

Journey of Hope



Bill Richard and Jim Tucker

My name is Bill Richard. I am a businessman in a construction company, a husband and a father who loves the outdoors and have a passion for flying. In the wake of the tragic Haiti earthquake, I completed two mission treks in February and May with my friend Jim Tucker to bring medicine and other aid supplies to some of the hardest-hit area of the country. Jim is a retired police captain and currently head of security at a nuclear facility in New England. Together, we travelled the length of the East Coast in my four-seat Columbia 2541M without the benefit of long term planning. We flew distances that were beyond the published range of my aircraft, and without the weather reporting assistance or the safety net

that we are accustomed to. At times, we relied more on instincts than technology, but the greatest test of all was the sweeping deployment of destruction and destitution that we saw. We embarked in this journey knowing that such an adventure would stir some emotions; but we had clearly underestimated our reaction to poverty.

As a member of Angel Flight New England I volunteer to fly people living in remote regions to hospitals for treatment. Through this work I became aware of the organization Bahamas Habitat and its urgent need for pilots, especially those with planes small enough to land on short runways. As I gathered information about these relief missions, I was overcome by a strong desire to take on a higher purpose without regards to my limitations, both as a pilot and a human being.

On February 17, two weeks after hearing about Bahamas Habitat, I left New Hampshire for Florida where I met my friend Jim. Bahamas Habitat had warned us about remaining open-minded and flexible. Priorities and destinations were bound to change at any time but no one had prepared us for the incredible amount of paper work required by the United States and the Bahamas Immigration and Customs before proceeding with our flights into Haiti.



Nassau, Bahamas

Later on that first day, after landing at Banyon Air in Florida, Jim and I loaded the airplane with supplies to be brought to Nassau under the diligent supervision of Sue Campion of Banyon Air. This successful Florida realtor managed a group of volunteers in charge of distributing a million pounds of aid supplies that several organizations had stored in Hangar 70. Our first assignment on the following day would be the “milk-run”. Essentially, we would shuttle the supplies out of Fort Lauderdale to the operation center that Bahamas Habitat had set up in Nassau. As we were preparing to leave the airport for the hotel, the Bahamas Habitat volunteers huddled us in a circle and asked us to join hands. For a brief moment, we closed our eyes and prayed for the people of Haiti, regardless of the nature of our gods and beliefs. A prayer was also offered for the pilots, a gesture that touched me deeply and put into a broader perspective the precariousness of our mission.

The next morning, fresh crews of Bahamas Habitat volunteers assisted us with procedures of arrival and departures and helped us load the aircraft. Most importantly, they briefed us on the air-to-air radio frequency used by relief pilots to communicate and pass on location and weather related information. This form of communication thus became an essential tool for pilots as air traffic controllers narrowed down to practically nothing within the Haiti radius and navigation was left to satellite guidance. Beyond these impediments, lied the constant stress of border crossing. Even before we landed, controllers bombarded us with questions related to our country of origin, the previous visited country and the content of our cargo. Once on the ground we had to face scrutiny and could never predict whether we would be singled out for interrogation. Fortunately, the authorities recognized our mission for every trip.

We made two round trips Nassau-Fort Lauderdale that day, spending most of the time in the air, and the rest divided between loading and unloading the aircraft. By then, we had figured how to speed up the paper work process, and the next morning, we prepared for our very first incursion into the heart of the quake’s devastation with a full load of medicines and food supplies destined for a clinic in Les Cayes.



Les Cayes, Haiti

We hit ground in Haiti surrounded by UN troops awaiting the arrival of a helicopter. The heat was overwhelming and the air still, nearly suffocating. As we emptied the aircraft, we noticed the gathering of children across a tall-wired fence protecting the airport grounds. “Hey Mister, give us food, give us money,” they kept repeating in their broken English. My first reaction was to dig into my pocket, but a UN guard cut me short. “Don’t,” he said. “Grown-ups watch in the background and will rob them, leaving them for dead if they have to.” The warning was chilling and non-equivocal. I went on with my tasks, sweating and feeling helpless like never before.

Several UN helicopters carrying troops and military personnel landed, immediately followed by another chopper transporting injured people on stretchers. Among them was a body rolled in tarp. “A victim from a landslide,” a UN soldier said. We finished unloading and prepared to leave but another UN soldier told us that our supplies would fall in the

hands of the local people at the airport if we did not pass them on directly to the clinic. We called the clinic and waited while the armed UN guarded our merchandise.

