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December 2011



Happy Holidays from Haitian Artisans for Peace International!

Christmas moments' are, for me, those moments when we encounter Christ. They seldom come wrapped in the big gifts that we eagerly anticipate and celebrate, nor do they make the 'headlines'. They come in unsung glimpses of Christ's presence in others.

I'm going to sing a few 'tunes'....



Richley Contant was one of this year's Christmas moments. 15-year old Richley was diagnosed with a congenital heart condition which required corrective surgery not available in Haiti. Richley's smile and spirit touched many hearts both in his home community and also those of his international friends.

A team of dedicated volunteers and HAPI staff worked against the clock, sharing gifts of prayer, time, tithes and talent to give Richley a chance at life by bringing him to the United States for the necessary medical treatment. Time ran out. **Richley died in his home on November 26, 2011.**

'Christmas' abounds in Richley's story. It is a love story. Love surrounded Richley from his family, community, and from those who had come to serve.

Richley reminded us of our call as followers of Christ to, "Love your neighbor as yourself" and to "love kindness (mercy)."

Richley's circumstances reminded us that **faith is not intended to be an individual experience but shared in community:** some tended to Richley's physical needs, others gave financial gifts, several spent hours on the phone and road chasing tests and documents...and all prayed. When he died, we cried together. One body, many parts.

Richley's story is alive with hope and promise: "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given." Because of Christ-mas Day, we rest assured that Richley is healed and that one day we will rejoice together!

Other Christmas moments happen when someone's words or condition cuts straight to your heart and you hear the words of Micah 6:8, "What does the Lord require of you? To act justly...."

At a gathering of Haitian and American women, we were exploring our unique experiences as women. One of the Americans asked, "What can a young woman experience that prevents her from completing her education that a young man cannot?"

A young woman stood up and replied, **"A woman can die in childbirth."**

Giving birth in a manger and wrapping your child in swaddling clothes is not a cherished nativity scene in Haiti. It is the all too real experience of **a teen girl birthing a child in unsanitary conditions with no modern medical care and nothing more than rags in which to wrap her newborn.**



Lord, break my heart for what breaks yours...and give me the courage to act justly!

Christmas shows up in the unexpected encounters.

When I saw Romicile seated in the front row, my stomach tightened just a little. I didn't know her story, but I had never observed her speak pleasantly: she always wore a scowl and had something to complain about. Was she there to disrupt?

As one of the scheduled speakers finished, Romicile leapt to her feet with great animation and began to talk. I offered her 'center stage' and the microphone. She shared an intimate story of an abusive relationship with her husband. The audience was clearly engaged, alternately laughing or somber, as **they connected with their 'sister' in her struggles.**

At the end of the program, Romicile was the first to greet me, grabbing my hand and shaking it profusely with thanks, before walking off with a HUGE smile that lit up her whole being. She was still smiling a few days later, in her cornfield.



What a gift! It didn't come with ribbons and bows, but it was precious nonetheless.

The last stanza of Micah 6:8 instructs us to "Walk humbly with God." Perhaps that is **the most important gift we can give others: to walk humbly alongside them for a while, to give them their 'voice,' and to listen.**

Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart." I hope you are feeling a little reflective this Christmas eve and you'll take time to ponder:

"Where have I encountered Christ this year?"

May your heart begin to 'sing.'
Merry Christmas,

Valerie Mossman-Celestin



Act justly...love kindness...walk humbly
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