in the water' at this time, according to Sen. Richard Lugar, R-Ind. Lugar, senior Republican on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said he'd like to see a conference in Washington to try to settle the issues. 'I think the only way to work this out is to have a conference take place here,' he said. 'These are people who have been intransigent in their position. We can offer our offices for the Aristide people, the centrists and the military people and attempt to work out a new framework.' The Bush administration used

sanctions against Haiti after the military coup in 1991. Strong statements were issued against the military leaders along with calls for the return of Aristide. Haitian boat people who had been coming to the United States hoping for refugee status were sent back. While campaigning, President Clinton criticized Bush's policy toward the boat people. But the Clinton administration has continued the policy of intercepting boatloads of Haitians and sending them back. 'We adopted a policy of con-



Lugar

taining the people in their own country because they had misinterpreted President Clinton's rhetoric and were prepared to come here in large numbers.' Lugar said. 'From that point on the administration has tried to think of a policy on how Aristide should be restored.' Those moves led to the Governor's Island accord. Under terms of that agreement: > Aristide was to name a new prime minister for Haiti and return to Haiti on Oct. 30, 1993. > United Nations sanctions were to be lifted. > Aristide was to provide a blanket amnesty for those involved in the coup. > Raoul Cedras, head of the Haitian businessman Robert

Malval became the new prime minister, but other terms of the agreement fell apart. Aristide did not return. On Oct. 11, 1993, a troop carrier, the USS Harlan County, carrying 200 U.S. troops coming to provide aid to the country was turned back from landing in Port-Au-Prince by about 100 armed anti-Aristide police attaches. Lugar said Malval met with him and Sen. Sam Nunn, D-Ga., in Washington, attempting to enlist their aid with a plan to bring together a broad-based group of Haitians he hoped would include Aristide. 'Aristide backed away. He is advised in Washington by people who have highly unrealistic presumptions of his prospects,'

Lugar said. Lugar said U.S. military intervention won't happen. The Clinton administration is 'sort of trapped' in its current policy. 'If they move away from sanctions against Haiti, that will be misinterpreted,' he said. 'The Aristide people have suggested stronger sanctions, but the U.S. position has become one of doubting that will help, and some embarrassment over how devastating the sanctions have been on ordinary people.' The polarization between groups in Haiti is extreme, Lugar said. 'It's not going to be easy for these people to ever live together,' he said. 'I don't know any way out but to keep introducing them.'

THE NIGHT

Danger never sleeps

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti The roosters crow at 3 a.m. The still night air of this crowded city is never quiet. It's cracked by sounds of barking dogs, guns popping, a woman's shrill scream. Maybe you get used to it after awhile and sleep straight through until morning. Maybe it's something to which you never want to grow accustomed. Port-au-Prince is a city on a lovely aqua bay, a city that rises, first slowly and then more and more steeply, into hills and mountains. There are few places for visitors to stay, but one is Hospice St. Joseph, on Acacia Street, a former commercial guest house run by Catholic nuns supported, in part, by the Lafayette Diocese. The white, curved building with long balconies on the second and third floors is separated from the street by a metal gate that rolls aside to let vehicles and people in and out. Guests don't venture outside the courtyard at night. Located halfway up a hill, the hospice looks out over the bay and the mountains to the left, overlooking endless miles of concrete block houses with rusting, gray metal roofs. Almost all the buildings are white; here and there one is green, one red. If there is electricity during the day, it's usually off by nightfall and the city turns to darkness broken only by lanterns and occasional car headlights running eerily up and down the many hills. Behind the hills, long before you see the cars, you see the headlights shooting up in the dark sky, creating shadows in



A dance instructor's face is highlighted by the shadows of the fading sun beaming through a door in an abandoned Port-au-Prince factory, while a trumpet, trombone and a tambou drum beat a rhythm.

doorways and alleys. Windows in many of the poorer homes are nothing more than holes in the concrete blocks. And in the early hours of the night the sounds of people talking in their homes, in the streets, carry through the city in a muffled rumble. Standing on the balcony of Hospice St. Joseph in the warm evening is like standing on the stage of a theater, listening to the muffled voices of an audience waiting for a performance. 'It's a Wednesday night in Port-au-Prince, and after several evenings of rainfall the people are

taking to the streets for huge Lenten parades. Fiery torches lead long lines of singing people who dance along far-off streets to the sounds of trumpets, tambou drums and cracking whips. The musical beat is fast and repetitive, the frenzied sounds electrifying the still night air. Rumor becomes reality The gunshots, too, come with nightfall. And this Wednesday night there are many. 'Will you need a guard at the hospice tonight?' a Haitian had asked earlier in the day.

