

Story of the Haitian Kidnapping and the Escape

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I never dreamed of being kidnapped in Haiti!

Haiti is a beautiful country in the Caribbean, occupying 1/3 of the island of Hispaniola. The neighboring country of Dominican Republic covers the remaining 2/3 of the island. The two countries have vastly different histories and completely different languages. French is the official language in Haiti (Spanish is spoken in the Dominican Republic), but French is mostly used by Haiti's elite class. Haitian Creole is the predominant spoken language. Creole is based primarily on eighteenth-century French with influences from many different African languages as well as English and Spanish.



Although, now known as the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, and certainly one of the poorest countries in the world, things weren't always this way! Haiti used to be known as "The Pearl of the Caribbean." It was France's most important and most prosperous colony, even more prosperous than Canada.

Today, Haiti is a country that is wracked by political chaos, corruption in the government, poverty, illiteracy, superstition, and yes, outright Satan worship! It's terrible! Many populated areas are currently being overtaken by gangs.

When I arrived in Haiti for the first time back in August of 2016, the United Nations had a strong Peacekeeping

Force in Haiti. The entire force, with military, police, and operations, amounted to about 10,000 people.



It seemed like they were everywhere! You couldn't drive the streets of Port-au-Prince without seeing them.



The UN Missions started in 2004. During the next 15 years, these Missions created a somewhat, "artificial sense of security in Haiti." After the mission ended on October 15, 2019,...



It left a power vacuum that gangs like the 400 Mawozo, who kidnapped us, were eager to fill. On the next page, is a photo of the acting gang leader who kidnapped us. Here, this news banner says, "Lanmò San Jou Menase pou l' touye misyonè yo." Literally translated, this would say, "Death without days threatens to kill the missionaries." On this video which was uploaded on YouTube during the time we were kidnapped, he says,

“What I need from the hands of the Americans, I still haven’t found. I’d rather kill them. I have no problem with putting a bullet into each one of their heads.”



Lanmò San Jou, (Wilson Joseph is his real name) the leader of the gang who kidnapped us.

Two weeks before we were kidnapped, Christian Aid Ministries sent us an email requesting an update on the Orphan Program. Compared to the Liberian Orphan Program, ours was small and loose-ended. None of our workers in Haiti were currently assigned to that program. We asked Dale to take charge, since he was warehouse manager/medicine program director and had more free time.

Dale emailed the CAM Ohio Office a few times. Dale himself had only been in Haiti for a few months, so he asked me if I would contact the director of the Haitian orphanage. I had been in Haiti for three years and was much more familiar with the Creole language and the Haitian culture. The orphanage was operated by Haitians under the Church of God in Christ Mennonite (Holdeman church). I had never been there but was eager to meet these nice people.

I called the director and asked if we could come to see the orphanage, take pictures to update our sponsors, and play with the children. He said, “Yes, sure. Come and bring as many people as you want, and we will give you a tour of the orphanage!” Initially, we talked of going on Thursday, until he mentioned that he would keep the children out of school for the visit. I didn’t want to keep the children out of school. I learned they went to school outside of the orphanage and not at the compound as I had originally thought. We decided Saturday might work better for both parties.

Saturday, October 16, 2021, started out as a beautiful day. Everyone piled into our 15-passenger, short-nosed van, or the bus as we called it. Dale sat in the driver’s seat since he was in charge of this program and Westley, the mechanic, sat in the passenger seat. The ladies sat up front where there were more comfortable

seats, and Austin and I sat in the back. Before we left, we had a prayer. We asked that the Lord’s hand would be on us that day and for safety and protection.

Who was Kidnapped? -----



Ray & Cheryl Noecker Family.

Here is a photo of the Noecker family taken right after the kidnapping. His wife, Cheryl, and all his children pictured here on the photo were kidnapped. Ray was not kidnapped. We were planning a CAM staff Communion service for the very next day, so he needed to stay back to prepare for the service. You can only imagine the anguish he went through, knowing that his wife and five children were kidnapped and in the hands of a Haitian gang.



Barry & Julia Grant Family.

This is the Administrator’s family. They were not kidnapped with us. Barry spent two months in anguish and utter reliance on God as he was bombarded with phone calls and visits from gangsters, US embassy, FBI, Haitian police, lawyers, news media, and sensationalists alike. You can only imagine what he must’ve gone through as he tried to sort through all of that.



Ryan & Melody Korver Family. Ryan and Melody Korver, along with their children, Andre age 3 and 8-month-old Laura, were kidnapped with our group.



The whole group of 17 who were kidnapped on October 16, 2021

BACK ROW: WESTLEY YODER, DALE WIDEMAN, RYAN KORVER HOLDING ANDRE, AUSTIN SMUCKER, BRANDON N. COURTNEY N. RAY NOECKER (NOT HOSTAGE BUT CHERYL'S HUSBAND) HOLDING SHELLEN

FRONT ROW: SAM STOLTZFUS, MATTHEW & RACHEL MILLER, MELODY KORVER HOLDING LAURA, CHERILYN N., KASSANDRA N., CHERYL N., KAY YODER

One thing we did as missionaries in Haiti was simply spent time preaching the Gospel of Christ. You can hand out all the humanitarian aid in the world, but if you haven't started preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ, you haven't even begun to be a missionary.

Paul said in Romans 1:16, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth."

As Christians, we must strive to make it a lifestyle to share the Gospel. It is the Good News unto Salvation.

In Haiti, we preached to neighbors, professionals, and gangsters alike. I remember the Work for Wages Program we ran early last year. We provided jobs for various locals, including some who were gang members. Often the gangsters were willing to work hard if they knew they would be earning some income. Providing jobs for people helps them to stay focused on earning an honest living instead of thieving and stealing from people. Every two weeks, we would go to the town close to the CAM compound and preach to some of the local gangs.

Was it a difficult work? Of course, it was! It wasn't uncommon for those gangsters to pull guns on people. Barry, the director, had guns pulled on him more than once. But some of the times that particularly stand out to me were the times when the leader of the gang sat in our services, under conviction and with tears streaming down his face. As far as we know, he never repented of his sins. But one thing is certain: he had the opportunity to hear the Good News of Salvation that is only available through Jesus Christ.

We also administrated the Haiti-Sponsor-A-Child School program. The Biblical Discipleship Center was for training and equipping pastors and church leaders. The Save-A-Life program provides medicines and nutrition for malnourished children. The goal of the SALT program is to provide a steady diet of Biblical teaching that will help people maximize their God-given resources and learn what it means to walk with Jesus. SALT Agri-Plus teaches sustainable farming practices and shows Haitian farmers how to maximize their land. Through the Water-for-the-World program, we drilled wells and built cisterns to provide clean water for drinking and irrigation. Another program was the Grow-A-Tree program to help with reforestation. The Food Box program helps needy families, widows, and the elderly with a monthly food parcel. And the International Crisis Program is used to rebuild after storms and natural disasters.

Before we got to the orphanage on October 16, we came upon a roadblock. There seemed to still be a few hot smoldering tires on the road. You must understand that the political unrest in Haiti had become much worse than I had ever imagined it could be in my three years of experience.

This last year especially, things had gotten worse. On any given day, when you drove around town, there were Haitian protests with roadblocks containing burning tires. This is what happens if people forget God and are sold out to Satan. But God was with us all the way. His will was to be done.

I was in the back when we came upon a roadblock. I couldn't see very well, and I sat tense and stiff in my seat. This roadblock concerned me. You see, Dale was brand-new to driving in Haiti since he had only come a little over two months before. Personally, if I had been driving, I would likely have tried to slow down well before the roadblock. He didn't. I sometimes have even stopped and gotten out to assess the situation. Sometimes I have even talked to the gangsters. Often it is something petty, and you can talk them out of it. Dale seemed to speed up if anything. I am not saying he did anything wrong though. We were in the Lord's hands, and we got around that roadblock just fine. Praise the Lord! We were good to go.

We arrived at the orphanage, the orphanage director gave us a tour, we updated the student profiles, and we took photos. Some of us enjoyed a lively game of soccer with the children. Before we left, we were grateful for the snack of fried plantains, fried chicken, and cold drinks.

Soon after 1:00 p.m., we were heading north towards Tin Village. We had been planning to go there next as this was pretty much directly on our route home, and some of the staff had never been there before. At Tin Village, they made unique pieces of art that incorporate Bible verses and different sayings all out of tin from old metal drums. Ting, ting, ting, rings out from the rhythm of many people pounding out souvenirs.

We were about fifteen minutes out, and I was again in the back seat. Others may have had a different view, but I will tell the story from my observation.

Suddenly, up ahead I saw a Land Cruiser Ambulance. I don't know if they stole it or what, but it was a real one and it was blocking half of the road. Gangsters were running around it with assault rifles. My first impression was that this was Haitian National Police, and we were in a hot area - we had to get out of here! Suddenly it hit me: *No! **NO!** This is the Papaya gang!*

I had known there was gang activity in this area, and I thought it was the Papaya gang. I had commented the night before that I hoped the Papayas (a tropical fruit

that grows on trees) would all stay in the trees when we were in the area.

After they had kidnapped us, we learned their name was actually 400 Mawozo.

Our vehicle did a quick U-turn on the road, and we were heading south again towards the orphanage. We thought we were going to get away. We were good to go, even if we didn't know how we were ever getting back to the CAM base. In Haiti, there are not many good road options. Typically, you have to stay on the main roads, or else bounce for hours through the mountains on the back roads.

Then a truck started passing us on the left, the back full of men with assault rifles. We thought if they passed us, it would be no big deal; maybe they were after someone else. Suddenly they cut directly in front of us. Tires screeched and we stopped short. We nearly T-boned them right there.

Now we were looking down the barrels of various assault rifles.

The staff at the CAM base had been planning to have Communion on Sunday, the very next day. In all my life, I have never had a better preparatory service than sitting there in that bus. My life flashed before me as I looked down the barrels of those assault rifles. My heart was pounding, yet I trusted in the Lord through the whole process. I felt I was ready to go to Heaven if God wanted to take me Home.

One of our staff members had been robbed twice in ten months' time - robbed at gunpoint. Yes, it's an unwelcome reality, but since gangs have taken over large areas, we had come to expect some of this. There are also kidnappings in Haiti nearly every day. But most of the victims are of other nationalities. I expected I might get robbed in Haiti, but I never expected to get kidnapped.

Soon these men pointed with their guns and motioned for us to turn around. We headed back towards Titanyen, towards the CAM base. Great! This was the direction we wanted to go: maybe they were letting us go. We were crying out to the Lord, "Lord, save us. Deliver us out of here." Maybe they saw we were a whole busload of white people and didn't want to mess with Americans. Maybe...

It seemed like they had moved the ambulance farther down the road to the south and were again blocking the road. There was a very narrow road leading off to the right-hand-side. That road was lined with walls on both sides.

The road ahead of us was full of gangsters. Again, they stopped us at gun point. Some rushed up to the windows and Dale, the driver, held up both hands.

They motioned for us to go down the narrow road. My heart sank. We were off the main road. There were two box trucks in front of us and a Prado Land Cruiser (SUV type vehicle) that we couldn't see, in front of that.

Later, we learned that this white Prado was the Gang Leader's vehicle. They were rounding up people to kidnap and heading them into this "cattle chute."



Here he is: The active gang leader, "Lanmò San Jou" was his nickname, literally translated, "Death Without Day" (Wilson Joseph). The most wicked man I have ever met.

Did you know that Jesus died on the cross for Lanmò San Jou's sins? Whosoever will may come. Pray for the gangs in Haiti. Pray that they would turn from the kingdom of darkness to the Kingdom of Light!

John 3:16 "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."



Here's another photo of him with 2 assault rifles and two pistols tucked in his shorts.

"Guns!" they shouted. "Give us all your guns!"

We explained that we didn't have any guns. We serve the Lord. He is our protector.

"Guns!" they shouted again. "Give us all your guns!"

Finally, they believed us that we didn't have guns and walked away.

During the next ten minutes the gangsters were pacing back and forth. They seemed to be sizing us up and just looking at us. They asked for our phones and our money. They weren't very demanding at that point, so we didn't willingly give them all our stuff. We still wanted our phones and our wallets.

