

TIME LINE  
OF **HELP**

**1982:** Parishioners from St. Boniface Catholic Church in Quincy's Germantown neighborhood hold a Walk for Hunger to help the poor in Quincy. They decide to donate half of the proceeds to Mother Teresa's home for children in Haiti.

**1983:** The Rev. Gerald Osterman, then pastor of St. Boniface, and a group of 11 parishioners travel to Port-au-Prince, Haiti, to deliver the money.

**1984:** The group makes its first visit to Fond des Blancs, a rural region in southern Haiti.

**1986:** An immunization project is begun to vaccinate Fond des Blancs residents. The St. Boniface Haiti Foundation builds a house in Fond des Blancs where volunteers from the United States can stay.

**1987:** St. Francis Xavier School is built in Fond des Blancs.

**1989:** A local clinic is enlarged and stocked with medicine. A Haitian citizen is brought to the United States for medical care.

**1992:** A 20-bed hospital is dedicated. An American nurse is hired as administrator. A year later, an American pediatrician becomes the hospital's medical director.

**1994:** The first Haitian physician joins the staff. American volunteers visit two to three times a year.

**1996:** A Haitian doctor takes over as medical director. Catholic nuns from the Daughters of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul arrive to administer the hospital. For the first time, medical teams from Jacksonville, Fla., are among those who come to help.

**1998:** An American surgeon performs surgery in Fond des Blancs for the first time. Twenty-eight surgeries are performed in four days. Volunteers from Lewiston, Maine, start visiting.

**1999:** Solar-powered electricity is installed at the hospital. A donated ambulance is used to transport patients with serious illnesses to and from Port-au-Prince, 70 miles away.

**2000:** An operating room, nutrition center and dental clinic open at the hospital. The St. Boniface Haiti Foundation rents a house in Port-au-Prince so Fond des Blancs students can live there to continue secondary education.

**2001:** The foundation starts building homes for Fond des Blancs' neediest residents. A self-sufficiency program is begun to provide families with food, clothing and education allowances. Families are given goats and other livestock to use for food or sell at market.

**2002:** A nutrition program provides food for malnourished children and families, elderly, and people with tuberculosis and AIDS. Two Catholic chapels are built in remote sections of Fond des Blancs. The hospital is connected to the Internet via satellite.

**2003:** More than 32,000 patients expected to visit the hospital. Fifteen groups of volunteers from across the United States, including four surgical teams, will visit. A program called Born to Live is launched to prevent the transfer of HIV from mothers to newborns.



■ Joe Debreus, left, and the Rev. Gerald Osterman serve as pallbearers in a funeral procession for 13-month-old Bethilene Buissereth.

# A tiny life flickers and is **GONE**

■ **HAITI**  
Continued from Page 1

In complete darkness, she carried her sick daughter down a mountain and over dirt roads.

The walk took three hours. It would prove too long.

Bethilene Buissereth died of dehydration shortly after reaching the hospital. She had diarrhea.

The next morning, seven of us piled into the hospital's SUV to take Bethilene home to be buried.

"This day is like so many others," Randolph resident Nannette Canniff, director of the St. Boniface Haiti Foundation, said as we bounced along. "It unfolds before you by the half-hour. It's based on people's needs."

The road we were traveling came to an end, and the funeral procession proceeded on foot for several hundred yards up a steep, rocky hill.

As we reached her house, Benitha's screams mingled with the cries of her four other children. Brothers and sisters watched as baby Bethilene returned home in a box. Their mother fell to her knees.

A moment later, Benitha picked herself up and went inside a simple concrete house to nurse her 3-month-old son. In Haiti, people seem to trudge on through the pain.

I stood there, feeling like an intruder who had shoved my way into the most personal of moments. I couldn't even say "I'm sorry" in Creole.

The family crowded into the house to surround baby Bethilene's coffin as the Rev. Gerald Osterman, a priest from a parish in Everett, said a prayer. I stood back, but Jean Phillippe Buissereth, the baby's father, motioned for me to join them.

