

# Merger Sponsorship Newsletter

February 2015

## The Gift of Hope

by Shelly Kirgiss

Last summer, in the middle of our concrete driveway, a tiny pansy sprouted. In harsh conditions, in a place it really shouldn't have grown, it found just enough of what it needed to thrive. And thrive it did. That pansy lasted the summer in that small crack, and admittedly, I was happy about it. I was rooting for its survival. There is something inherently captivating about the underdog, about seeing something live and grow when all logic says it shouldn't.

The school in Merger is like that flower. It stands as a refuge of hope in a place where hope is minimal at best.

Merger is not a beautiful place. It is not lush or tropical. The sun is hot, and the humidity makes the air feel heavy. The streets are packed-earth, littered with garbage and all forms of waste. You have to step strategically as you walk through the village. The best houses are made of concrete block and are about the size of some of our master bedrooms. Life in Merger (and Haiti in general) is hard and for a casual observer can seem almost hopeless. But with God there is always hope, and God is alive and working in Merger, Haiti. We felt His presence and heard His whisper in the voices of 397 students who have been given reason to hope.

As we entered the schoolyard of the New Life Education Complex (CENV), pictures I had looked at for the past two years came to life. The students in their makeshift classrooms dressed in the khaki and white of the middle and older grades were listening to their teachers while covertly trying to sneak a peek at who had just arrived. We jumped out of the trucks and made our way to the site where the new building had already

been started by the Haitian team, and on the way, we passed the kindergarten rooms. "Hey you!" rang in the air as they realized visitors were at the school. Little arms waved from underneath thatched walls. Tiny faces peered through cracks. I realized that working would be difficult with those precious little ones just a few feet away, but work we did – hauling sand and rock, mixing concrete, cutting and twisting metal – it was hard but satisfying work. And then it was time for the much anticipated break. The first students released were those in the older grades. Some of them were hesitant and stood back, not sure what to make of the ten white people invading their schoolyard, but some were anxious to talk to us.

Through broken English, they asked us questions that made my heart soar... "Do you know Alvin and Tracy Bracken?" one young man inquired. "Yes," we assured him, "We know the Brackens." He introduced himself as Frantzot and told us, "The Brackens are my sponsors. I pray for them every day. Tell them thank you – I couldn't be here without them."

Those small conversations solidified in my mind the value of this program – the relationship we have with Johny and this school. These students know who their sponsors are; they are grateful and thankful and those that know Jesus as their Savior pray for them. There is hope here, and it comes in the form of relationship, education, and sponsorship.



Abigail with a group of students.

The middle grades were released next and the energy level on the playground (really just a very large empty field) rose dramatically. Young men were playing soccer or tackling one another (boys apparently are the same in every culture). So many students wanted to hold our hands, stroke our hair, climb on our backs – it was like being a human jungle gym. I loved it. We learned names and grades, and my mind whirled as I made connection after connection. So many of the faces I had seen numerous times on my computer screen were standing before me, hugging me and sharing their beautiful smiles. And everyone wanted their picture taken. “Photo, photo” was heard over and over again during the recess break. I gladly obliged. You can never have too many pictures of happy, smiling children.

Once the middle and older students returned to class, the kindergarten grades have a break. Pandemonium may be the only appropriate word for the onslaught of seventy (or more) 3-5 year olds swarming the team, laughing, smiling, wanting desperately just to be held. Games like *London Bridge* and *Ring around the Rosy* were a hit. Their energy was contagious and fun to watch. Dave started giving students piggy-back rides and what ensued next was hilarious...as Dave ran across the schoolyard with a small child on his back, twenty others ran screaming behind him. It was like watching a human comet speed across the field.



Altogether we were able to spend three days at the school in Merger. We worked hard, sweated more than we probably ever have, and acquired cuts, bruises and blisters. More importantly, we forged relationships. I was able to watch my teammates share the love of Christ through laughter, hugs and games. Abigail, the youngest of our team members, had a special ability to connect with the older students, in part because she is the same age as some of them. She made bonds that may possibly last forever. I was able to meet the mother of one of our sponsored students, Smia, and I will never forget it. Although we didn't speak the language of the other, two mothers' hearts joined together in an embrace and a kiss on the cheek – Both saying “thank you” – one for the help to send her daughter to school and the other for the privilege of doing so.

I left Haiti with the realization that it is a land of contrasts, a land teeming with a tension that is almost palatable. Poverty, destruction and sorrow are apparent everywhere you look, but if you take the time to know the people, to look deeper, you see that God's servants are moving and changing Haiti – from the inside out. Hope is bubbling to the surface in unexpected places, and beauty is springing forth from the cracks of a broken society. Merger is one of those places, and you are helping with this transformation. Thank you - for giving your finances, your prayers and your encouragement to a people in need and for allowing teams from Glenwood to continue to bring a message of hope to a people who so desperately need it.

***“A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he has brought justice through to victory. In his name the nations will put their hope.” Matthew 12:20-21***





The top picture shows the building in Merger on the first day of construction (2/11). The Haiti building crew had already completed the foundation and first layer of block. Dave Knoedler stayed a week longer than the rest of the team and the bottom picture shows the progress just before he returned home (2/22). This building will have three offices and one kindergarten classroom. The plan is to construct another building directly across from this one that will house the remaining kindergarten classes.





### Praises For...

- A safe and successful GO Team trip! A home was worked on in Port-au-Prince and a kindergarten/office building was worked on in Merger.
- Mason and Lauren's ministry in Haiti. They have forged relationships and are making inroads in the community surrounding STEP.
- The continued health and safety of Mason & Lauren, Johny & Rosadite and all the staff and students at CENV.
- Successful surgery for Rosadite.

### Please Pray for...

- Continued safety for all the staff and students at CENV.
- Open hearts for the students and parents who do not yet know Jesus.
- The students and the church in Merger to continue to grow spiritually.
- New sponsors for the students we have waiting.
- Continued healing for Rosadite and that the pain she has been experiencing would be gone.



For more information regarding the sponsorship program, please contact Shelly Kirgiss in the church office at 360-571-3300 or at [skirgiss@glenwoodcc.org](mailto:skirgiss@glenwoodcc.org) Thanks for your support!