Then the ambulance pulled in behind us, and the whole procession started moving. What was happening? At this point, we knew there was a chance we were being kidnapped, but were we? What were they going to do to us? We didn't know. I started sending messages to my family and youth group asking them to pray.

The road was getting wider. The gangsters must have thought this was dangerous and that our bus driver might try to turn around or something. They came running up from behind and opened the driver's door. They grabbed Dale out and smacked him across the face. They grabbed him and loaded him face down in the back of the ambulance. We cried, "Lord, save Dale!" What were they going to do with him? Oh, we were worried for Dale! We didn't know if we would ever see him again.

The gangster had the driver's seat now. He put it into drive, and we were on one of the wildest rides of our lives! Haitian roads are terrible, and we hit all those bumps and washouts at high speeds. We were going so fast that I was sure we were going to have an accident. I almost hoped we would. I figured having an accident would be better than all this chaos! At least we would have to stop and think about life. We bounced so hard that our heads hit the ceiling multiple times. The vehicle almost bottomed out one time. The driver kept looking back. He would pull up his mask and then smile like he had a good catch or something.

All this time we were crying out to God. It felt like the Lord was right there with us. We felt peace, yet fear wanted to creep into our hearts.

At this point, I started messaging on a WhatsApp group called Haiti Happenings Update. This chat with almost 200 members is for reporting roadblocks, news on gas shortages, and any other country situations. Part of me felt like I shouldn't send that message. It felt like I was doubting God. It felt like I was dialing the equivalent of 911, if there ever was a 911 service in Haiti. My hand hesitated over the SEND button. It felt like it was a compromise of my faith. I was also afraid to send this message because kidnappings go deep into Haitian politics. I feared this message would get into the hands of the wrong people - senators and people in government positions who are sometimes involved in these kidnappings.

I hit the SEND button, but we had terrible data coverage. The message didn't send. I prayed that the Lord wouldn't let the message go through if he didn't want it to. Pretty soon it sent.

The message said something like this: "Please pray for us, we are being harassed/kidnapped by the Papaya gang. About 15 Americans. Men, women, and children. They are currently in control of our vehicle." Soon messages came in saying, "We are praying, we are praying!"

Another message instructed me to drop a pin quick. I opened Google Maps, but I could hardly remember how to drop a pin or how to get the coordinates of a location. I dropped a pin, copied the coordinates, pasted it, and sent it. It went through, though someone else said it wasn't an accurate location. I didn't know, so I left it at that.

We are human, and I feel like there were times through this process where we made mistakes. We had to cry

out to God for forgiveness.

Our rough drive ended in a big parking lot. It was a big open circle that seemed like a staging area. They parked the Prado, the two box trucks, our vehicle, and the ambulance. At that point, we were so thankful to see Dale again. We were all together.

The gangsters started to party. Smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol, and maybe dealing drugs. They seemed to be relaxed and were smiling and laughing. They looked us up and down as if sizing up the catch. We talked to them. We told them of Jesus and about our trust in the Lord. We handed them some copies of Gospel tracts and the Haitian Creole version of The Torch of Truth.

They just kept on laughing and talking and sizing up us and our stuff. They started stealing more phones and money, but it was still low-key. We were grateful that they just took the money out of our wallets and let us keep our ID's, credit cards, and those kinds of thing.

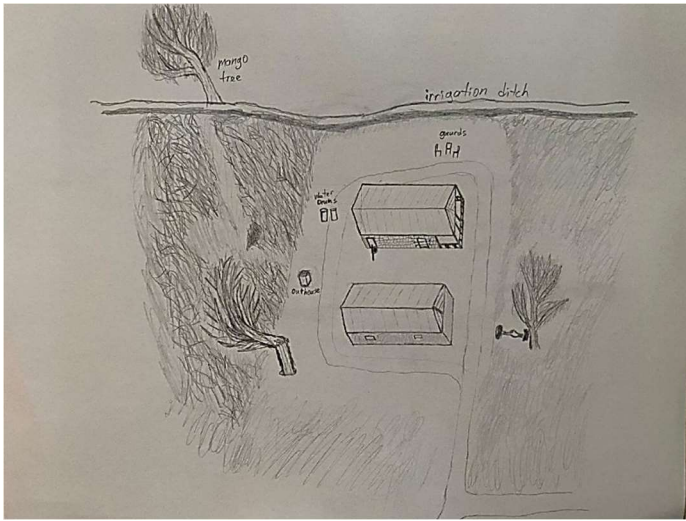
For probably an hour or so, we were kept in that parking lot in our vehicle. At one point they opened the back hatch where Austin and I were sitting. Austin had only been in Haiti for 24 hours before being kidnapped. He was supposed to be going to help with the International Crisis earthquake project in the South.

There was a gangster who looked like any other, but later we learned he was second in command of the acting gang leader. He and the leader were the ones who initially decided to kidnap us. He kept saying, "My head is in the sky! My head is in the sky!" He started patting Austin down, feeling his hair, and rubbing his face. What was going on? Did this guy like him or what? What was he going to do?

After an hour we still couldn't figure this situation out but one thing we knew: we were hot and thirsty. Parched, in fact.

Soon a gangster jumped in the driver's seat, and we started moving again. Where were we going? The road wasn't the same one we had come in on, but we thought, *Great! Hopefully this road leads back to the main road or something. The Lord is working. Surely this situation will soon come to an end. Soon we will be back at the main road and on our way.*

The road led to a dead end. Beside us to the left stood a small Haitian shack and another bigger building. Later we found out that they called the bigger building “the Devil’s house.” We stopped. This was not a good situation. We were tense and very scared.



A sketch of the gangster camp where we were held at the beginning and again at the end. We were moved at one point but then brought back to this place. This was the place from which God helped us to escape.

They started demanding our cell phones and wallets. All of them! I had previously told everyone to cooperate if they demanded those things. It wasn't worth the fight. It wasn't worth risking one's life. So, we handed everything over.

They kept us there for another ten or fifteen minutes. What was going on? What did they really want? It seemed like the wheels in their minds were turning. *What can we do with a group of Americans? How can we use them?*

We were desperate to find out what was actually happening. This was now about two hours after we were taken off the main road.

Since I knew more of the language, I needed to have a good conversation with these guys. I have never met with a more wicked man than that gang leader. I have never dreamed of meeting people who blatantly say that they are serving “King Lucifer.” But I believed that God could save his soul if he humbled himself and repented.

I started asking him questions. “What is going on? What do you want from us? You’ve got our wallets and phones. What more can you take from us? Please, can you let us go now? Can we leave?”

“No way,” he said. “We need 3 million dollars!”

“We can’t give 3 million dollars. We don’t have it. We work for a mission, so we can’t give you the Lord’s money.”

“Give us 3 million dollars!” they demanded.

“No,” we said.

“Okay, then get out of the van,” they said. Then we started fearing for the ladies. They were in the two front seats. They took them to the other side of the van. There was a brief pause. I thought we were all coming out of the van. Oh, we prayed for the ladies! We cried out to the Lord! It was probably only 30 seconds to a minute. They had taken some of the ladies and stood them in front of the Devil’s house. What was going on? Then it registered. They wanted to keep the rest of us in the van. They did NOT have good in mind for the ladies!

“Out,” I shouted. “Everyone get out of the van! Go! Go! Go! Everyone!”

There was no stopping us! We all jumped out of the van. I stood at the front of the line between the ladies and the gang leader. The rest of the group lined up behind me. The building behind us was called the Devil’s house as if it was haunted or a house to do Witchcraft or Voodoo in. This was a terrible place to be and felt like a ghetto. What were they going to do? Were they going to kill us?

We were singing and praying and trying to trust in the Lord. Probably hundreds of others had already heard of our kidnapping and were praying as well.

As we stood there, they started patting some of us down. I think the Lord protected the ladies as they didn’t do a very thorough pat-down on them. The leader patted me down and felt in my shoes. I took them off, but he didn’t find any money in there. I thought they had taken all our money, but Matt had some Haitian Gourdes (Haitian currency) that equaled about \$12.70 US dollars. Later, it proved very valuable during our time of escape.

We stood there singing but they told us to stop. We calmed it down but kept on singing.

Then they got out their phones and pointed them down the row of people. The gang leader said, "This is a final video for this group of people." A final video! What? Were they going to kill us? *Okay, Lord, we are in your hands, and we are ready to go.*

They put us in a house with two rooms. The room we were in may have been ten-by-twelve. It was a very small room. They had previously brought two Haitian captives out of that room. They were tied hand and foot. They looked very dirty and in bad shape. Later that night, we heard two gunshots in rapid succession, and we never saw those men again. We were grateful that we were never tied as other hostages were.

They told me to go into the now empty room. I didn't know what was going to happen. Why did they want me in that little room by myself? Soon I saw that everyone was following me into the room. They closed the door and then there was no doubt anymore. We knew we were kidnapped.

We sat in a tight circle in that small room. Even though we were kidnapped we finally had a sense of peace. We were all together. No one was separated. That would have torn us apart. The Lord knows how much we can handle. We started praying and talking and singing once more: *"The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them..."*

Our rooms had some mattresses to sleep on at night for which we were very thankful for. Some of them were uncomfortable with springs poking through, but we were blessed. The eleven other hostages in the next room did not have any mattresses. If anything, they slept on cardboard. The first night there were 5-6 of us men who slept on one single size mattress.

During the first few weeks we engaged in more spiritual warfare than I have ever fought in my life. It was literally exhausting! Satan was trying to attack us from every angle and discourage us. Satan would attack the children, especially during the night. Ryan and Melody have two little children, an 8-month-old and a three-year-old. There was also Ray and Cheryl's six-year-old boy. When the children were attacked, their chests would seize up. It was almost like they were literally demon-possessed.

We would cry out in the name of Jesus Christ. "Come, Lord, deliver us! Fight the powers of Satan!" He did. After two or three weeks, it changed. The Lord put a hedge around us.

That first week we sang more and prayed harder than we ever had in a week's time. Most evenings I would stand beside the house and preach as loud as I could to whoever would listen. I would tell them about God's love and call on them to repent of their sins.

One morning I woke up with a start, as I heard a man (probably one of the other captives from the other room) crying out to God, confessing and repenting of his sins.

Our condition from the outside probably looked worse than it actually was. They treated us well, so to speak – as well as can be imagined or dreamed of while being kidnapped in Haiti. It was like we were Americans and the cream of the crop. It was like the captors were saying, "We got you where we want you. We are going to treat you nicely. But we will keep you here until you have met every demand of ours." Occasionally they brought us Pringles and fresh fruit and cakes and cookies. They even brought in an Igloo with cold drinks. Most importantly, they gave us water. We were given two meals a day. In the morning it was usually Haitian spaghetti with half a hard-boiled egg per person. Breakfast usually arrived anywhere from 8:00 a.m. until 2:00 p.m. In the evening, they brought rice and beans.

At first it surprised us that they brought us so much American food from the supermarket. Later, as they were more and more angry with us, trying to pressure us to beg for ransom, our food became less. I actually lost up to 15 pounds while I was there.

We were trusting in the Lord to deliver us and take us out of there. As time went on and the guards continued to get angrier at us, Satan would tempt us. Sometimes we started to doubt. *Why doesn't someone just pay the money?*

Mackenson was a clean-shaven man but later we realized that he was a witch doctor. He was a very wicked man. At first, he posed as a Christian and acted like he really was one. He was the guy to talk to when we needed water or any other supplies. He was the town runner. He would go to town and buy toilet paper or water. Sometimes we got thirsty before he brought us another supply of water. Once, we even boiled the shower water to drink because we didn't have other water. Mackenson hated to buy water. It was as if he was allocated a certain amount of money for our supplies. If he could use only a little bit of it, then he could pocket the rest. Toward the last, he really started complaining more and more. He seemed very reluctant to bring us the things we had enjoyed at the beginning.

The first evening of our kidnapping, the acting gang leader whom they called Lanmò San Jou, opened the door and asked for our boss's phone number. We told him, "We don't remember what the number is, but we can get it off one of our phones if you bring one to us." He acted surprised that none of us remembered the number, but soon they brought Ryan's phone. He got Barry's number and dialed it on his own phone. He instructed me to tell Barry what had happened. "Tell him that you are kidnapped, and that there is a ransom required for you to be released."

