

IF IT'S WET AND NOT YOURS DON'T TOUCH IT

If its wet and not yours don't touch it, and if you must touch it WEAR GLOVES, that's what was going through my mind on August 8th when I was only two hours in country and realized I was going to be delivering a baby on a dirt road in the tent city without any medical supplies or GLOVES. Welcome to Haiti.

On January 12, 2010 my world got rocked and my heart broke. I don't know why the earthquake in Haiti affected me so profoundly, but I found myself struggling with heartache and stress even though I didn't know anybody in Haiti and I admit I would have to look closely to find it on a map.

I started a tent-drive here in California. We sent tents, but it still wasn't enough. Months later my church made a decision to send teams over the summer to provide relief in the form of construction, medical relief or orphan care. In May 2010 I calculated my PTO balance and found that I would have enough PTO to go in August. That was the tail end of the short-term missions' assignment. I had never been to a third-world country. My colleagues were very supportive and my supervisor was encouraging. I had no idea what I was getting into, but I knew I was headed to Haiti.

There is no book, no video, no pod cast, and no cliff notes to prepare you for service in Haiti. It's hot, it's dirty, it's corrupt and at times it's violent, but here I was ready to leave the safe confines of my cubicle and turn off my "legal" mind to serve in Haiti. I find that each employee at AAA has a unique story of how they got to AAA and what has kept them here. I'm no exception. In a prior career I worked in emergency medical services. I left the industry in 1998 but my skills never left me. Once in Haiti I volunteered in a tent hospital for the non-profit

J/P Haitian Relief Organization. J/P HRO serves 50,000 displaced Haitians living in 10,000 tents over 7 holes of golf. Can you imagine such close quarters? It was HOT. I slept in a tent on a cot.

So in just 8 days I delivered two babies, transported over 40 patients to one of the two remaining hospitals in Port-au-Prince, found the severed finger of a stoic 7 year-old girl put it on ice and busted my rear-end to get her to a hospital, only to learn there are no micro-vascular surgeons anywhere in Haiti or the DR. If you lose a digit or limb in Haiti, it's gone, done. I had some patients who didn't make it and while I'm trained to handle it, it still sucks.

AAA's volunteering program encouraged me to be willing to help others. Working for an organization that builds volunteering into its identity has been such a blessing for me and my family. It's helped me teach my kids it's not just about working to make money, but working to make a difference. Immediately upon returning home I was making plans to return to Haiti because there is still so much more work to do.

In November 2010 I went back to Haiti, this time helping in Leogane (the epicenter of January's quake). I served with Extollo International, a Christian non-profit based out of Pleasanton. They are helping rebuild Haiti by teaching Haitians trade skills. I arrived the day after Hurricane Tomas. I worked at an orphanage that has approximately 40 girls and 30 boys. These are kids taking care of kids. Through Extollo International I was able to identify and recognize a major problem with the boy's orphanage. They were without water for 3 1/2 weeks since their well had broken. It was heart wrenching for me to see kids with insects living on them and knowing they were sneaking drinks of water out of the creek that has cholera. Within a few hours we had identified the problem, obtained tools and a part to make the needed repair. The boys were drinking clean water for the first time in weeks and at the height of the cholera

epidemic. That was a good day. The BIG picture is overwhelming, but the small picture is manageable. One orphan, one patient, one family, one well at a time. The only difference between us and them is that we were born into privilege. We all bleed red blood and we all deserve a chance to live.