It was a dismissed remark until morning when people learned a home several doors away had been entered by military or police agents demanding money. Perhaps there were rumors earlier in the day that something was coming to this neighborhood. There are rumors everywhere, always. There is no reliable official local news. When the gunshots come, they pop first in the distance; sometimes they get closer. At times several pops come quickly, close together, as if more than one person is shooting. You wonder if a shot is just a warning in the air or if each one means someone has died. Death is part of the night, the Haitians say. This Wednesday night there are other sounds around St. Joseph, one of them the sound of a woman giving birth. In the single room that is her home, the young mother is lying on the concrete floor with several older women around her, the father lying on a bed. The neighborhood midwife — a young man — has come to do his work. He takes a broom — a stick with dried palm leaves tied to the end — and swishes it just above the woman's body, up and down her legs and arms, her chest and stomach. 'Sweep out baby,' the father says approvingly to those who have stopped by to see. The young woman sings gentle songs in her sweet, high voice to divert attention from her pain. The father has placed a small metal barricade over the open

doorway. He doesn't want guests to venture out at the night to cross the street back to Hospice St. Joseph. 'Attache, Attache,' he says and pretends to shoot a gun. But the guests do cross the street and have trouble unlocking their gate as they listen to unseen footsteps pacing slowly, steadily up the dark hill, below the crest where they can see. The footsteps disappear as suddenly as they came. The roosters crow at 3 a.m. They crow the rest of the night. Dogs are awakened by the gunshots or roosters or each other and they bark without stopping. Sometimes bleating goats add to the noise. At 4 a.m. there are three gun blasts so close to Hospice St. Joseph that people jump from their sleep. Some run to a balcony to look. Some don't want to move. And then comes the more frightening sound. It's the sound of a woman screaming — a scream from somewhere, but you don't know where. And the gunshots and the screams and your imagination and the darkness leave you gripping at your sheets. Sometimes in the early, black darkness of morning in Port-Au-Prince you're awakened by sounds that shatter the sleep from your eyes and keep you awake for the rest of the night. And at those times, the gentle bell of a shoeshine boy who passes with the first warming light of dawn becomes the most welcome sound of the day.



The local midwife uses a broom to sweep a baby from the womb during early labor in a one-room house in Port-au-Prince. Josh Bussert (left) of Lafayette comforts the woman during contractions while the father-to-be looks on.

COMMENTARY

Images haunt memory

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti Sitting in a wicker chair on the shaded front porch of a hospital for children, Jenny Penderville holds a sick baby to her shoulder, nestled to her neck. She rocks forward and back. She has a pretty young face that smiles as she bends her head to look at the infant.



John Norberg

Inside the hospital are many unheld babies, crying. And outside the hospital grounds, beyond a stone wall and an iron gate, Haitian men and women are waiting, looking inside, hoping for help from volunteers who have come to the hospital to work this day. Other women wait with their sick babies, hoping to get them admitted. Some mothers who have lost all hope have abandoned babies here.

Penderville, of Pittsburgh, is in her 20s. She studied religion and social work at a small college back home and came to Haiti for a two-week program during her senior year. In 1989, she came here full time. 'This is where God wants me,' she says, hugging the baby in her arms. 'I feel more at peace here than at home because of that. I know this is where God wants me to serve.'

When you first walk down the streets here, you smell the rotting garbage, the sewage. At first you see the children begging and rubbing their bellies, the markets where people eat food covered by flies, and the open, red festering sores on men and women who can't get medical help.