Barry answered the phone and wondered with concern in his voice, "Are you all together? Are you doing ok?" The news of our kidnapping was already being spread all around. I said, "Yes, we are all together. They kidnapped us here, and yes, we are doing ok." Lanmò grabbed the phone and told Barry that he doesn't have much time, "I am demanding a 17-million-dollar ransom, a million per person. I will soon be killing them if we don't get the money. You have 24 hours of time. Bring the money, or else!" Barry said, "Please remember, these are God's people. They are here to do God's work..." Lanmò stood up and walked away still talking to Barry.

About the second or third day, Mackenson brought in a big trash bag full of clothes. "Here, I brought some clothes. Have all the girls come and pick out clothing for them to wear after they take a shower," he said.

"No, we can't do that," I replied.

"Yes, have them come and pick out clothes to put on!"

"No, I said we won't do that! Listen, just leave them right there, and we'll look at them later."

I didn't even need to look at the clothing to assume that they would be extremely immodest for the girls to wear.

After much firm refusal, he finally agreed to let them go. I am convinced that he wanted to have the girls dress in immodest clothing so that he and the other guards could lust after them.

Later my suspicion was confirmed when we dug through the bag. Most of the ladies' clothing pieces in there were very immodest! Some of us men were able to find some half-decent clothes to wear. Now we had an extra set to put on when we washed the set of clothes we were wearing the day we were kidnapped.

The girls had to sacrifice the most for the sake of modesty. They only had one set—the dresses that they were wearing during the kidnapping. They would wash their dresses in the shower room while taking a shower. Then, they put the wet dresses back on and had to wear a wet dress for the rest of the day. Usually, they tried to shower during the forenoon, that way their dresses had the rest of the day to dry.

There is protection in modesty! Our bodies are the temple of the Holy Ghost. We have been bought with a price! Never be ashamed of modest dress! (See 1 Corinthians 6:18-20 and 1 Peter 3:1-7.)

During the first week we were getting desperate to talk to Barry or someone else we knew. We wanted to let our families know that we were okay. We asked to make a phone call, but we still hadn't memorized any phone numbers. We kept asking to call. Lanmò kept acting weird, like he didn't have the number.

Probably about seven days into the process, Lanmò pulled out his phone, he had the phone number we needed. He asked us to call and tell our boss that we need the ransom money. He called Barry and even let us talk to him. The phone call was very short, maybe only 30 seconds. Instead of pressuring Barry for ransom money, Barry started firing questions our way: "How are you? Are you all together?" And Barry told us, "The whole world is praying for you."

Even though the Gang leader did not know English (nor did any of the other guards), he grabbed the phone and hit the off button. He must have understood enough to know we were not saying what he wanted us to say.

We were only one week into the process, but we had already felt very alone. Oh, we broke down and cried! The whole world was praying for us! Oh, the joy through the tears! I believed it was true. God's people from every corner to the world were praying for us.

We got Barry's phone number off of Lanmò's phone, wrote it down, and some of us memorized it.

We also had two pens for writing. The first day we were given a big roll of white commercial paper towels (the kind that would come out of a dispenser). We would tear off sections and use it as writing paper. The one pen got lost during the first week and the other one ran out of ink after about six weeks. I wished I had kept a journal as some of the others did, but I expected to be delivered during the first week. We thought this was a high-profile case. Seventeen white people would surely be out in a week or sooner.

I believe the gang also did not expect to keep us there very long. They thought that it was going to be quick, easy money. Their demands would be met, and soon they would release us. It was not to be, however!

We only met one person who could speak English well. (We had wondered why they would kidnap so many Americans if no one knew English.) This one man was, in his own words, American and just walked into camp late the first evening. He was black. He said that he was on our side. He had a mask on and said he feels like he needs to remove his mask so we can talk friend to friend. He said he feels like he could get harmed because of coming in and trying to help us out.

Having been in Haiti for three years, I thought that this man was more likely to be the real gang leader. He was probably involved in Haitian politics. He asked us which states we were from and kept saying, "Yup, I've been there. I've been there."

About a week and a half into our captivity, Mackenson came in with the radio blaring on the evening news station. The radio was saying that the US military is coming to Haiti. It was all in Haitian Creole. Westley, the mechanic, knew a little Creole as well. He understood some of what they said. Basically, they were coming to free the captives. The US military was coming, and our guards were scared. We were excited!

We certainly hoped that they would deliver us. The Bible says that they don't bear the sword in vain. It is their job to execute justice. We praised the Lord. Maybe He would use the military to take us out of

there.

I am so glad that God can receive all the honor and glory for our deliverance. It wasn't the Haitian Police; it wasn't the FBI, or the US Military. It was God! God showed Himself strong on our behalf!

I was in the "bucket" shower room at the time, but I heard the announcement on the radio. A shower came from drums of water brought from the creek. The water looked clean, but it was not. It had what they called tiny microbes (I guess that is how it translates into English) in it.

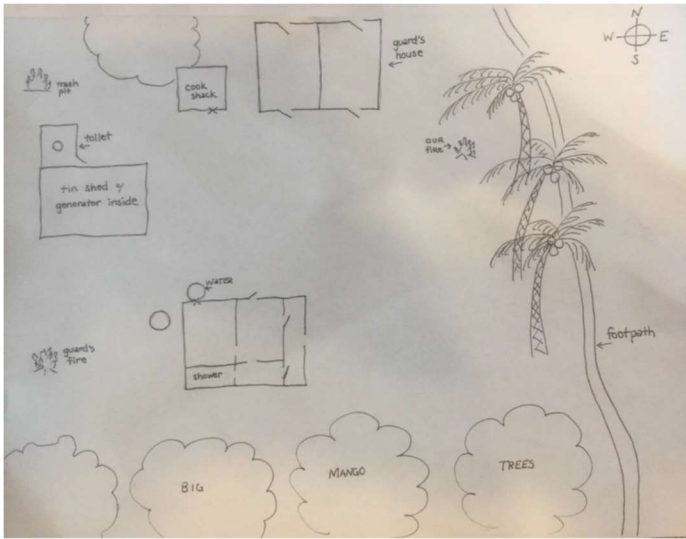
The first few days, the mosquitoes were especially bad. Our feet were covered with mosquito bites and ant bites. When we itched them, the skin would open up a little. As we poured this "clean" water over us during showers, those microbes or worms entered our skin openings and ate around them at night. Soon we developed pus-filled sores that would heal over as a large boil. I still have huge scars on my feet. Eventually, I believe this was the reason that some of us were released. Two of the ladies could hardly walk anymore. I was told that Cheryl had 50 of these huge sores that looked like boils all over her body.

Back to the blaring radio. Our guards were scared and told us to pack up. "We are moving." We were scared too! Were they going to take us to a ravine somewhere and kill us? Would they dispose of our bodies, or what was going to happen?

They loaded the mattresses and everything up. They tore down the fans, and the generator in preparation to move. Both had been wired with exposed electric wires that weren't quite OSHA approved. Haiti is a hot country, and it was still hot in October. We were grateful for the fans and the generator. As the weeks and months went by, it became much more pleasant.

Our new location was a much nicer place! It had open fields with farmers out cultivating the soil by hand. There were rows of coconut and mango trees. We enjoyed the beautiful area during the daytime when they left us outside, but we had to stay in the compound.

During the day we had about five armed guards. At night we had about seven to ten guards as they would call in more reinforcements with really big guns. Every evening at about 6:00, they would usher us back into the house and lock us up again. We praised the Lord for a nicer location.



A sketch of the second location.

There were fewer mosquitoes now, but still too many. The guards would commission someone to pick coconuts for us and let us eat them. It was refreshing and so very, very good to have fresh fruit.

There were times of deep discouragement. One early morning, I felt so low, and I needed some time alone. I went around the corner of the house and was just praying, alone with God. After 45 minutes or so I saw something out of the corner of my eye. I saw Mackenson coming up behind me. He came to the last mango tree in the row of trees and reached down. I hadn't noticed it before, but there was a black plastic bag there. It was a wine bottle with a weird-looking lid and wires going through it like a cork or something. He put the lid on the bottle.

Mackenson saw me looking at him out of the corner of my eye. What he said next, struck me.

He said, "This is the Devil's stuff. Don't you touch it, or it's going to bite you!" And then he walked away.

I didn't say a word. I prayed, "Lord, what should I do? God, aren't Christians to confront evil? I feel like you have called us as Christians to get in the way of evil." It felt like a direct challenge from Satan. Shouldn't I do something to show him that I am not afraid of it? After a while, I took the bag and moved it away from the tree. Something was done. He would know I wasn't afraid of it, but what would he say?

After a while I joined in the morning devotional, prayer, singing, and sharing time. We usually prayed and sang about three times a day with much singing morning and evening. Many, many, hours were spent praying

and witnessing to our captors. I think the guards heard the gospel being preached for 63 days while we were there.

Sometimes while witnessing to the guards, they would say. "Yes, but we worship Satan." It was terrible! I have never met more wicked men than these. When you are witnessing to someone and they look you in the eye and tell you that they worship Satan, it sends the chills up and down your spine. They are so hard and cold. It is human depravity at its worst! It's almost like you're not even talking to a human being.

I shared with everyone what happened with the bottle. What should we do? Destroy the bottle? Austin, the one who was kidnapped after only being in Haiti for one day, said, "Yeah, yeah. Let's just get rid of it." I asked him if he wanted the honors of doing it and he said, "Yeah, sure. I'll throw that away." I picked up the bottle and we said, "Satan, I rebuke you in the name of Jesus Christ." We prayed, "Lord Jesus, protect us and cover us with your blood. Be with us, Lord!" I gave the bottle to Austin, and he threw it as far as he possibly could out into the field. From my observation, the bag and bottle and whatever other stuff were in there, hit the ground and burst open. There was a red liquid that shot out. Praise the Lord! We were rid of the stuff!

I was nervous about the outcome of this, but we committed it to the Lord. The day went on and I became less worried about it. Every morning the witch doctor would close the lid of this bottle, and every night he would open it up again.

They were so superstitious, they thought that during the night they need to close all the doors and windows to keep the evil spirits from coming in and harming us. We were constantly trying to open the windows for fresh air.

It was dark already that evening when Mackenson came. We were sitting in a circle sharing, praying, and singing together. Mackenson posed as a friendly man and a Christian, but he was not. He had a real temper! (As mentioned, we think he was the witch doctor.) He talked to the other guards in a frantic tone of voice and was very excited. "What? Did one of you guards move the bottle? Where's the bottle?"

Then he said, "Samuel, Kot bidon?" ("Where is the bottle!?")

I said, "Nou te jete li." ("We threw it away.") "No, No, No," he said. "Where is the bottle?"

He started coming in as if ready for attack, and I yelled, "Satan, I rebuke you in the name of Jesus Christ!" He moved back. We were all in a circle just crying out to the Lord. He said, "I need to have the bottle before the light of dawn! You are not going anywhere until you show us where this bottle is! We will beat you! We will kill you!"

Mackenson comes in for another attack. I said, "Satan, I rebuke you in the name of Jesus Christ." He stopped. He was powerless. He could do nothing. He grabbed a shotgun from one of the guards and leaned on it as we were praying out loud and just crying out to God. We sang song after song and prayed prayer after prayer. Sometimes when we paused between songs, he would shout insults and curse us. I thought this was going to last all night.

After a while I said, "It's time to go into the house. We just have to face him." He went over and stood in front of the house. His plan was that I was not going inside the house until he had that bottle. They weren't going to let me into the house until I told them where it was. I was not going to tell. They told us that, to them, this was the equivalent of burning a Bible or destroying God's Word.

Since I knew the most Haitian Creole, the others looked to me as somewhat of a leader. We were praying. *What was going to happen?* I thought I was going to lay down my life that evening! I thought I was going to go see Jesus! It was getting later and later into the night. This two- or three-hour ordeal was exhausting! They wanted to keep me outside of the house and put the others inside. At one point, the ladies went into the house, but they kept on praying. The other men in the group would not leave my side. They supported me and prayed for me. We prayed and prayed, and Mackenson came in for another attack several times. The same thing happened. His attacks from Satan weren't working.

A man called Chèf la who was the head guard of the camp, came over and said, "If you don't show us where the bottle is, we will beat you without stopping until you show us!" I said, "I am ready for that. Go ahead. Start beating me." He pulled out his gun and said, "Do you know what this is called? This is called a gun. Do you know what guns can do?"