Later on, a worker from the clinic appeared, followed by a female missionary and her 12 year-old son. She offered us a short tour of their facilities in her open 4 X4 ATV. As soon as she set the vehicle in motion, we bounced right and left, horrified, and simply hung on to our dear life. The roads were ramshackle at best and crowded with people. To avoid the crowds, drivers simply beeped the horn and pedestrians moved swiftly aside.

As we moved out of the airport, poverty filled both the landscape and the air we breathed. Mobs of people walked aimlessly, some sat on top of small donkeys, some rode in vehicles so overloaded that we wondered how they could progress. We came upon an entire family grappled onto a motor bike; the father was driving, a child filled the front basket, another one hugged his dad from behind while the mother sat facing the rear, holding a bag in one hand and an infant in the other. I tried to let the sight float above me, like we had been instructed to. I swallowed hard, sand and sweat alike, trapped in a moment of shock and disbelief. The worst was yet to come.

As we walked into the clinic, two American doctors greeted us thinking we were the nurses they were so eager to bring into their team. When they learned we were pilots, their face dropped and they turned away, clearly disappointed, and for good reasons. Close by, interminable lines of injured people waited patiently for medical attention. We walked into an overcrowded ward with beds lined up barely three feet apart from each other. All patients were critically crippled and mutilated from the earthquake. For most of the patients, family members saw to their bodily needs. Some less fortunate were assigned a sponsor. Once a week, the doctor would make his round and prescribe treatments, often limited and insufficient due the scant supplies available.

We came upon a young woman, lying completely naked in a bed set against the wall. Her mother carefully lifted her upper arm and agony washed over the woman's face as it bent unnaturally in the middle. We later learned that her chances of survival were next to none because of a much more serious injury that had slashed part of her backside. I walked away, devastated, the coolness of my dictated composure melting at my feet. In an effort to

regain some focus, I took my camera to capture the smiley faces of children. I hugged them, holding back some tears in front of such unbelievable courage and strong human spirit.

On the ride back, Jim and I talked very little. What we had just witnessed were beyond words. Four hours later, we landed in Nassau going from absolute deprivation and complete destruction to outlandish luxury.

The next day, Saturday, February 20, Jim and I flew back to Les Cayes to drop off our supplies and pick up Dr Joanne Frederici, a volunteer returning to her Washington State, along with another doctor working in Jacmel, a coastal city. “Fly up the coast for a hundred and fifty miles and you’ll see the airport.” These were basically our flight instructions. We landed relying on the GPS and Jim’s unmistakable sense of direction.

We had grown accustomed to the switches and chaos, but the midday heat and humidity was beating hard on us. The temperature in the plane reached 110 to 115 degrees. In Jacmel, while Jim was going through the safety instructions with our new passenger, Dr Tiffany Keenan, another doctor walked up to us escorted by two UN armed soldiers. He requested that we immediately fly back to Les Cayes to deliver Tetanus medicine for two sick children. A life and death situation, he explained, and expected us to react accordingly. Heartbroken, I told him that we didn’t have enough fuel for such a trip, and that we were bound to crash somewhere before reaching our return destination. He insisted in a harsh and commanding tone. At some point I just walked away, feeling frustrated and helpless.

It was incredibly hot outside and inside the aircraft. We took off with a tail wind. Upon lift off we barely cleared the airport fence, rolled our wings between trees and house tops and then turned abruptly to avoid a ten thousand foot mountain range while listening to a stall warning horn and a stanch British women’s automated voice indicating terrain collision ahead. We made it to Turks and Cacos Islands to refuel with the haunting images of two little boys waiting for medicine I was unable to bring them.

In the air, Dr Keenan told us in length about her effort relief as a member of a non-governmental organization (NGO) called Haiti Village Health. We came to learn that she

was instrumental in the local area around Jacmel in distributing aid and medical attention upon the arrival at the airport of teams of volunteers. Jim and I decided that we would do whatever we could to help her with her organization.