As we stood there, a mix of English and Creole words

floating through the room, I tried to envision the other children playing with their sister a day or a week or a month before.

Daphnee, 7, is beautiful, with an innocent face and wide eyes. Her hair was arranged in neat rows of braids. Jean Felix is 5; Natalie, 3. At 3 months old, Pierre Roody will only know his older sister through stories told years from now.

I watched their faces and wondered: How do you explain to children that their sister died of a stomachache?

Afterward, as men searched for tools to build a proper coffin, Benitha insisted we stay for coffee. Her daughter lay dead in a box, her children were scared and confused, and she insisted on entertaining a group of strange "blancs," the Creole word meaning "whites" and applied to all foreigners.

In Haiti, making coffee involves physical labor. A thick, heavy stick is used to grind beans in a barrel. Up, down. Up, down. I watched, and could almost hear my doctor warning me not to drink the water.

We waited for the coffee, and Gary Higgins, the Patriot Ledger photographer traveling with me, kept busy taking pictures of the children standing quietly outdoors. Nannette had told us the day before that some Haitians don't know what they look like. Mirrors and cameras are rare in the back country.

The children's eyes grew wide with fascination as they looked at images of themselves on the camera's digital display screen. They smiled despite their sadness, and Pierre Roody, naked from the waist down, spit up as Nannette bounced him on her lap.

The coffee came in miniature white cups that could have belonged to a child's tea set. I wondered how I could discreetly dump it out.

And then came the rain. Not a few drops, or even a steady drizzle. The water pelted down in heavy, almost angry, streams.

We filed back into the small, concrete house, and as I stood next to the cardboard box where little Bethilene lay, there was nothing to do but watch the rain. Her father politely offered me his chair.

Nannette was still playing with Pierre Roody when she casually said, "I hope we don't have to spend the night."

The thought horrified me. I was stuck in a house in rural Haiti with a family of strangers, a dead baby and coffee I couldn't drink. I'm embarrassed to admit it, but one thought that came into my mind was that I didn't have my bug spray.

The satellite phone that before seemed like a lifeline now sat in my bag on the floor, useless. I played out a pretend conversation in my head:

"Hi. I'm trapped in Haiti. Come get me."

"Where are you?"

"Take National Route 2 out of Port-au-Prince for maybe four hours. Make a left on a dirt road. Drive through two rivers. I'm on a mountain. There's no address, but there are chickens wandering around the yard."

The rain finally did stop, and as we said goodbye, the family thanked us again and again.

I stared at the house where I was afraid to spend the night and realized these people spend their lives here. For me, Haiti was a blip in a world of air conditioners, big-screen TVs and dinners out with friends. In their world, children die of diarrhea.

And yet on this day of unimaginable pain, they made me coffee. They offered to stand so I could sit. They smiled and thanked us just for coming.

*Karen Eschbacher may be reached at [keschbacher@ledger.com](mailto:keschbacher@ledger.com).*



■ Bethilene Buissereth's grandmother wears her pain on her face.



■ The Rev. Gerald Osterman leads a grieving family in prayer.



■ Nannette Canniff eases a brother's and sister's pain and gives their mother a reprieve by holding 3-month-old Pierre Roody.

## THIS SERIES: **DAY BY DAY**

Through 20 years of effort, a South Shore church group has touched the lives of a desperately poor people in Haiti. This is the story of that mission, and how it has persevered and expanded. A Patriot Ledger reporter and photographer went to Haiti to tell the story of the group's remarkable achievement.

- |   |  |  |   |
|---|--|--|---|
| <p><b>TODAY:</b><br/>Basic medical care is saving lives</p> | <p><b>MONDAY:</b><br/>New homes become the foundation for a better day</p> | <p><b>TUESDAY:</b><br/>The everyday struggle for food and water is eased</p> | <p><b>WEDNESDAY:</b><br/>Education and jobs provide hope for the future</p> |
|---|--|--|---|