I smiled and said, "I'm ready to die. Chief, I'm not afraid of you." Oh, the peace and joy of knowing the Lord, the joy of Heaven. If he had shot me, I would be in Heaven.

It would be a lot better than being here. We praise the Lord for His protection and can testify of His greatness.

They were completely powerless to do anything. So we went into the house, but even after going in, they came inside and continued to ask me to show them where the bottle was. I declined to do that. I thought we might have to stay up all night and keep praying and seeking the Lord, but we did get some sleep.

During the night, if we needed to use the restroom, they would let us out of the house. One evening, a group of about five all went at one time. Apparently, the guards were afraid we were attempting an escape. They started shooting into the air. Our hearts were pumping fast even though they weren't aiming at us. We knew they were afraid something was going on, even though we had no intention of running away.

After about three weeks at this new place, they moved us back to the original location. This time we had both rooms of the house, and all the other prisoners were removed.

This house had multiple doors. We were only supposed to use the front door to go in and out of the house. The back door was not nailed shut. It had a big bag of hard cement (kind of like a big rock) resting against the door and holding it shut. It also had a prop. Originally it had two props, but one was taken away and used for tying up other prisoners. The prop was a split rail fence post with holes in it.

We all knew that Thanksgiving Day was rapidly approaching. We started praying fervently that we could be at home by Thanksgiving Day so we could celebrate a joyous reunion together with our families.

As day after day went by without any news or hope of release, I started to question God. I had served my first term in Haiti from August 2016 until March of 2019. I was at home for nearly 2 years until God called me back to Haiti in a very clear and powerful way during the fall of 2020. I then returned to Haiti for a second term in February of 2021 and was there until the Coast Guard evacuated us to Miami, Florida, after our escape on December 16, 2021.

As time went on, the gangsters threatened to keep us there for a year if that was what it took. They said, "You need to call your boss and tell him to bring the ransom money so you can be released." We weren't about to put pressure on our boss to pay these bandits, but we desperately wanted to be freed.

One day I felt like I was about at the end of my rope. I went into the house, lay down on one of the dirty mattresses, and started crying out to God. I must've started doubting God. I said, "God, why did you call me back to Haiti in such a clear, powerful way, just to leave me sitting here rotting in this gangster camp?" What God showed me struck me. I thought of the verse in Hebrews 12:6 where it says, "For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth."

I felt like God was saying, "Sam, I didn't necessarily call you back to Haiti to help the Haitian people. I called you back to Haiti to change you! When you were back in the United States, you weren't nearly at your fullest potential for my kingdom."

I burst into tears and said, "That's right, God. I'm sorry! There were times that I had the opportunity to share the Gospel with someone and I didn't do it. There were times when I could've shared your love with someone, and I didn't take the opportunity. God, please change me into the man that you want me to be."

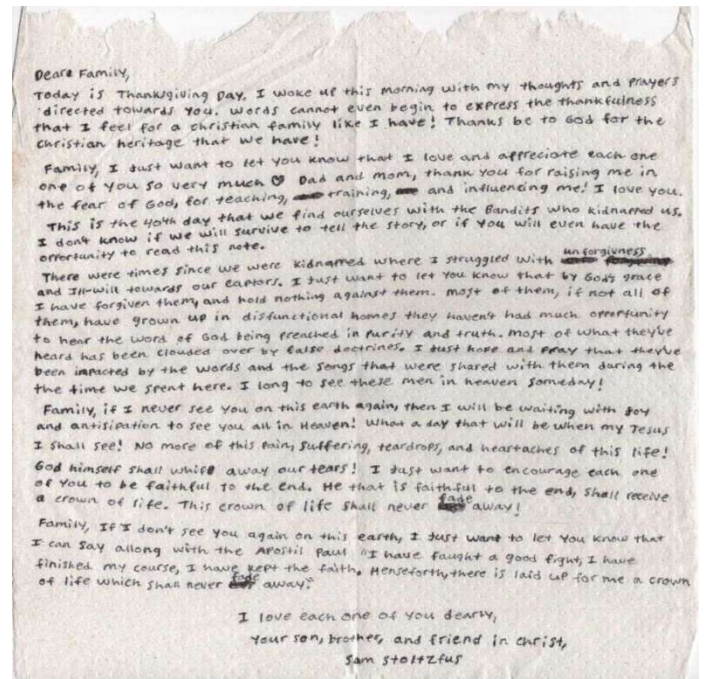
Thanksgiving Day also marked the 40th day of captivity. The number 40 in the Bible is often a period of testing. Jesus was tempted by Satan for 40 days and the Israelites were in the wilderness for 40 years. We thought *surely our period of testing is coming to a close.*

Thanksgiving morning dawned hot and sunny. Just like all the other days, we were still in captivity. Most of us were feeling very discouraged. We were missing our families tremendously as we faced another painful day away from them.

Finally, realizing that I might never even see my family again. I decided to write them a final letter, hoping that they would somehow find it later, in case I was killed by the gang.

If someone would've asked me before that day if I had forgiven the gang for what they had done to us, I would've most likely said, "Yes, of course, I forgive them. Jesus asks us to forgive and to love our enemies." Then, as I was writing this letter, I suddenly realized how much bitterness that I had stowed away in my heart and how hard it was to truly forgive them with a heartfelt forgiveness.

I tore off a section of the paper towels that we used for writing paper and cried buckets of tears as I wrote this letter:



Dear Family,
Today is Thanksgiving Day. I woke up this morning with my thoughts and prayers directed towards you. Words cannot even begin to express the thankfulness that I feel for a Christian family like I have! Thanks be to God for the Christian heritage that we have!
Family, I just want to let you know that I love and appreciate each one of you so very much. Dad and Mom, thank you for raising me in the fear of God, for teaching, training, and influencing me! I love you.
This is the 40th day that we find ourselves with the Bandits who kidnapped us. I don't know if we will survive to tell the story, or if you will even have the opportunity to read this note.
There were times since we were kidnapped where I struggled with unforgiveness and ill-will towards our captors. I just want to let you know that by God's grace I have forgiven them, and hold nothing against them. Most of them, if not all of them, have grown up in dysfunctional homes. They haven't had much opportunity to hear the Word of God being preached in purity and truth. Most of what they've heard has been clouded over by false doctrines. I just hope and pray that they've been impacted by the words and the songs that were shared with them during the time we spent here. I long to see these men in heaven someday!
Family, if I never see you on this earth again then I will be waiting with joy and anticipation to see you all in Heaven! What a day that will be when my Jesus I shall see! No more of this pain, suffering, heartache, and heartaches of this life! God himself shall wipe away our tears! I just want to encourage each one of you to be faithful to the end. He that is faithful to the end, shall receive a crown of life. This crown of life shall never fade away!
Family, if I don't see you again on this earth, I just want to let you know that I can say along with the Apostle Paul "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of life which shall never fade away."
I love each one of you dearly,
Your son, brother, and friend in Christ,
Sam Stoltzfus

The letter written to my family on Thanksgiving Day

Dear family,

Today is Thanksgiving Day. I woke up this morning with my thoughts and prayers directed towards you. Words cannot even begin to express the thankfulness that I feel for a Christian family like I have! Thanks be to God for the heritage that we have!

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I love each one of you dearly,

Your son, brother, and friend in Christ,

Sam Stoltzfus

After writing this letter, it felt like a load had fallen off my shoulders. It brought me truly face-to-face with the question of forgiveness towards my enemies. At that moment, I forgave them. I then tucked the letter into my wallet hoping that if I was killed, there would be someone who would find my driver's license and mail the letter to my family.

One day soon after being moved back to the original location, Matt suddenly became very sick. At the one o'clock prayer meeting he announced that he was very sick. It hit him so hard! He said, "I wasn't quite feeling well all morning long, and now, if I have what I think I have, it is sepsis. I've had it before, and it takes medical treatment. I need to go to the Emergency Room, or I could be dead within twelve hours."

We started fearing for Matt's life. He lay down on a mattress inside the house shaking from head to toe. He couldn't walk anymore. Oh, how we prayed! We laid hands on Matt and prayed that God would show Himself merciful and that He would touch, heal, and spare Matt's life. We also put pressure on the gang to release Matt. We told them that he could die if he didn't get to the hospital really soon.

That evening, the possibility of their releasing Matt started looking more and more promising. The gang leaders started showing up to look at Matt. By this time, God was already answering our prayers. Matt's condition had improved so dramatically that we were afraid that maybe the gangsters would notice and not allow him to leave. I told him, "Matt, we want you to

be able to leave. We are excited that you can possibly leave, but you had better look sick good and proper or they're not going to free you. Even if you can walk, we're going to carry you out of here." He said, "Yes, well, I still feel a little weak. I'll just let you carry me out."

That evening the various gang leader's vehicles rolled in, and they released Matt and Rachel. By the time they arrived at the US embassy, Matt was almost back to normal.

We saw God's healing power so often during our captivity. Never had I seen anything quite like it. Someone would have a burning fever, and we would lay hands on them and pray. By the next day, they would be almost completely recovered.

One day Cheryl was sick and in so much pain she was crying. I think it was all she could do to keep from screaming. She said, "Oh, I'm in so much pain I can hardly stand it anymore! Please, can you pray for me?" We laid hands on her and prayed that God would heal her. He did! The next morning, she was almost back to normal.

God didn't have to answer our prayers. But He chose to help us so many times! One thing is certain when you are in a desperate situation like that: Prayer and faith in God are your only options! Often in the United States, we have money, we have resources, we have options! You can dial 911 or go to the hospital. Often it seems like we look everywhere except to God.

When we get to the end of our hoarded resources, prayer takes on a whole new meaning! You pray like you've never prayed before. You cry out to God like you've never cried out to God before. And God loves to hear the cry of His children! The Father's full giving has only begun!

The night of Matt and Rachel's release, Lanmò's vehicle rolled in at 4:00 a.m. We awoke with a start, as we heard someone being beaten mercilessly!

The next day we saw who had received the beatings. The gang had captured two men from a rival gang. The two men introduced themselves as Peter and Gracia. They were in bad shape from the beating they had received the night before. They had dried blood on their foreheads and were covered in dirt from head to toe. Peter had his front tooth knocked out during the beating.

As the day went by, I became concerned about Peter and Gracia as they didn't have any water to drink on this hot day. They looked like they were parched. At this point, we had some bottled water. Mostly we drank from 8-oz. water bags. I grabbed two water bottles and said, "Hey, Chief, please, will you allow me to give these men a drink of water. It is a hot day, and they need some water to drink."

Chèf la said, "Not the bottled water; they have to drink from the bags." In Haiti, it is a status symbol to be able to drink bottled water. Only the higher class can afford this luxury.



An 8oz. Water Bag (I drank the water in this bag on the way out during our escape)

I put the bottles back and said, "Ok I'll give them the bags." I grabbed two bags of water and went over to where Peter and Gracia were sitting. They were tied hand and foot, so I opened the bags with my teeth and squirted the water into their mouths. They were very grateful for the water. At that time, I didn't say much about Jesus, but I said, "You need to pray to Jesus. Jesus can help you." I left it at that and walked away.

Later, as the day went by, I felt like the Holy Spirit was prompting me to share the Gospel with those men.

You need to understand that, at this point, I was going through extreme discouragement. I didn't see any end to this kidnapping in sight. I had no idea how much longer this gang intended to keep us here. They threatened to keep us there for a year!

I said, "God, I want to share your love with these men, but I can't. I'm so discouraged. I just don't have it in me!"

I felt like God was saying, "Sam, I want you to share my

love with these men."

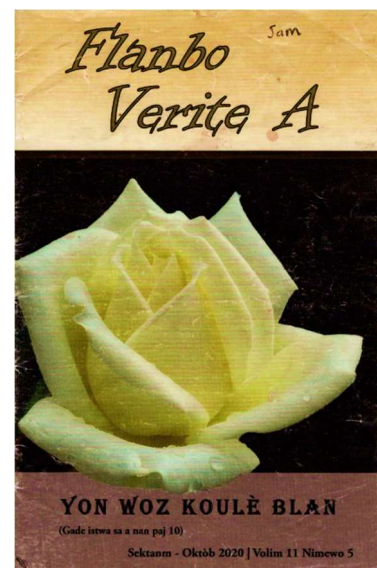
I said, "God, I want to share your love, but you are going to have to fill me up. Is it even worth it? God, we've preached, we've prayed, we've sang songs, and we've shared your love for all this time, and not one of these gangsters have turned to you! They've all hardened their hearts!"