On Sunday, we flew to Fort Lauderdale. It was time for Jim to go back to work. We hugged and tapped each other's back as we parted. I would miss his company, his coolness and his efficiency. Fatigue crept in as I loaded up the plane with supplies to be dropped off in Nassau, then heard the ground controller scolding me through my headphones. I had gone the wrong way on the taxiway, and to make matters worst, had taken a wrong intersection for a take-off and was moving the plane in the opposite direction in one of the busiest airport in the States. Deeply embarrassed, I shook my head and cleared my thoughts while the ground controller quickly put me back on track. My next priority was to get some rest.

I returned to Les Cayes on Monday with two nurse passengers. Again the people picking up the supplies offered us a tour of the area, their clinic and the orphanage, and again I went along with mixed feelings of curiosity and apprehension.

At the clinic, emotions ran high as we greeted the patients. Most of them had recently suffered amputation and the smell of gangrene was overwhelming. We were brought into a room where women were all lying on their stomachs. They were recovering from a skin graft taken from their backs to be used on other parts of their bodies. Our guides informed us that the supplies we had brought in would be used up within a few hours, which was little comfort to us. The scope of misery and desperation expanded before our own eyes, and there was so little we could do to alleviate it.

At the orphanage, we distributed a handful of energy bars I had gathered from the plane. Most of the children had lost all their family, parents, siblings and relatives, in the earthquake. The orphanage keepers took pride into showing us their creativity in sheltering the children. Basically, they had cut doors and windows through the metal of old rusted shipping containers and fitted bars into the openings. They had added a thatch roof for water to drain off them. Such an arrangement securely housed ten to fifteen kids. We

were indeed amazed by their sense of survival and dismayed by the harsh living conditions of the children.

We were then hurried to the airport where an aircraft had brought us a couple of cans of fuel that would carry us on to Nassau with a little spare in case we ran into trouble. In theory I had completed my last assignment in Haiti. I filled out the flight plan and paid the landing fees. I made it to Nassau, met with pilots at the hotel, and let the whole experience fade under the weight of exhaustion.

The next morning I boarded a van along with other pilots that would take us to the airport. Sitting in the front seat, I recognized the doctor who had ordered me to fly to Les Cayes without sufficient fuel. A few minutes into the trip, he turned to face me and bluntly lashed out that a child had died as a result of my refusing to fly in the tetanus medicine. The news hit me like a ton of bricks. I was speechless. Within seconds a doctor sitting towards the end of the van literally threw herself over the rows of seats and let her peer equal know, in no uncertain terms, that he was way out of line. Nonetheless, the damage was done. The blame for the death of a child stuck to me like plague. I was devastated and desperate to leave this place.

At the Nassau airport, I felt one step closer to New Hampshire. I started to preflight my plane, haunted by this unknown child that I had not saved, when a Bahamas Habitat volunteer approached me and asked me to stay another day. The orphanage that I had visited the previous day had sent out a plea for food as theirs had been stolen. This, I could do. I packed the aircraft to its full capacity with rice, beans, baby formula, salt and some canned foods. Some faces I had seen and hugged at the orphanage came back to me, and brought me a brief moment of peace.

The next day I landed in Portsmouth around 7:30 PM in a snowstorm. I was exhausted, emotionally drained and in mourning of a child, a complete stranger who would stay with me for as long as I lived.

Two weeks after my return from Haiti, I picked up the phone and called my friend Jim. Without any hesitation he agreed to be part of a second trip to Haiti. Dr Keenan provided us with a specific list of supplies for her clinic in Jacmel, and with her recommendations at hand, I spread the word around the airport for volunteers. Pilot and flight instructor Janice Newman was among the first to step in, along with my dad, who had been instrumental in raising donations to offset the first expedition. Carole Aten, a public relation expert, also offered her expertise, and soon students from Oyster River High School in Durham NH came along. They had co-founded at their school a relief organization that raised money to purchase “happy houses” for shelter in Haiti.

This newly formed committee held meetings on a weekly basis in the comfort of Janice Newman’s conference room at Pease airport flying school. We solicited the support of local businesses and organizations, and without their incredibly generous response, our pledge to Dr Keenan would have melted down to mere good intentions.

Meanwhile the ports in Haiti started to open allowing a much greater speed and volume in the delivery by containers of some of the requested provisions like food and medical supplies. Consequently, Dr Keenan asked us to bring in products that were not available by container, mainly specific medical supplies distributed by an organization called MAP (Medical Assistance Program) International, a non-profit that assembles pharmaceuticals from donated materials. She also requested items that had to be purchased at medical supply companies or hospitals.

