

(Description from show at University of Sioux Falls, March 2008)

# They Are the Water

## A Record of One Week in Haiti

They Are the Water is composed of work I have produced since returning from a medical mission trip to Haiti in October of 2007. The trip was organized by Mission Haiti, which is a group that brings together church members with medical backgrounds from around the United States to visit Haitian villages, bringing medical supplies and personnel to provide whatever help they can to people without any other access to medical facilities. Our home for the week was at an orphanage in a town called St. Ard, which has one of the best clinics available in Haiti. From an American perspective, the facilities would be considered rudimentary and unsanitary, but in Haiti it was one of the best available to the people who live there.

We drove to different villages each day, leaving before dawn so that we could arrive and accomplish as much as possible before having to return to the orphanage in the early evening. We could not stay out after dark because the roads are very dangerous and many people, especially foreigners, can be kidnapped for reward money. Each village was a different experience and had its own set of challenges and needs. We had to hike to some of them, up to an hour and a half from the road. Our Haitian guides would carry the medical supplies up the hills and ridges, balancing the heavy load on their heads while walking at a pace most of us had trouble matching.

In each village, we would set up a makeshift medical area in whatever structure was available. Often, it was a cinder-block building with a tin roof and dirt floor which also served as the area school, church, and community center. I worked with the dental team on most stops- washing instruments, holding a flashlight to see into the patient's mouth, and even pulling teeth sometimes. The patients sat in old wooden chairs that seemed ready to break at any time. Space was so limited that we would often be working back to back with patients right next to each other in the dimly-lit room.

All of us were sweating constantly in the heat, which would become more and more stifling as a day wore on and was made even more unbearable by the close quarters and small space. Walking outside of the makeshift clinics would bring the relief of fresh air, but brought the even worse discomfort of seeing the crowds of people waiting outside for treatment. We never made it to all of the people coming for help at any of the villages and always had to board the bus with untreated patients watching as we left.

At many points during the trip, I found myself trying to come to terms with the overwhelming problems facing everyone I would meet. Lack of clean water, sanitation, food, clothing- all of the basic necessities we take for granted are precious commodities. But none of these issues seem to be too much for the Haitians. They have a hope for the future of themselves and their friends and family, which seemed to be embodied by the children in the villages we would travel to. Schoolchildren wearing uniforms, mothers getting their kids ready for the day, and children playing in the streets without a care in the world. Moments like these were striking in that setting, something which seemed much too normal amid the surreal environment.

This exhibition is a partial collection of what I have produced as a subjective documentary of my experience. The entire body of work will be on display at my thesis exhibition on April 25th at USD. For this show, I have hung some of the works that are still in progress and probably will remain so even through the thesis exhibition. I am still working through how to present the experience to a viewing public in a way that accurately reflects the experience and is respectful to the people and places I am representing. My goal is to give viewers some idea of the dire situation in Haiti while not forgetting the hope which still remains despite everything. This work is a result of my personal experiences while in Haiti and serves as both a record and a reflection of the time I was able to spend with the people who live each day in such difficult and challenging circumstances.

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