I went to bed that night, still feeling like God wanted me to share the Gospel with those men.

The next day dawned. I again felt like the Holy Spirit was prompting me to share the Gospel with Peter and Gracia. Finally, I said, "Ok, God, I'll do it, but please fill me up. Give me words to speak!"

I must've felt like Jonah in the Old Testament. I felt like God was telling me, "Go and preach!" But I wanted to run in the opposite direction.

I went inside the house and grabbed my copy of the Haitian Creole Torch of Truth. Called "Flanbo Verite A" That issue of the Torch of Truth has a powerful testimony of a girl who ran away from home and got lost in the world and wickedness. Here is the story I read to Peter and Gracia in English, called, The White Rose:



The Haitian Creole version of the "Torch of Truth" called, "Flanbo Verite A". This was about the only literature we had to read during the two months of captivity.

The White Rose

The sun was setting as I walked along the bank of the Thames River in the city of London. I was on my way to a rescue mission where I was going to preach that night. I stopped for a few moments and contemplated the river's serene water. I reflected on the many scenes the river had witnessed in its long history. I reflected on the innumerable multitudes of many centuries who have walked along the banks of this river and wondered how many of them had found the peace of God in their heart. I thought of the thousands who didn't have peace with the Lord that very afternoon.

As I was about to continue my walk to the evening church service, I suddenly noticed a young lady get up from a bench and walk purposefully to the bank of the river. I perceived in her something that alarmed me, and I went to her.

"Excuse me, young lady," I said softly. The young lady started and looked around as if searching for a way of escape. An air of gloom surrounded her, accenting the paleness of her feminine face. Her eyes showed deep sadness and disillusionment. As an evangelist in the suburbs of London, I daily saw all kinds of deplorable things found in large cities. But the attitude of this young lady alarmed me.

"Forgive me, young lady. I know I'm a stranger. But let me tell you that I'm a pastor of the Gospel and I'm on my way to the rescue mission that is around the corner. I see that you are anguished and distraught. Would you like to come visit us tonight? Perhaps there you will find rest for your anguish... there is Someone who wants to be your friend."

When I said the word "pastor," the young lady's countenance fell and she responded indignantly, "No, I don't want to go to your meeting. I don't want anything to do with religion. Please, leave me alone."

Earlier that same afternoon, some friends had invited me to tea in their home. When I was leaving, the woman of the house had given me a white rose. It wasn't my custom to wear a rose, but I felt I should for the woman's sake. Then, as I was talking to the young lady beside the river, I remembered the rose. Without thinking much about it, I took the rose from the pocket of my suit coat and offered it to the girl. This was something very strange for me to do, but I felt God leading me to do it.

"Will you accept this white rose?" I asked her. "Perhaps

it will remind you that you have friends at the rescue mission who would like to help you, if you would like to attend."

I did not expect the young lady's reaction. She drew back as if I had hit her. Her face betrayed a tense emotional struggle.

"No... oh no, I can't!" she exclaimed. Then, to my surprise, she reached out and took the rose. Her eyes filled with tears. I had to go, but before leaving, I again invited her to the service.

While preaching during the service that night, I felt an extraordinary weight. The experience by the river was etched in my mind. I had clearly seen a soul in extreme need, and I was overwhelmed with a great desire to be able to convince those listening to receive the message of salvation and peace.

When I finished the message, the person in charge of the meeting came forward. Then, I suddenly saw her... Way in the back, in one of the last benches, was the young lady with whom I had spoken by the river. I felt a ray of hope and my heart was relieved. Yes, no doubt, God is working with her. No doubt, God led me to talk with her. I began to pray.

The service had ended, and it was time for the invitation. Suddenly, the young lady stood up and came forward. She began to talk, but suddenly she stopped. Then she went on, not noticing that everyone was looking at her. "I have heard the invitation to come to Jesus, and that's what I want to do. Do you think He can save a sinner as bad as I?" she asked choking with emotion. Then, without waiting for an answer, she went on, "I was going to end it all in the river this afternoon, because I knew I couldn't keep living the life I've lived these past five years. I was about to throw myself into the river when this man spoke to me and invited me to this meeting. I turned down his invitation brusquely. But then he gave me this white rose. At first, I didn't want to accept it, for it represented something I had lost. But then something inside me forced me to accept it... it was like the rose my mother gave me when I left home five years ago. It was her favorite flower.

"This afternoon, when I received the white flower this man gave me, I again heard my mother's voice as she bade me farewell: 'Elaine, my little girl, you are leaving your mother, totally against her wishes, and you're going to a world full of evil. I fear you are going to sink into sin. When you are far away from me and you see a white rose, remember the gift your mother gave you when you left home and the prayers that I will always be offering to God for you. I will not cease to pray for your return home and for your salvation.'

"This rose, white and pure, is what made me reconsider tonight and come to myself. I knew I had to look for the way if it still was open for me. The pastor told me Someone would help me find the way. Do you think He would accept me, as great a sinner as I am?"

It wasn't hard to answer her question. "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (Isaiah 1:18). "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). The Bible doesn't say that this is only for people who have not sinned much.

The young lady listened attentively while we read these and other verses to her. Suddenly, she began to weep and fell to her knees. She repented of her sins and invited Jesus to be Lord of her life. When she got up, she was a new creature. Her first desire was to return home to her mother.

From the editor: Glory to God for the salvation of one soul, lost in the wickedness of this sinful world. The Bible says, "Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth" (Luke 15:10). Dear reader, where are you in your personal life? Are you also far from home, far from God, sunken in the world and wickedness? Do you hear the voice of the One who is calling you to Christ, who also can help you find the way of life and peace? Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6).

Anne Hazelton -From the Gospel for the Youth

I read this story, and then I also read this poem from the back cover of the Torch of Truth:

The World Offers "Mirages"

Mirage Definition:

(mr-aa-zhuhz) Mirage (mr-aazh)

1. An optical illusion caused by atmospheric conditions, especially the appearance of a sheet of water in a desert or on a hot road caused by the refraction of light from the sky by heated air.

2. Something that appears real or possible but is not in fact so.

*Happiness and parties, masks and color
Splendor and light, pleasure and excitement.*

*Oh, world, mirages you offer,
Tinsel that shines like gold.*

*Mirages of happiness, of prosperity and abundance,
Wretched world! A mirage, vanishes like smoke.*

Mirages of pleasure and rumba,

Mirages of beauty and elegance.

Mirages of life when it is no more than death,

Mirages of peace in the middle of war.

*What do you offer, oh world, to that something within
man, that is not satisfied by parties, nor pleasures, nor
music, nor money, nor mirages?*

Oh world, what do you offer?

— Juana Saray; (Gloria E. Romero Lozano)

After reading this, I bowed my head and prayed out loud in Haitian Creole. I prayed that God would draw Peter and Gracia to Himself so that they could be converted and experience the salvation that is only available through Jesus Christ. I prayed that they would humble themselves and become as little children. I prayed that they would experience conviction so that they could then experience the life-changing transformation from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of light. I prayed that they would personally experience the hope and joy of salvation.

After I said, "Amen." Peter also bowed his head and prayed. He didn't pray out loud, but he prayed nonetheless. It reminded me of the story about the two thieves who were hanging on a cross, on either side of Jesus at His crucifixion. Gracia was a proud and arrogant man who thought he knew what he needed to know and thought that he had his life together. Peter was a humble, penitent man with a soft heart, ready to receive salvation. He saw his sin and his need of a Savior. When Peter said, "Amen," he had a big smile on his face! And I wondered, oh I wondered, *Did God begin a work in Peter's life?* I left it at that and went about the day.

The next day I went to talk to those men again. Peter still had a big smile on his face. It was as if he was radiating the joy of Jesus on his face. I asked him, "Peter, do you believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God?"

"Yes, I do believe that Jesus is the Son of God," he replied.

"Have you repented of your sins? Are you sorry for your sins?"

"Yes, I am sorry for my sins!"

"Do you accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior?"

"Yeah. Yes, I do accept Jesus as my Lord and Savior."

"Do you have Jesus in your heart right now?"

At this, he had a huge smile on his face and said, "Yes, I do have Jesus in my heart!" I gave him a big bear hug and said, "Welcome to the Kingdom, brother!"

Praise God, for one poor, lost gangster in Haiti, who can experience salvation through Jesus Christ!

We often talked about attempting an escape, but it didn't always feel practical because some of the people in our group were sick. Cheryl and Kay had so many boils that they could hardly walk.

I kept trying to encourage the group. "The Lord is with us. Let's have faith and just walk right out to freedom. The worst thing that can happen is that they will kill us. We will go to Heaven where we will be better off than here." But some in our group were afraid of that. I don't blame them. I was too, but I was ready to completely rely on the Lord and let Him take full control.

Then one evening the Lanmò's vehicle drove in. Without another word, he came over and grabbed Kay's hand and started leading her to his vehicle. "Hey, what's he doing with Kay?" someone cried. "Sam, find out where he's taking Kay!" I leaped off the couch and ran to Lanmò's side. "Please, please," I cried, "tell me, where are you taking Kay?"

"I'm taking her to the hospital," Lanmò replied curtly. *Ok, I thought, couldn't you have told us what is going on and spared us this grief of not knowing what is happening, what you are doing with her, or where you are taking her?*

After Kay was in the vehicle, he came over and grabbed Cheryl's hand. At this point, he wanted to separate 6-year-old Sheldon from his mom. Sheldon was clinging desperately to his mom. "If I go, my baby goes with me!" Cheryl yelled.

At this, Lanmò became very angry and a big struggle ensued.

Finally, in the end, Sheldon was allowed to go along with them, but it was an experience that left us shaken!

There was a whole progression of events that led up to the escape and the Lord led every step of the way. If God would not have blinded the eyes of those guards, I believe I would still be sitting in that prison camp right now.

Andre, Ryan's three-year-old son, was running a fever almost every night. He was sick and burning with high fevers. We prayed, and during the day he would often get better. We were getting very, very desperate for deliverance.

Maybe we doubted the Lord and put our hope in man. There were airplanes that would circle almost every day. Surely someone was going to help us! We had to get out of here! It felt like a compromise of faith, but we made two signs out of cardboard and wrote with charcoal in big letters. S.O.S. The other one said, WE NEED HELP! We held up the signs while we were out in the mornings. Once, an airplane throttled down. It was confirmation that they saw the signs, but nothing happened. The FBI later told us that they saw Andre from the plane. They saw he was sick, and his stomach was bulging, but they were powerless to do anything. I don't know why they couldn't do anything, but I believe the Lord wanted to receive the glory and honor from our escape. We showed our signs for three days, but still nothing happened. The guards were always around there, but we had a system. If a guard would be coming around the corner, we would say, "Tails." If the coast was clear, we would say, "Heads."

The Lord wanted us to put our complete trust in Him and let Him work out the details. It wasn't by the arm of man that we were delivered at all. It was a progression of events and miracles. The Lord did great things for us! We were so excited!

Monday evening, we were having our devotional time on the other side of the house between the two buildings. I was praying most for deliverance from the constant smoke.

Breathing in secondhand cigarette and drug smoke was terrible! I hated the smoke, the drinking, and the drugs! The rap and rock music on the radio was terrible! I could understand it, and Satan was trying to get a foothold in my life. Profanity was constant, and they would bring in prostitutes.

We kept talking about escape. That Monday evening there was a beautiful double rainbow in the sky. We were so encouraged by this sign of God's promise! We had a good time of prayer and singing. In the evening it poured down rain, turning everything into thick, deep mud. That night we talked about escaping because the guards were really, really, drunk and high on drugs and alcohol. Here was our opportunity! *Let's do it! Just walk out into the mud! We would be muddy and look like pigs, but by the time we had taken a hot shower at the CAM compound, it would be well worth it! The Lord could work for us.*

It was a constant struggle to have everyone united in faith. But God was moving in our hearts and leading us. The next day was Tuesday. It was a little drier and the mud was slowly drying up. I looked around and didn't see any guards in sight. So, I moved the prop that was blocking the door a little closer to the left-hand side and angled it more steeply. I figured if it's closer to where the door swung open, it would be easier to grab a hold of, if we tried to pry the door open. Also, if it was on a steeper angle, hopefully it would slide up the door instead of binding.

