



Fifteen-year-old Beatrice (above) came to the Mission House in search of medical treatment for a life-threatening machete wound. After the recent death of her mother, Beatrice has no where to live and no food to eat. (At left) Sister Ellen Flynn comforts Beatrice after redressing her wound. The youth is one of the country's 4.2 million children, many who will never see adulthood due to hunger, homelessness, disease and oppression.

and rule is by intimidation. People are very afraid. Soldiers march down the street as a show of force. It is effective in controlling the people."

I asked Maiz if he thought things were different and he told me, "The faces of the people have changed, they are now faces of fear. People go to gatherings — church or school — and they watch and look around because sometimes the soldiers shoot their guns into the crowds."

We talked about the coup and what they saw.

Maiz told us that the day after the coup the soldiers went down in Cite Soleil, the poorest slum in Port-au-Prince. They went in with their guns and shot down 700 people. The bodies were piled up at the ends of the streets.

He said people are very careful. After the coup the soldiers have been looking for Aristide pictures and memorabilia. If they suspect someone has such items, they have broken into homes, destroyed it and beaten the people in the house. People have died for having a picture of the democratically elected President.

Can this be real? And where is the United States, the defender of democracy?

Sunday, Sept. 6: Went to church this morning and I understand what Maiz was telling me about people's caution. There was a sense of careful watching. The Church of Haiti is the one place where hope is alive. No wonder the Army is harassing the Church and its leaders.

Met with some friends for dinner and talked about the state of the country. We talked of the embargo and someone said, "What embargo? Gas is still available. Buildings are still being built. Those who use those supplies are still able to get them."

"Remember, the poor are not using gasoline and the poor are not building grand homes. The poor continue to support the embargo hoping it will have an effect, but the rich simply cross the border to Dominican Republic or fly to Miami for supplies."

I mentioned about the electricity. It goes out daily now, usually from early morning to mid-afternoon. Part of the strategy is intimidation. The "power" shortage is meant to be a show of power. Seems ludicrous to me. It doesn't mean much to the very poor, they have no electricity anyway. I find it irritating.

Water is in short supply and not drinkable. I fall asleep dreaming about standing in the shower.

Monday, Sept. 7: Went up to visit the house where Maiz lives, an orphanage where 27 people live.

I spent the evening holding the newest family member in my lap. Meet Farah, a fragile frightened child of two. Her mother had to give her away because she has seven children and she cannot feed them. She had to choose to give up one in order to be able to feed the others.

Which one of my children would I give away to ensure the rest could eat?

There is something terribly, grievously, morally wrong when any mother has to make such a heinous choice.

Tuesday, Sept. 8: Today was the day to go to St. Catherine Hospital and deliver medical supplies we brought down for Dr. Paul Blough. Paul has been here for 10 years since he retired from obstetrics in the States. He is 78 years young and delivers 12-20 babies every day. His dedication and love of his work shows in his bright smile and the warmth of his words. What a marvel!

We visited all of the different clinics in this facility located in the heart of one of the worst slums in the world. It is an oasis in the middle of hell.

That graphic picture became very real for me as I stood on the porch roof in the children's ward. Beneath me was an open field, a garbage dump and a foul smelling open air latrine. Scattered around were women and men in squat positions. Paul reminded me that there are no "rest rooms" in Haiti and I realized what I was seeing.

In this rocky murky cesspool was a group of eight people with shovels, digging in the excretion and garbage. They were digging a foundation to build themselves a home. How could I be witnessing such misery?

Wednesday, Sept. 9: Today met Sr. Martha, who works in Aquin in the southern part of the country. She told me of the trials they are undergoing. Travel is not safe and they only travel in pairs now.

She told me what had happened to another Sister who found herself alone after dark. The Sister was stopped by the military at a checkpoint and detained for over an hour. In that time she was subjected to a full body search, all for intimidation.

The army does not like having religious here and many priests and religious have been arrested or detained. The army sees the preaching of the Gospel message as a subversive threat. Martha told me of the arrest of a parish priest in Jeremie and how the Army closed the Church.

She asked that we pray. "On those days when I become discouraged, I know it is your prayers that gives me what I need to continue," she confided. She lays her life on the line, literally everyday to walk with the poor and live out the gospel message and all she asks is that we pray. I shall pray unceasingly!

Thursday, Sept. 10: We talked this evening of the demonstrations that took place in Washington, D.C., yesterday. There was a rumor of a demonstration here in support but friends here informed us, "No, no there are no more demonstrations in Haiti."

We watched a video tonight called *Haiti: Dreams of Democracy — Killing a Dream*. I am sure if the military knew we had this tape they would come in here, take the tape, destroy the house and beat or kill us. What a

terrifying reality. I understand why people are so cautious of what they say. I see the fear in their faces and taste the terror in the air.

The video does a good job of describing how Democracy came about with President Aristide and how it is dying under repression. Needless to say the copy of this video here is guarded carefully.

Friday, Sept. 11: Beatrice came by today to have her bandage changed. Meet Beatrice, age 15. Beatrice came into our lives earlier this week and will never leave my heart. She was slashed by a machete on the face, leaving a gaping wound with bone fragments protruding from it.

Without extensive treatment, she will die from this wound. But she is a child of the streets with no access to medical assistance. Her mother died recently and now Beatrice has no where to live and no food to eat. She came to the Mission House hoping someone could help her. Divine guidance?

Dr. Mike treated her wound and instructed Sr. Ellen on continuing treatment. We made arrangements at St. Catherine's Hospital for her to have the surgery she will need. She suffered her pain silently and bravely. Mike bought her a pretty red dress that brought a smile any language can understand.

A child, a mere child trying to stay alive against all odds. Of Haiti's population of six million, 4.2 million are children. Beatrice, one of Haiti's children, may never see adulthood because of hunger, homelessness, disease, and oppression. Beatrice will haunt my memory and conscience incessantly and evermore.

Saturday, Sept. 12: Today is our last day here, a time we have all been dreading. It means we must say goodbye to Maiz and leave him in this land of no opportunity.

We have tried for years to get him to the States but all efforts have failed and there is little hope. Maiz and I talk about my family and it pained me to see the grief on his face and the unspoken words, "My family of Mike and Jason are leaving and I cannot be with them."

We leave to go to the airport, each in our own place of sorrow. As I dried my tears, my sadness was replaced by anger at our government's policy toward Haitian immigration.

As the anger swirled around in my head, I was confronted with another reality. As we were heading down the hill to the airport, six brand new vehicles came screaming up the hill loaded with soldiers in full armament.

My question immediately, "Now, where do you think the money came from to buy those vehicles and arms?"

No answer, never is the question answered. At the airport we say goodbye to Sr. Ellen and promise to pray for her and all of Haiti.

As the plane flew over the mountain tops of this tropical paradise turned violent and depleted, I kept asking myself a question over and over: "Does God still hear the cry of the poor?"

Ecker is director of Bethany House of Hospitality, 169 St. Bridget's Drive, Rochester. She and her husband, Deacon Thomas Ecker, are members of St. Joseph Parish in Penfield.



A child of the streets offers a friendly greeting. Cite Soleil, one of the worst slums in the world, is home to more than one million people who live without water, electricity and sewer system.