Thanks to Jim’s contacts at both Portsmouth Hospital and Dover’s Wentworth Douglass Hospital in New Hampshire, we were given thousand of dollars worth of medical equipment, along with wound and lice supplies. Portsmouth Hospital went as far as donating an arthroscopic surgery setup for which Dr Keenan dispatched to a surgical clinic before we even set foot in Haiti. The money was spent on four laptop computers and four Clinics in a Box, each valued at \$15,000 but bought for \$500 a piece, and each providing a course of treatment for 700 to 800 people. We were stunned at both the kindheartedness and expeditiousness of our donors. They seemed to appreciate that their contribution went directly to the earthquake’s victims and created an immediate impact on people’s lives.

Exactly one week prior to our departure, Jim and I started to deliver the donated material to Janice's office. We spent hours recording the weight and content of each box that we marked accordingly with an identification number in black for content and in red for weight. As the boxes piled in, it became obvious that we could not fly all this merchandise to Florida in one trip as we had planned. Fortunately, local philanthropist, Tom Haas, offered to load his PC-12, three times the freight and speed capacity of my Columbia, and bring the totality of our donated supplies to the KFXE Fort Lauderdale airport. From there, Jim and I would divide the load into two or three trips between Fort Lauderdale and Jacmel. Tom's offer came as an immense relief to us. While a trip to Florida takes him four and half hours, we would have spent most of the time allotted to this mission simply traveling from Pease to Florida, or worst limiting the amount of donated goods.

As Jim and I were finally ready to leave from Pease on May 10, we received a desperate last minute plea for children's vitamins from Dr Keenan's Haiti coordinator. My wife Janet volunteered to rush to the store. An hour later, she pulled in at the airport with \$150 worth of vitamins and armfuls of Toy R Us bags filled with stuffed animals and small blankets. After a final farewell, I started the engine and called Portsmouth Ground for our clearance. This first leg of our journey to Fort Lauderdale would count as the easy part. Jim and I glanced at each other, then taxied to the runway.

The next morning, after loading for our first trip to Jacmel, we departed the Fort Lauderdale KFXE runway at 9:00 a.m. with a routing that would take us first to Great Inaugua in the Bahamas, approximately three hours away, for a fuel stop. About two hours into our flight and 475 miles from Fort Lauderdale, we cancelled our flight plan due to favorable weather and sufficient fuel on board to continue directly to Jacmel. This change involved us flying to an imaginary location called the Joses intersection and allowed us to avoid Cuban airspace. Beyond that point there would be no more radio contact available. We traveled the next 150 miles or so to Jacmel and skirted under some clouds before turning on to the final approach on an airstrip advertized as 3900 feet of usable runway. Considering the quake damage, we figured we had less than 3000 feet to land.

Although most of Haiti has been deforested for charcoal, any remaining trees on the island seemed to be clumped together at the end of runways. On the final approach we were 20 feet above the treetops. We got so close to people, we could see the white of their eyes. The lumps and moguls on the runway appeared to have worsened since our last visit in February, and we assumed this increase in damage was due to larger aircraft applying forces that the ground was never intended to sustain. We made it in one piece with a quarter of a tank of fuel left to carry us back to our refueling stop in Port-au-Prince.

Fredo, Dr Keenan's local guesthouse coordinator, whom we had met on our February trip, greeted us, and helped us unload our aircraft. The thermometer showed 98 degrees as we finally passed the large steel gates of the airport en route to a UN warehouse compound to drop off the supplies, then on to the Haiti Village Health guesthouse.

Fredo drove us on a twisted, bumpy road through throngs of local people. Despite our tanned faces and arms, we stood out quite drastically as the only white people among the Haitians who called white people "blonde". Fifteen minutes into the ride, Fredo parked the vehicle next to a ten-foot wall topped with broken bottles embedded in mortar, an obvious deterrent against intruders. We walked through the main entrance protected by a large steel gate with a lock. Inside, Jim and I were shown our closet-size room, furnished with two bunk beds, so small that our feet would have to hang over the edge. The main room was the largest, 25 by 10 feet, with a large table that could accommodate up to 20 people filling most of the space.