That day we watched in amazement as the camp Chief ordered the guards to remove a power strip from the back door and move it to the front porch. During the downpour on Monday night, it had been partly submerged in water. It was quite a process, but they moved the entire thing to the front door. That meant they would no longer sit at the back door during the night to charge their phones. Oh, we were rejoicing! The Lord was working out every detail of our escape.

We were still not united as Wednesday rolled around. That was the night of our deliverance. The Honda generator had run out of oil a day or two earlier. We thought it would be great if that generator and the fans were running during the time of our escape. They would create some white noise. By now, Ryan and Melody were desperate to get their children out of there. Andre was not in good health!

That morning, when Makenson brought water to fill the barrels, Westley asked him if he could bring oil for

the generator. He said, "Yeah, no problem. I'll bring the oil." We had a lot of doubts that he would really bring oil. He was one of the most forgetful men that I ever met. Often when we needed supplies like toilet paper, we told him we are almost out. Then when no toilet paper showed up, we would start using Laura's baby wipes. Then he would get furious and say those were for Laura.

Later that day we asked Westley to secretly go into the thicket to see if he could scout out a trail. He was in the brush for an hour or two. We did the heads and tails thing with the guards again. Was there any way to get twelve people and two little children through?

That morning Ryan prayed. He was feeling discouraged and felt like he needed some time alone with the Lord. He prayed with his whole heart, just seeking the Lord. "Lord," he said, "If you do not want us to leave and try to escape, please make Westley come back and be discouraged and say this is not going to work." Unknown to him, his wife prayed a similar prayer.

It wasn't an easy thing for Westley to come back from the thicket and say that we could do it. Westley was one of those who was okay with the idea of escape, but he wanted to make sure that we had all our bases covered. He figured that we would have one chance at this. If we got caught trying to escape, the gangsters would treat us very roughly. They would likely tie us up and keep us in a corner of the house.

Westley even mentioned his idea of digging a tunnel from the thicket all the way into the house. We figured it would take a month to accomplish this, but we didn't care anymore. We were ready to start digging if need be.

Westley came back out of the brush with a big smile on his face and said, "I think we can do it."

Melody had been combing one of the other girls' hair with the only comb available - a plastic fork. Ryan had been walking laps around and around in the back courtyard, praying and crying out to God. As he prayed, he heard his wife relating a story that had happened to Ryan's grandparents on his mom's side.

The Story of Grant Bontrager

This story was retrieved from:

<https://www.cjonline.com/story/news/2017/01/30/kansas-son-family-forgive-father-s-unspeakable-crime/16558111007/>

This is an AP Member Exchange story from The Hutchinson News

ARLINGTON, Kan. — Grant Bontrager's birthday is a day he always ponders his existence.

Days before he turned 25 this month, he sat with family members, including his grandparents' Eldon and Mary Ellen Bontrager in their Arlington home. Eldon pointed out the window to the big farmhouse next door where representatives from Winfield State Hospital came calling back in November of 1991.

They wanted to tell them the unbelievable news that their daughter, who had severe cerebral palsy and described by professionals as "functioning at age 3 months," had been raped and was six months pregnant. A 21-year-old hospital employee had turned himself in to authorities, The Hutchinson News (<http://bit.ly/2jl109r>) reports.

The apologetic officials suggested a doctor perform an abortion.

The Bontragers knew their heart. They didn't need time to weigh the pros and cons.

"In that house, around the table, that was where the decision was made," Eldon said.

There would be no abortion.

"Two wrongs don't make a right," Mary Ellen told everyone that day.

She turned to her daughter-in-law, Mamie Bontrager, and asked if she would take the baby her daughter obviously couldn't raise.

Without hesitation, Mamie said yes.

But first she needed to discuss it with her husband LaVon. Like everyone else he was shocked when he heard the news of what had happened to his sister. He asked for a little time to think about it. The couple had an 8-year-old son, Greg, and a 4-year-old daughter, Angie. They had wanted more children, but that hadn't been possible.

LaVon agreed with Mamie: they should adopt the baby

his sister was carrying. When their two children heard there was going to be a new baby in the family they jumped up and down and cheered.

A community prays

From the moment the Bontragers made the decision, their daughter was given a private nurse who was by her side 24/7. She was 29 at the time. A wisp of a woman; she might have weighed 89 pounds. She was examined by specialists who told the family everything that would go wrong with the pregnancy they had failed to detect for six months.

"They made it seem like it would be impossible for things to go well," Eldon Bontrager said.

A 1991 Associated Press story didn't name the victim, who was described by the Kansas Department of Health and Environment as not being able to see, hear or speak.

She was confined to bed. There had been no prenatal care. A geneticist said they could only speculate whether a baby might be born mentally diminished because the genetic histories of both parents were unavailable.

"Somehow we didn't worry," Mamie said.

She and all the Bontrager family prepared for whatever the future held.

They chose to trust God and prayed for a miracle. They rallied support from each other and their Cedar Crest Mennonite Church, a community who unceasingly prayed for them. While the newspaper reports never mentioned the family's name, their extended Reno County community of Beachy Amish knew of their struggle.

Two months after learning their daughter was pregnant, the baby arrived so suddenly he took everyone by surprise. Eldon was in the room at his grandson's birth at Wesley Medical Center. Mamie and LaVon arrived soon after and named the 3-pound, 6-ounce infant Joseph Grant.

He spent five weeks in the hospital before he was big enough to come home.

"He was such a fighter," Eldon said. "He wanted to live."

His grandparents remember a “sweet affectionate baby,” just one of 27 grandchildren who bless their lives.

Growing up with the truth

There is a family photo of Grant in Mamie’s arms, looking directly at his biological mother during a family visit to see her.

“He always knew he was adopted,” Mamie said. “When he was 6, he asked who his real mother was and I told him.”

They knew the day would come when they would tell him the whole truth. It came when Grant was 12, and LaVon told him the rest of the story, that Grant’s biological father was charged and convicted of raping his biological mother. Grant was left with so many questions swirling in his mind, but that’s where he kept them.

“For years I knew I was different, but I didn’t want to talk about it,” Grant said. “I kept everything inside. I was wondering why my mom couldn’t take care of me and wondering where my dad was. I was trying to figure it out in my head.”

He knew he wanted to meet his father, but knew he had to feel ready.

“I didn’t understand what God had for me yet. And I had all this stuff, and I didn’t know why I was dealing with it,” Grant said.

That “stuff” was emotional hurt and tension. Growing up in a house of faith, he wondered why God would allow this to happen.

“Why did I have to be the one brought into this situation?” Grant said.

Answers didn’t come easy.

There was something he knew for certain, he always loved and appreciated Mamie and LaVon and felt they were his parents. Still, he wanted to find his biological father.

Healing the pain

The entire Bontrager clan enveloped, loved, and helped nurture Grant.

“LaVon and I always felt Grant was a gift from God, as are our other two children,” said Mamie.

Despite growing up in a loving environment, Grant’s teen years were turbulent. There were things going on in his head that others couldn’t help with.

A turning point came when Mamie and LaVon sent him to counseling with Nevin and Joann Nisly at Hope Ministries, Partridge. The counselors helped Grant to find the pain and work through it.

“They helped him to see that God did not abandon him, but he had a purpose for his life,” Mamie said.

At one particular session they had him write down all the things that hurt him in his life.

“It was like Christ was responding with a thought or image in my mind,” Grant said.

As he asked why he was born, he felt a response that he was here for a purpose.

“So I can be glorified through a bad situation,” Grant said.

Through the exercise he felt more guided toward God’s plan for his life. He felt more certain that God wanted to use him to share his story of his birth. He felt led to speak at prisons and area churches.

While Grant said he felt ready to meet his biological father, it took several more years for that to happen.

Three years ago, when he was 21, he found a connection - one of his co-workers at Sturdi-Bilt Storage had served time with his biological father in prison. A meeting was set up at the co-worker’s home.

“I was scared. But it was very good,” Grant said, of the emotional visit. “It was a roller coaster.”

By then, LaVon had died. But Mamie supported the meeting.

At 6-foot-3, Grant was taller than his biological father. The two men shook hands and then he told Grant the meeting had been a long time in coming. While he was married, he didn’t have any other children.

“Then we talked about the weather. We didn’t go deep,” Grant said. “It was a good start.”

Searching for forgiveness

Grant said he never felt bitterness toward his biological father. During their visits they have never discussed the circumstances of his birth.

"He never did anything to me," Grant said. "He is the reason I am here."

Then more than a year after they met, Grant was asked to do a favor - baptize his father.

"He told me he and his wife had become Christians and he wanted to rededicate his life," Grant said. He wanted Grant to help. The baptism took place at a church near Wichita. Grant and the minister took him down into the water.

"It was good," Grant said. "It was really cool."

Back in the winter of 1995, Eldon and Mary Ann Bontrager received a letter from the offender victim ministry asking to be forgiven. They didn't respond right away. But when they did write back, they told him he was forgiven.

Another stepping stone came for Mamie and the Bontrager family when they also met him after Grant had begun visiting with him.

While it brought up all the painful memories, it was cathartic.

"We all had to process things differently," Mamie said. "There were stepping stones in the healing process."

"I was so angry," Carolyn Bontrager said, when she learned of her sister's rape. "She was so little and helpless. But I felt if I didn't forgive him, I couldn't love Grant the way we could."

Her brother, Myron Bontrager, agreed. They could hate this man for what he did to their sister. But if it hadn't happened, Grant wouldn't be here.

The family even asked The News to not use Grant's father's name for this story because he has turned his life around.

"It's such a paradox," Mamie said.

"To do this to a handicapped child..." said Myron Bontrager, of his sister.

But, during that meeting the man who had raped their daughter and sister told them again he was sorry.

"It was hard, but it was forgiveness. It was so beautiful," Grant said. "It was closer to home for them than me."

And despite how painful it might have been for the Bontragers, they put their arms around the man and

said he was forgiven.

Moving on

On Aug. 8, 2015, Grant's biological mother died. She was 53.

"It was very hard," Grant said. "I was never able to have a relationship with her because of who she was. It's something everybody wants ... a relationship with their biological parents."

As he looks toward the future, Grant hopes to have a wife and his own family some day. But that's in the future.

"I want to keep my focus on my ministry, allowing God to open doors," Grant said. "I want to help people who are dealing with deep personal issues and speak out against abortion because I believe abortion is wrong.

"I want people to realize that God has a plan for their life. No matter where they are or how far away from God they feel, he still has a plan."

Mamie wishes LaVon was alive to see the man Grant has become.

"He has added so much joy and brought diversity to our family," Mamie said. "I am thankful that God has made something beautiful out of a very bad situation."



Grant Bontrager, center, is surrounded by his family at the Arlington Amish Mennonite Church on Wednesday, Jan. 18, 2017. Bontrager's mother suffered from severe cerebral palsy and was raped in 1991, resulting in pregnancy. Bontrager was born in 1992 and raised by his aunt and uncle. (Travis Morisse/The Hutchinson News via AP) Topeka Capital-Journal.

At the one o'clock prayer meeting that Wednesday afternoon, the Lord moved Ryan in a mighty way! He shared this story with tears to everyone in our group.

We had three watches that hadn't been stolen but when daylight savings time began, we never changed the time. So, it would have been 12:00 regular time that afternoon as he related this story to us.

This story was shared in tears! Ryan sensed the Lord asking him a similar question as in this story. "Are you willing to take this same step of faith that your grandparents took?" It scared him that the Lord would even compare the step of faith that his grandparents took when they chose to accept this child to something like our escape effort!

Before we prayed, he said he felt the Lord was telling him that he needs to take his family out of there. I was right on board with it all. Through most of the two months I had been saying, "Brothers and sisters, we need to take this step of faith and let the Lord work out the details." But we were not all united and I knew if our hearts were not united, failure was assured! It wasn't going to work! Many times, I thought I needed to escape for my own sanity and health. At one point when I was depressed, I told them, "I am leaving next week. I am going alone. If you're not going with me, then have a nice day." I was very desperate, but later I confessed to the group. The Lord worked in my heart, and I said that I was wrong and was sorry. I would not run without the group. We would stay together.