At first you see everything. You smell it all and you walk down the street glancing from side to side in disbelief. But as time passes, you stop noticing. The garbage, the open sewers, the suffering all become a natural part of the landscape. Still — the images of Haiti stay in your mind, like snapshots in an album. If you manage to stop thinking about them while you're here, they come back to haunt you when you're many miles away. And when you close your eyes to try and lose them, you see them even more vividly in the darkness of your thoughts.

Penderville can't get Haiti out of her head when she returns home to the United States. 'Everybody deals with the emotional hardships differently,' she says. 'As for myself, I see children die all the time and I'm fine until one of them dies who maybe I knew a little better. Then you'll let it out. And then you're OK again for a couple months. It's when I go home from here that the shock of it really sets in.'

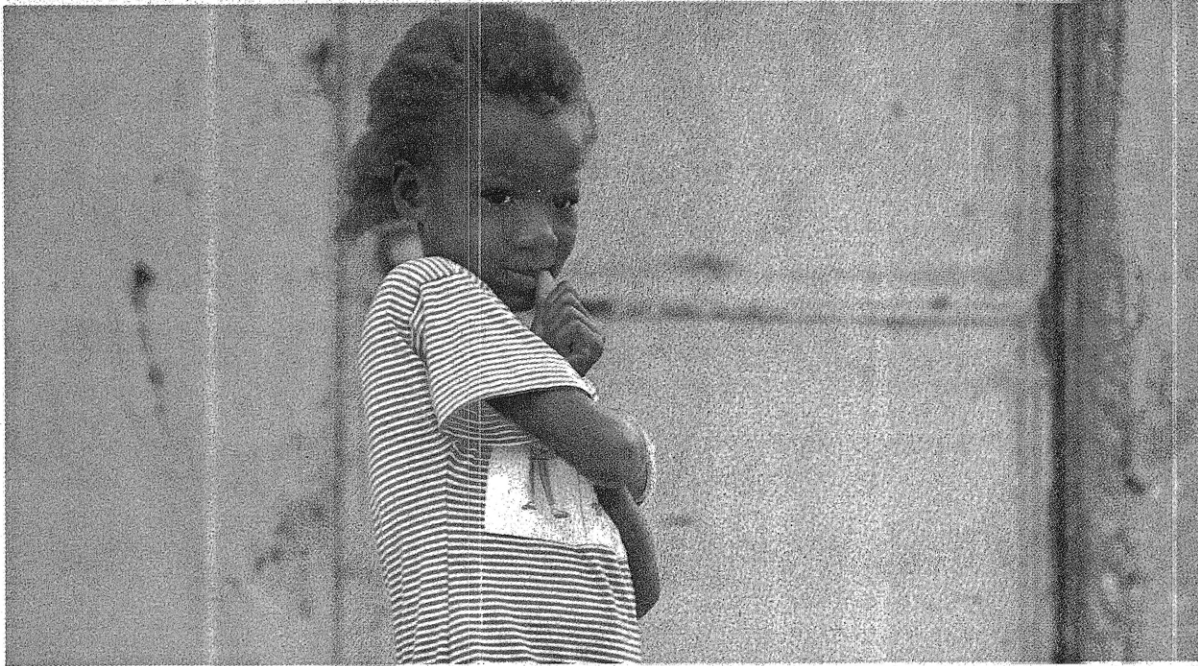
She gazes out at the street in front of her, seeing hopeless looks on the faces of people there. 'People in the states say we're sensationalizing this,' she says. 'They're getting numb. When I go home, it hurts me to see the lack of concern. I think they just have to come down here and see. They need to come down and see the little boy I saw here at the hospital the other day. They had put more medication in his cup than they normally do and when I gave it to him, before he took it, he looked up at me with big eyes and said, 'I'm not getting better, am I?'

Haiti is not getting better. Everyone says it's getting worse. So many people here need help, it's overwhelming. Everywhere people here call out to visitors from the United States. 'Blan, blan,' they say in Creole as you pass. 'White, white.' It's also a word for stranger. Some shout at you as you pass, blaming the problems in Haiti on the United States and the outside world. But mostly, the people here are friendly. They smile at you and talk with you.