At this point, Jim and I had not decided whether we would spend the night in Jacmel or return to Nassau to get the next load ready for our second trip the following day. Returning to Nassau with air conditioning, comfortable beds and full breakfast was far more appealing. We checked on the weather and decided not to stay in Jacmel when we noticed Fredo looking somewhat dejected. The guesthouse keepers had bought food to feed us and made special arrangements for us to stay over. Given all the efforts that had gone into our accommodations, we changed our minds and accepted to spend the night. With time on our hands, I asked Fredo to show us around. I had seen parts of Jacmel on my previous trip, whereas Jim had only been as far as the airport.

It was not a pretty sight. The paved roads were strewn with debris from the earthquake, sometimes blocking the way entirely. Services such as trash removal and sewerage treatment that we so easily take for granted at home were simply non-existent. Dogs, goats and chickens, even a pig, rummaged through the debris for scraps of food. We drove through the city on paved roads that intermingled with dirt roads, both equally rough and nearly impassable.

We took some pictures, not as much for us—such bleak images never quite fade in your mind—but for people at home; benefactors, family and friends. I snapped shots of people living in tents along the roadside or in the roads. Many appeared to be wandering, heavy-footed, with dreary eyes. Against this gloomy landscape, children sometimes irrupted in their bright-color school uniforms, as if to remind us that their resilience were worth our efforts.

Further into town, we came to a heap of rubble that marked the end of the road. It was once the entrance to a school where over sixty children had perished. My heart sank. We turned around and headed for Cap Lamandou Hotel that Fredo knew carried beer. We sat outside overlooking the bay into Jacmel under a cloth umbrella bringing little protection from a staggering 98°F sun. I marveled at the beauty of the mountains and ocean line, so calm and inviting when seen from afar.

Back at the guesthouse, we were treated to goat, chicken, brown rice and beans, lettuce, tomatoes and coleslaw. We conversed mainly with Fredo since the other guests did not speak English, and decided to wrap up the evening at a local establishment to meet with some friends of our guides. The café was an open platform sitting on the street side. The only structure was a wood beam ceiling and tin roof that protected a small office space and prep area in the back. We befriended a group of journalists and therapists from the Midwest who had been in the country for about ten days. The thing on their mind was beds, showers and air conditioning. I picked up the tab; forty beers, two dinners for some latecomers and a bottle of rum for our driver. The bill amounted to less than \$100 US.

After five hours of sleep, Jim and I got up and took our turn experiencing the shower arrangement. It was basically water pumped up on the roof and fed into the bathroom by

gravity. The smell of the bathroom reminded us of a well-used port-o-potty set in the summer sun, and not exactly germ-free. We rinsed off very quickly and sat for fresh fruits and eggs that the house cook had prepared for us. We ate with some apprehension; none of the food appeared to have been refrigerated. We both liked the coffee, strong and sweetened with fresh, unprocessed sugar.

From Jacmel, we headed straight to Port-O-Prince for fuel, a ten-minute flight that worried us as we could not get anyone to respond on the tower frequency. After repeatedly announcing our descent, we hit a two-mile final approach and thankfully got the tower to give us our clearance. It was never confirmed whether the ground controller responded to our actual call or to that of AIR FORCE 3 bringing in President Bill Clinton right behind us. We fueled in Port-O-Prince at \$7.40 per gallon, \$3.00 more than in Florida, paid a \$100 landing fee and a \$24 radio fee. We were back in Fort Lauderdale by 4:30 in the afternoon. We borrowed a van and picked up a tent and some trinkets for our guide. At the hotel check-in counter, the clerk excused himself, ran into a back room and returned with a strong smell of perfume. It had just occurred to us that we had brought along quite an odor.

The next morning, freshly showered and shaved, we loaded the supplies, added oil, checked the gas and the airplane's weight and balance, and departed from Fort Lauderdale with a full load of merchandise. Two hours into the flight, I noticed that the temperature kept rising in our number one cylinder unless I starved it with fuel. An hour later we flew over Jacmel. The heat was staggering. The plane's computers indicated 98 degrees and we were still 2000 feet in the air. It was over 100 degrees when we hit the ground. With the humidity factor, it felt like 120.