Then Ryan said, "I believe the Lord wants my family to escape. Everyone is welcome to come along but you don't have too. There's no pressure. Don't come along if you feel like God wants you to stay and continue preaching to the guards."

The chief of the guards had told us, "If you try to escape and we catch you, we will kill you. If part of your group escapes, we will kill the ones who are remaining. If you escape and get away, our chief will kill us."

Ryan told us, "I feel like that was a threat. I think you're more valuable to them alive than you are dead. They may not carry this out." He asked to hear from everyone.

Finally, everyone was on board with the decision. Finally, the Lord would deliver us from this ghetto of smoke, drugs, vile language, and all the Satanic forces! We all had faith, and finally we had the power of unity, the collective faith that moves the hand of God! Jesus

said we could move mountains with faith as small as a grain of mustard seed, one of the tiniest seeds on planet earth! We didn't know what the outcome would be. We could be killed, but we were simply prepared to step out in faith and give the results up to God.

Everything was looking good. We felt joy and I was glad we were all together in this decision. We had preparations to be made. Ryan said, "We don't have to wait for the perfect time. The generator likely won't be running. I'm not going to wait until the generator is running. The Lord is going to intervene if He wants us to get out of here. He will put the details in place. We can take a step of faith and follow him out of here. I'm not set on tonight, but at the next good opportunity, we will be leaving."

We started making preparations. Ryan said, "If it doesn't work out tonight, then we will wait for another night. But let's make plans and work together. We can do this since the Lord is on our side." We planned to leave between one o'clock and three o'clock. We packed our bags with keys for the mission, our wallets, and so on. We were scared - of course, we were scared - but everyone was happy!

The back door was like an old barn door. It had two pieces of wood that were nailed together with cross pieces. Near the bottom of the door was a small crack about one-half-inch wide. We thought if we took a stick inside the house, we would be able to press on the rock and push it away from the door. There was also the prop to move away.

That evening when Makenson brought supper, Westley got up to remind him about the oil. Then he stopped. He felt like God was saying, "You don't need to worry about anything." Someone asked Westley, "Hey Wes, shouldn't we remind Mackenson of the oil?" Westley said, "I thought of that, but I've committed it to the Lord." We decided not to remind him of the oil. We were still trusting the Lord and committing the oil to Him. If He wanted the generator running, He would make it happen.

For the devotional that evening, we moved the couches to the other side of the house because we didn't want the guards to sit down where the door was. We thought hopefully this would encourage them to nestle down on the other side of the house that night. There were some things we did in preparation of an escape; we weren't trying to help the Lord. We were just acting in faith and trusting the Lord to work on our behalf. We wouldn't have had to move the couches. God was already working out the details.

That evening was one of the most beautiful sunsets we had seen during our entire time of captivity. Earlier that day there was not a cloud in sight. Now the storm clouds rolled in early, and we were rejoicing. We thought rain would help our efforts. We sang the song "Is That the Lights of Home."

I remember that as being one of the most intense moments of our captivity. It felt like a breaking point. We felt like something was going to happen. Either we were going to our Eternal Heavenly Home, or our physical earthly homes. It didn't matter which it was.

It rained just a little bit. Enough to get our hopes really high! The guards moved all the couches and chairs onto the front porch.

Because of the shower, the guards ordered us into the house early that evening.

When we were in the house, we discussed the order of filing out the door. Who would be first? Who would be next? You were responsible for the person in front of you and behind you.

It was very unusual for Mackenson to be there after suppertime, but late that night, lo, and behold, Mackenson showed up and stands in the doorway. "There's no oil for the generator," he bellowed. I said, "Well it would be nice if we could have some because it is very hot." Ryan was fanning Andre with a Styrofoam plate. He stood there for a long time as if debating whether or not to get the oil. Finally, he dialed a number and called his chief. I don't know where they got it; they said they needed to go all the way to Port-au-Prince for oil, but that evening the oil showed up. Before we knew it, the generator fired up and the fans were running. *Praise the Lord! Thank you, Jesus!* Another miracle in the progression of events. Our faith was boosted, and we trusted the Lord more. God was working out the details.

This wasn't a time to be doubting God, but I thought,

Oh no, now that we have the oil, just watch the generator run out of gasoline! Gas was a big issue during the time of our captivity. They had often run out of gas. Sometimes it would go a couple of days until they would bring more. A different gang, called, "G-Nine" was tying up the fuel supply in Port au Prince. So, there was a major fuel shortage. Gas prices were so high, that if they could even find gas for purchase, they were spending up to \$10.00 USD per gallon of gas.

It may have been my imagination, but later that night the generator started running roughly as if it was running out of gas. I prayed, "Oh Lord, please, just keep that generator running. Please, just put gas in the engine and keep it going!" It kept running even as we left the house that night.

We planned to wake up at one o'clock, Thursday morning, December 16. The chief of the guards was typically very vigilant. Tonight was no exception. He smoked cigarettes and drank alcohol but didn't do drugs like some of the other guards did. Although they brought in reinforcements with big guns, sometimes some of the guards would doze off or be high on drugs. The chief of the guards refused to do drugs because he wanted to be sure that he was awake and alert in case the other guards dosed off. Earlier that night, I heard him rousing the guards. "Hey, get out there and do your job!"

Most of us had not gotten much sleep. Somehow, I had dozed off a bit. Someone woke me at one o'clock. My legs felt like jelly, and my feet were shaking. I could hardly stand up.

I was hoping that leaving would be a quick steady process. It was not to be! The guards' radios were blaring and we heard them talking to each other. They were shining lights around. Although the generator and fans were providing some background noise, I was hoping we could have been quieter. Twelve people inside that little house created quite a stir. It seemed like the guards could sense that something was taking place, but they just couldn't quite lay their finger on it.

Then Westley heard Mr. Attitude, one of the guards, say these words in a very disgusted tone of voice, "Mwen santi Bondye!" ("I feel God!") We had nicknamed all of the guards, and since they didn't know English, they couldn't tell who we were talking about. The one we nicknamed Mr. Attitude had earned his nickname from his terrible attitude that he displayed on a regular basis.

A gangster guard like Mr. Attitude doesn't just make up stuff like this. If he said, "I feel God," I know in fact, he did feel God! Because God's presence was so close during that time!

We spied on the guards for a long time. They were shining their flashlights around. One of the guards took a walk down the lane. At one point, there was a guard changeover. Finally, they all settled down a bit on the front porch. The timeframe we had planned for between one o'clock and three o'clock was swiftly winding down.

We had our small bags of water in our pockets. We would move ahead. The stick was pressed against the rock. The rock fell away from the door with a thud, and vibrated the house just a little.

That noise was in the Lord's hands. Soon after, Brandon (15) who had been trying to spy on the guards, removed a fragment of a board that was loose so he could spy on the guards through the crack a bit better. The nail holding the fragment made a nice little screech. It alerted the guards on the other side of the house. The camp chief alighted from the front porch. He came around the side and made a good, long inspection of the door.

Sherilyn saw him through the crack. "There he is!" She hissed, "It's Ping, the chief! I can see him!" We hit our beds. We were sure he would see the rock, put it back in place, and come in the front door to call us out for an attempted escape! We stayed in bed for a while. Some people started going to sleep. We were ready to say, "Lord are you showing us that this is not the night?" After inspecting the door for a few minutes that chief walked away. I believe with all my heart that the Lord blinded his eyes. The rock was no longer against the door where it was supposed to be. He had been looking at that door after he heard the noise, but he walked away.

We were in bed, but we thought he was going to put the rock back and come in and ruin our plans for this night. I waited in bed for some time, pondering. Our window of time to leave was nearing the end. Austin was still by the door spying on the guards. Finally, I decided I would talk with Austin one last time before giving it up entirely for that night. We weren't set on leaving that night; we just wanted to leave at the next best opportunity. I got off the mattress and went over to Austin. "What do you think, Austin?" I asked, "Should we just give it up for tonight?" Austin replied,

"You know what? I think God blinded his eyes! He didn't see the rock! Let's go!"

I said, "You know, you're right! Let's do go!"

I went over to Ryan who had already fallen asleep. "What do you think, Ryan, should we give it another try?" I asked. "Yes, sure. Let's give it a try!" he replied.

By this time, the children were sleeping again but Ryan and Melody picked them up again. They whimpered a little, but not too loud. We had made manikins from sheets to make it look like people were lying in bed sleeping.

Despite everything, we were ready to take this step of faith. This was the Lord's time and His will. Slowly Westley and Dale eased the door open. They pushed on the prop with the stick and held the split-rail fence post away from the door. Westley slipped outside and moved the post to the side of the house away from the door. He took a good look to his left and didn't see any guards. He went into the shower room at the end of the house and pulled back the tarp. He saw three guards sitting on chairs playing on their cellphones. Then, he ran back to the outhouse to see if the guards would be able to see our point of entry into the thicket. He thought it would be very close, but not quite! He ran back to the house and said, "All clear." So, we filed out single file into the thicket.

Our hearts were pounding. We were ready for the guards to yell at us, ready to hear gunshots. Dale and I were the last people out, so we closed the door. I grabbed the rock and put it back in front of the door.

Dale grabbed the prop and put it back into position. Off we went into the brush hardly missing a beat. We were right behind the last person. At first the guards could have seen us. Our 12 pairs of feet went crunch, crunch, crunch through the vines and sticks. Would they hear us? All the way through the brush we crunched, but we didn't hear a thing. No yelling, no gunshots, so we went deeper into taller brush where we could duck and hide more.

We got to a fairly wide irrigation ditch a little way down the trail that we needed to cross. I was able to jump over it. The ladies had a lot of trouble. We were still not very far away from the house, and we needed to go!

We've got to go! Got to go! Got to go! I realized the ladies were not making it! I had offered my shoes instead of their crocs and flip-flops, but they declined. I got into the ditch part way with my one foot trying to brace up and help the ladies across. Finally, we were across even if our feet were wet. A little farther down the path we realized, *Wow, the Lord has humor!* If we would have walked just a little farther, there was a bridge, and we would have been able to cross without getting wet. But we were moving, and we were making time. We hiked cross-country towards National Route 3 that we had spotted while still at the house. We had traveled on that road before, though it was not the road we had been kidnapped on. Off in the distance was the big mine or quarry that we could see from the house.

As we were heading to Route 3 the Lord provided us with a bright security light to follow. We thought it maybe was coming from the police station in that direction. We were still making good time crossing the country through the fields. We thought we may have a two- or three-mile hike. Later as we hiked the distance, we found it was more likely 10 miles. After we were a good way from the house, we got to a huge lake. All the ducks and birds were alerted, and they flew out. Before that, we had made little noise. When we came to little Haitian villages, we stopped and prayed.

Lord, keep the dogs quiet, keep the animals quiet, don't let anyone see us. This quietness was no small miracle. Haiti is densely populated with people, dogs, and roosters.

Now it was 4 or 5 o'clock in the morning and we were at a lake. Do we go through the lake? I think Ryan was getting prepared for a swim. I said, "No. Let's keep going around the lake towards the west."

After the lake came the thicket! We had to keep going but we kind of lost our bearings. Thorns and cactus plants that were three times as high as we were abounded here! Those walls of cacti were nearly impenetrable! It was a painstaking process to find the path of least resistance. *Help us Lord, get through the thickets of briars, thorns, and cactus!* We were trying to follow the North Star and attempting a northwestern direction. There were times the thickets were so thick that we couldn't see stars above us. We would stop every few steps to pull thorns from our footwear. The going was painfully slow, and we had wanted to be at Route 3 by daylight. This was not to be the case!

About two hours later, we were finally out of the thorns. We were farther north than we should have been. We didn't come out by the police station. I believe it was the Lord guiding our every step. After the thicket, we came to a larger secondary road. It wasn't paved, but it was a nice gravel road. We were scared, because on one of the recent school trips, my assistant school program director, who is a Haitian, had pointed this road out to me as one that the gang uses when they rob and kidnap people.