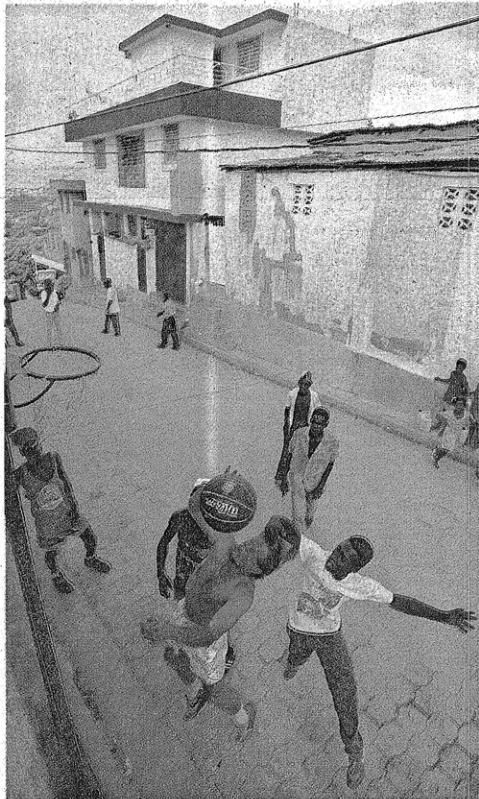
They ask for money for food, for water. They learn your name. They use it as they speak, as you smile at them and walk away. You can't give money to everyone who needs it in Haiti. No one has that much money. One young man talked to me at length about his problems as I walked down a street. 'I'm sorry I can't help you,' I said. But he kept on. He was hungry. His children were sick. He asked for so little. I had 10 times that in my pocket. 'I'm sorry,' I said. 'I have to go.' Thirty more people just like him were watching, waiting.

He stood still as I moved forward and the distance of the broken, dirty street separated us on the hot afternoon. Thirty feet away I turned and glanced back. He was still standing there, still watching me, still hoping. 'Goodbye,' I said. 'John,' he called. 'You will not forget me, will you? I need your help, John. Will you remember my name?' Yes, I'll remember. After seeing, how could I ever forget? His name is Haiti.

THE PEOPLE

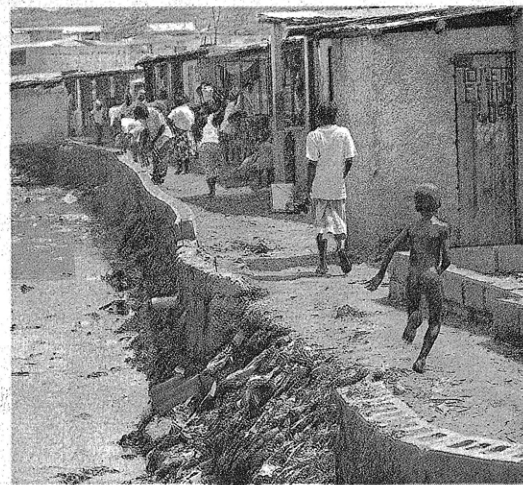


A malnourished child smiles shyly, her hair tinged red by her condition. Rather than playing, children often rummage through the streets of Port-au-Prince slums, searching for food and money.



FAR LEFT: Hoosiers brought the game that the state is known for to a group of Haitians living near Hospice St. Joseph. Here, Tom Reichert of Lafayette plays an afternoon pickup game. Even in a Third World nation like Haiti, American athletes like Michael Jordan and Charles Barkley are popular.

LEFT: A leaf from a nearby tree is wrapped against a man's forehead to cure a headache. When Haitians can't afford a doctor or modern medicine, they often turn to herbal methods.



LEFT: A large open sewer runs just yards away from homes in Cité Soleil. In Haiti's slums, 18-inch open sewers lead into larger open sewers, contributing to disease.

BELOW: The line forming at a health and medical clinic near the open sewers of Cité Soleil starts with this young boy.

BELOW LEFT: Pounding tambou drums beat rhythmically, fast, faster to the blare of a trumpet and trombone, sending members of a Port-au-Prince dance class into a circle of motions, following a leader in the last sun of the day.