Unlike the first time that we unloaded at the airport, the officials required that we paid them several hundred dollars, not a penny less, to let our medical supplies leave the waiting area. Despite my best negotiating efforts, we were forced to pay the full amount, and then leave.

Back at the guesthouse, we asked to be brought to the refugee camp in town to deliver in person a box of blankets donated by Karma Threads in Exeter, New Hampshire.

After what I had seen at the clinic, I was naïve enough to think that I was prepared for the refugee camp visit, but I was sadly mistaking.

An immediate feeling of oppression overcame us at the sight of the 12- to 15-foot masonry wall that concealed three to four acres of a former soccer stadium. The sole entrance was a pair of large steel gates guarded by two wardens who were clearly not Haitians. I braced myself for the worst. Our guide had warned us about the camp's infamous reputation. Lack of electricity and nightly security patrol set the stage for rapes, beatings, and fires on a regular basis. I walked into this camp with the impression that I was visiting a prison.

Hundreds of people met us close to the gate entrance, some excited, others depleted, many with their hands open for offerings. We drove slowly down a small path. Close by, a naked woman crouched down over a large bowl to wash her hair with a lice comb. Further down, our guide stopped the vehicle at a white tent where a woman greeted us. Her name was Charlene, an affable native Haitian, who knew Dr Keenan and spoke a decent English. We handed her the blankets and she took us through the camp. Children immediately gathered around us, holding our hands, and pulling the hair off our arms. Jim and I were an intriguing pair to them, most likely the only white people they had encountered.



Blankets from Karma Threads

Since it had not rained during the day, we were able to walk on a somewhat firm ground, which I soon realized was a mixed composite of feces, urine, mud and garbage. That was just the beginning. We peeked into some tents and it was like sticking your head into an oven. Charlene explained that more than half of the refugees did not have beds or cots to sleep on. When it rained, they were forced to sit up as the water level rose bringing along feces and urine contamination. To make matters worst, I noticed that half of the people walked around without the protection of shoes or sandals. We came upon a couple displaying food for sale while a man urinated less than a foot away.

We were brought into a lot of tents during this tour, each one defying our level of endurance. We were shown a two-week old infant that had recently been pulled out from the trash, and minutes later, a four or five-year old girl with a petrifying swollen head walked towards us. She was suffering from an infection, most likely encephalitis, without

any hope of recovery. We took a picture, which seems to please her. A little further down, a woman emerged from a tent carrying a listless child in her arms. The mother showed us her infected backside, and a distended lower bowel oozing a white puss from her rectum. Bone-deep sores puckered her butt cheeks.

I walked by Charlene's side, listening to fragments of her descriptions, doing my best not to show any emotion. I tried to breathe as little as I could. The heat, the foul odors of human waste, the plea in people's eyes as they stared at us were shattering. I felt helpless and frustrated knowing that we had flown in the necessary medicine to possibly cure this little baby, but did not have access to it.

Keeping a neutral face and low voices was crucial when visiting the camp. Charlene explained that political problems constantly sprang up at any signs of favoritism. If refugees spoke out about their conditions, they were thrown in jail and their families was deprived of food for the duration of their internment.

On the last leg of our tour, we walked by the "Save the Children" center, a large white tent filled with kids and some adults. In lieu of any schooling, the organization provided some structure and activities to occupy the children. It seemed like a small consolation to see kids smiling at us, and we embraced it.

Upon leaving, Charlene looked at us in the eye and genuinely thanked the American people for their help and support. In appreciation, she had arranged not too long ago for an American flag to fly near the front gate, but the guards had interpreted the gesture as an insult. The flag was removed and Charlene was sent to jail.

At the guesthouse, Jim and I sat side-by-side on the lower bunk bed and shamelessly cried. Then we talked about what we had seen, how impossible it would be to forget, and how important it was that we did not.

After dinner, Fredo and his cousin brought us back to the outdoor café to cheer us up. I was about to order a second round of beers when he told me that his mother lived near-by and invited me to go meet her. Jim stayed behind while Fredo, his cousin and I made our way out of the café's light and into pitch-black darkness. We passed a lot of

people standing around or crouched along the side of buildings, intently staring at us. I sensed Fredo's nervousness as he picked up his pace. I fell into his footstep, wondering if I had not made a huge mistake.