We were startled as a big herd of cows came running towards us! I felt sure there was going to be a farmer herding those cows, but we didn't see anyone. We didn't want to run along this open road, but we didn't really have another option. We wanted to get across this road, but there was an almost impenetrable thicket on the other side. We decided we would have to run down the road until we find a clearing where we could cross. We ran down the road fast! A little too fast! Melody, carrying ten-month-old Laura, stumbled and fell really hard! I looked back, and thought, *Oh no! The journey has probably been too much for her! She must've passed out.* We ran to help her. Laura was screaming and crying. When I saw Melodi stand up, I realized that she hadn't passed out, but she had fallen so hard I thought surely, she had to have broken bones or something! "Are you OK?" we asked. "Yes, I'm OK," she replied. But Baby Laura was hysterical. We were really afraid of attracting unwanted attention with Laura crying so loudly! We were desperate to get off the road!

Just ahead we found a dump truck trail going up the mountain in the direction we wanted to go. It was as if the Lord had provided it just in time! Just as we ran off the road, two vehicles passed by on the road below. We were out of sight and so thankful not to have been spotted! It could've easily been the gangsters out looking for us. Now, ahead of us were cow paths that were heading in the right direction. We were glad to walk on cow paths where there were fewer thorns.

Another miracle was that we didn't meet a single Haitian person on the trail the whole time. This is rare indeed for the populous country of Haiti! Maybe if you had lived in Haiti for three years you would understand what a miracle this was to walk about ten miles and not meet a single soul! We heard voices sometimes, but we never met anyone. We feared everyone, as we were still in gang territory and assumed everything would be reported back to the gang.

By now, we were nearing Route National 3. We were close to the road. Too close for comfort. I thought we might be spotted! We saw a peasant woodcutter in the distance, cutting trees to make charcoal. We prayed.

What can we do? Where do we go? Where do we start? We decided the group should nestle down and wait. Westley and I would go try to make contact with the woodcutter in hopes of finding help. We were afraid he would report us back to the gang, but we committed it to the Lord. We now had the cash that Matt had hidden away during the kidnapping.

Before we got to him, another person came walking down the trail. I said, "Bonjou" ("Good morning"). I was trying to be friendly and asked him how he was doing. We were trying to be discreet, so we told him our phone batteries had died and we needed a phone. I believe that was the truth. They had long since died after the gangsters took them. "No. I don't have a phone," he replied.

"Do one of your neighbors have a phone we could use?" I asked.

"Yes, just go down and knock on any of their house doors. They should have a phone you can use."

"Can you please show us which house to go where we can find someone with a cellphone?" I asked. "Yeah, sure," he responded. We hiked up a knoll and he pointed us to a house down yonder. "Right there. Just go knock on that back door, and someone will help you out," he said. "Do good people live there?" I asked. "Yeah, they are good people. Just go knock on the door. They will help you out."

We hiked down the mountainside to the house. We crept around the side of the house, half expecting to see a big gangster with long dreadlocks sitting on the front porch. When we saw it was ordinary people, we relaxed. We tried to be vague and very brief, but he was asking way too many questions. He asked if our vehicle was broken down on Route 3. "No," I said, "we're just out walking. Our phone batteries are dead. We need someone to pick us up."

He asked all kinds of questions and wondered, "Are there more of you out here?" "Yeah, there are more of us," I responded, "but we just need to make a phone call to have someone pick us up."

"I'm out of minutes, or I would let you use my phone." "Well, do any of your neighbors have a phone we can use?" "No, not really that I know of," was his reply.

"Look," we said, "we have 500 Gourdes. (This is the equivalent of \$5, a hardworking man's wage for a day of work in Haiti.) Can you go purchase minutes to put on your phone so we can make the call? Go ahead and put 250 Gourdes worth of minutes on your phone, and you can keep the other 250 Gourdes. Or if you want, you can put the whole 500 Gourdes on and keep the minutes."

"Well, the place to purchase minutes is way down there in town," he responded.

"We really need to talk on the phone," we said.

"Okay, sure, yeah okay," he said. He jumped on his bicycle and pedaled away. About fifteen minutes later he came back panting and sweating with 250 Gourdes worth of minutes on his phone.

Westley grabbed the phone and dialed Barry's number. "Hello. Hello. Hello," he said.

"Hello," we said, but got no response. "Put it on speaker phone," said the man who owned the phone. "The top mic on the phone isn't working." We hadn't wanted it that way. We didn't want them getting more information. Because the phone was broken, we had no choice but to use the speakerphone as we talked to Barry.

"Barry, this is Wes."

"Ah. Ah. Ah. Ah. What?!" Barry wondered.

"Barry, we are delivered," we said.

"What! Are you all out? Is everyone out?" he asked

"Yes, The Lord delivered us and rescued us last night. We are by Route National 3."

"Where's that?" Barry questioned. "Can you drop me a pin? Where are you?"

"Well," we explained, "we are using someone else's phone. We are on Mon Kabrit (Goat Mountain) just as you start going up the mountain."

"I think I know where you are," he said. "We are coming right now! Phil and I are on our way!"

Barry is the Country Director for the CAM base in Haiti and Phil is the Country Supervisor from the Ohio office. They were bringing two vehicles to pick us up.

"Look," said the man whose cellphone we borrowed. "There are police right down there in this little town," Okay. But I was afraid of Haitian police. I figured there was so much corruption in the Haitian politics that the police could have connections with the gang. But I called Barry back.

"Look, we are here on Route National 3." I gave him farther directions. "I am going down to the police."

"Be very careful and vague with what you say. The FBI is involved in this, and it is a real mess," he replied.

It was decided that Westley should go back to get the group and I would wait on Barry and Phil by the road.

I walked down the road towards the police officers. I was afraid, and there were a lot of vehicles. There was rush hour traffic creeping up the road.

The kidnapping was top-story news all over Haiti, and nearly everyone knew about it. It was also strange for a white person to be walking down this road. And not just any white person, but one with hair covering most of his ears, a mustache so long that it was going into his mouth, and a long, full beard.

Tap-taps, other vehicles, and even a motorcycle driven by a gangster with long dreadlocks all came to a complete stop on the road. They all looked at me. Needless to say, I was wanting to get out of there!

I shook the hand of a very gentle police officer.

I said, "Hey, can I sit here in the brush and wait for a ride? Someone is coming to pick me up."

"Yeah, sure," he said. "That is fine."

I sat down and waited. Meanwhile, the police asked, "What is going on?" He called me over. He was a nice man, but I tried beating around the bush.

"Just tell us; are you in trouble? What is going on?" "Yeah, yeah, we are in trouble," I said.

"Can you call for reinforcements?" He turned to another police officer who was standing there.

"Where are you from? Where do you live?" At this point, my hands started trembling. "I'm from the United States," I replied.

"You're trembling. Just tell us what's wrong. Look, you are in the hands of the state. You are with the police! We are going to help you." I started to relax a bit.

"Where do you live in Haiti?" he asked.

"Titanyen," I said slowly.

"Are you from a group of 17 missionaries who were kidnapped here in Haiti two months ago?" he asked.

"Yeah."

He asked me more questions. "Did the gang release you last night?"

"No," I said. "Actually, we escaped. The Lord took us out of there!"

A look of surprise flashed across his face. "What? You escaped!? That means that you just left the place?"

"Yes, we escaped. God helped us leave that place last night!"

"Hey, tell them to send the reinforcement right now! They've escaped!" he yelled to the police officer, who was still on the phone with the police barracks below.

The officer was likely thinking that the gang was already looking for us. There could be a gun battle with the gang!

Soon Barry and Phil pulled up. It was perfect timing! The group had started walking down the road right then and met us there. We all piled into the vehicles. The police were sure we needed to wait on the reinforcements that were coming. They wanted to supply us with an escort to get out of there.

Barry is a man of strong faith. He said, "No, thank you! No, thank you! We don't need anything." We left in a big hurry. We got into a serious traffic jam on the way to the CAM compound. Although our hearts were still pounding, we were so happy! Happy to get back to the compound at Titanyen!

Oh, the rejoicing and the joy to be back safe and sound. Praise the Lord!



A photo of our group after arriving at the CAM compound shortly after the escape. We praise God for what He has done in helping us escape that memorable day of December 16th, 2021. Exactly two months to the day after being kidnapped!

We didn't have much time to lose! We were told the Military was sending a Coast Guard flight into Port au Prince, and personnel from the Haitian Police, FBI, and US Embassy were coming to escort us to the airport.



We arrived at the airport where they opened a back gate to let us into the complex. There was the airplane waiting for us. No passport checks, no customs, no security. Our passports have an extra entry stamp and lack the exit stamp. They even had a doctor on board to do the Covid Test during the flight.



They allowed us to visit with the pilots in the cockpit.

What a change for us, going from being held as hostages in a gangster camp to a beautiful hotel in Miami, Florida, within less than 24 hours of time!

After our escape, we were excited because we thought since we had escaped, no ransom money would be paid. We were disappointed to find out that a ransom had already been paid to the gang. Unfortunately, we all were supposed to have been ransomed out.

Why didn't the ransom money work? It was because at the last minute (after the money had been paid), the gang leaders changed the terms of our release. Now, instead of just wanting money, they demanded the release of the gang founder who used to be a senator in the Haitian politics. This senator was in prison since 2015. Although he had a life sentence in prison, he still had direct involvement in running the gang even while he was in prison. The government refused to release him in exchange for our release.

We praise God for helping us escape! We don't know what would have happened had we not escaped.



What Does the Future Hold?

What Does the Future Hold? Will CAM send missionaries back to Haiti?

I don't know. God knows. One thing that we do know is that the work of prayer is not over!

Pray for the gangs in Haiti. Pray for the poor people. Pray that God would turn them from the kingdom of darkness, to the kingdom of light.

For myself personally, I don't know if God will ever call me back to Haiti or not. If he does, I want to be ready and willing to answer His call.

I still need to share this with you. *Love your enemies. Bless them that curse you. Do good to them which despitefully use you and persecute you.* We had times of temptation. Satan was telling us to just grab the guns and shoot the guards and get ourselves out of there. We thought of that, but we always overcame. We would have had many opportunities to get a hold of their guns.

Physically speaking, I don't think it would have been too hard to overpower those guards and get out of there. But you know what? The Bible way works! The Lord Jesus Christ is our Deliverer! We have a stronger weapon than the sword of earthly forces!

All the glory, honor, and praise belong to our Almighty, Eternal, Heavenly King, the Alpha and Omega, and the Beginning and the End. He is the First and the Last who is to come back someday soon for his Bride. Will you be found faithful? Will you lay down your life for the sake of the Cross if that is what the Lord calls you to do?

Dear Lord Jesus. We come to you thanking and praising you. We come lifting up your Almighty Name. Lord, we thank you for the miracle you worked on our behalf!

Truly for us to live is Christ and to die is gain! But Lord, we want to share this testimony around the world if that is what it takes. We want you to receive all the honor and glory. It was only through You! We couldn't have done it any other way, Lord. It was You. Thank You, Jesus, for saving us. Thank You for answering the prayers of likely millions of people around the world.

Thank you for friends and family and for loved ones. Thank you for our heritage, Lord. We were raised up and taught of you. We didn't deserve this. We could have been born a gangster and grown-up serving Satan and sin and be, more than likely, lost eternally. Lord, we don't deserve salvation! You have pulled us out of the miry pit! Out of the clay! You have set our feet upon the rock and established our goings.

Thank you, Father. God, I pray that you would raise up men and women in this increasingly wicked generation who would stand in the gap! Those who are ready to raise up the standard of the cross of Jesus Christ and proclaim Him Lord of their lives with full, unconditional surrender, poured out like wine upon the altar for you and broken like bread to feed the hungry! You said in Your Word to pray that the Lord of the harvest would raise up laborers for the harvest in these last days. May we all be ready and equipped to face the Enemy.

Lord, I thank you and praise you. Thank you for the group of Brothers and Sisters in Christ and for my family. They mean more to me now than they ever have before, Lord. I thank you for the way the Saints all over the world can lift each other up. Lord, I look forward to Your coming and Your return and the end of tears and suffering. We love You, praise You, and worship You. In Jesus' name, Amen.

If you would like to listen to this story, or testimonies from the other former hostages, please go to:
<https://www.plainnews.org/2021/12/25/kidnapping/>

Or call:

1. Call **(712) 432-8776** from any phone.
2. Enter Conference ID number: **5555#**
3. Enter Sharing ID number: **8001#**

God, the Almighty, freed the remaining 12 hostages on December 16, 2021. They returned to the United States the same day.

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