Fredo's mother occupied a modest two-room apartment lit by a small fluorescent light. She greeted us dressed in her nightgown. Obviously, she had not been expecting any visitors, especially a stranger, which made me feel ill at ease. On the other hand, Fredo's sister, Cherline, and her husband both seemed thrilled by our visit. I could converse with Cherline who has a decent command of the English language. She showed me her two-year old daughter sleeping on a bed and I was shocked at how much younger she appeared considering how excessively small she was.

Cherline is an educated woman with a high school diploma but no employment. She came across as smart and ambitious, and desperate to study in the United States in order to later benefit her country. At this point, all I could do was to promise to send money to buy food for her and her extended family cramped in this tiny home. When she looked at me and handed me her e-mail address and phone number, I told her I would try my best to have her come and study in the US. It was the least I could do.

Friday, May 14 was our last day in Haiti. We woke up in sweat, quickly rinsed off and woke up our host so that we could get an early start. The weather did not look great and an early departure was in order. At the airport, at 6 a.m., the temperature had already reached 98 degrees with a 90 per cent humidity factor. On the short route between Jacmel and Port-O-Prince, we encountered a new problem. Our windshield was covered with a haze from the dust and debris, and the sun rising over the mountains hit us straight in the face. It was like flying blindfolded and without instruments. I began to roll the plane back and forth, and about one mile from touchdown and 600 feet in altitude, Jim spotted the runway in the corner of the windscreen. Using basic "left, more left, right, no left" commands from Jim, I saw the runway seconds before touch down.

We refueled, cleaned the windshield and paid the mandatory fees to the controllers. We cleared the island and made contact with Miami radio that informed us of a very intense weather disturbance about fifty miles ahead. To make matters worse, a storm band

of 100 miles wide and 300 miles long was coming through at very close range to us. After some very scary maneuvers, we unwillingly penetrated the Cuban airspace to avoid thunderstorms. We were handed off to Cuban controllers who diligently cleared us to deviate as far as needed into their airspace to maintain safety.

When we were handed back off to Miami Radio, we were asked if we needed to declare an emergency. Jim and I looked at each other and rolled our eyes. The request sounded so out of proportion. The term emergency had taken another meaning for us. Haiti was an emergency, not the Cubans who had been efficient and courteous. "We're fine," I responded to Miami Radio and continued to Florida where we landed three hours later.

Meanwhile, our mechanical problems had not improved. One of the cylinders was still overheating, but my mechanic seemed to think that it was caused by excessively hot outside temperatures.

We ate and rested in Fort Lauderdale. At the hotel front desk, I apologized for the smell and the clerk sped up our check-in. For the rest of the day, we basically ate and slept. The next day would be the longest but the final part of this trip. We arrived in Portsmouth to a much-appreciated welcoming committee: our wives, and Janice Newman. It felt good to be home.

As we departed Jacmel earlier the previous day, Fredo left me with a plea as we hugged good-bye. "We still need help," he said. "DON'T FORGET US!"

How could we? Haiti is not a place you can visit and turn your back on. There are people there who we befriended, others that we wished were still alive. We owe them all what we can give them.

Jim and I have been making fundraising plans for a possible return to Haiti in the winter with more supplies. One week of flying cost approximately \$10,000, plus the purchase of the needed medical supplies.

Meanwhile, I continue to support Cherline, her young daughter and her extended family. I have sent her information (through Janice) from the president of University of New Hampshire (UNH). Hopefully, she will meet the enrolment criteria.

Fredo is currently enrolled in a Taiwan university. Jim and I have personally financed his trip and equipped him with a laptop computer and winter clothing. He plans on returning to Haiti in four years to help his compatriots.

There are many people in Haiti like Fredo and Cherline who rise from the most abject deprivation and human sufferance with unshakable pride, will and hope. They will never cease to amaze me, humble me and inspire me.

If you would like to directly help the people of Haiti please send your o donation to:

William Richard

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Billr@pilotconstructioninc.com

There are no overhead fees or charges. The money is used entirely to offset the cost of the flights, lodging and supplies that we deliver, and is not tax deductible. If for some reason we are unable to return to Haiti in a reasonable amount of time your contribution will be donated to Dr. Tiffany Keenan.

NHPR wrote an article about our efforts in May 2010. The address is:
<http://www.nhpr.org/node/31991>