■ Dolph Descolline, 13 months, weighed just more than 9 pounds when he arrived at St. Boniface Hospital. A week later, he is 2 pounds heavier and gaining strength.

# Matters of life and DEATH

■ **BONIFACE**
Continued from Page 1

other diseases that continue to ravage Haitians.

In the years since, they have touched tens of thousands of lives. Last year alone, the group raised nearly $1 million for the people of Fond des Blancs.

In addition to providing medical care, the St. Boniface Haiti Foundation has built houses, a school and two churches for Fond des Blancs residents. It launched programs to feed starving children, help men and women find work and provide livestock so people can eat and eke out a living at market.

Nannette Canniff has dedicated her life to Haiti. The mother of 10 runs the foundation out of her Randolph home and has traveled to Haiti dozens of times in the last two decades.

"God has blessed me with a good mind and good health, a good husband and a good family," she said. "I have the ability to come to another country where people don't have what I have and try to make things better.

"I think there's enough goods in the world for everybody, there's enough food in the world for everybody. It's just not shared."

Health care remains the group's primary mission.

Today, the hospital has a 24-hour emergency room, an operating room, a dentist's office and a nutrition center. Serving a region of 45,000 people, the three doctors, six nurses and one dentist who work there make 30,000 visits with patients each year. Next month, a doctor trained as an obstetrician and gynecologist will join the staff.

■ Fabiola Carrenat and her father, Beito, watch as a nurse adjusts an intravenous tube in her arm. The 5-year-old contracted typhoid fever after drinking bad water.

On one morning late last month, nearly every bed in the hospital is full.

In the pediatric ward, 5-year-old Fabiola Carrenat appears almost lifeless as she sleeps, her arms and legs sprawled out and her eyes draped closed. Her father sits patiently, staring at her sick body, as if willing her back to health. He has not left her side in days.

Later, he will hold her hand as she slowly shuffles around the perimeter of the hospital's courtyard.

Fabiola came to the hospital with a high fever and abdominal pain. Doctors say she drank bad water and has typhoid fever. Without proper treatment, typhoid can kill. Fabiola will survive.

In another room, an 89-year-old woman listens as doctors and nurses making their morning rounds discuss her condition. She was admitted almost a week before with dangerously high blood pressure, and doctors suspect she has kidney problems. Now, her blood pressure has come down, and medicine can control her other ailments. She will be released the next day.

The opportunity to receive treatment for such illnesses is less than extraordinary by American standards. But not in Haiti.

Fond des Blancs is dotted with mud huts; running water and electricity remain unimaginable luxuries here. Located less than 70 miles from Port-au-Prince, Haiti's capital, the journey can take more than five hours by car over roads riddled with crater-like potholes. This is not a concern to most people in Fond des Blancs, who count themselves lucky if they can afford a donkey.

The Rev. Gerald Osterman, who was pastor of St. Boniface Church when the group first traveled to Haiti, sat three weeks ago on the hospital's roof below a star-cluttered sky.

Before the hospital opened, the local parish priest, who is traditionally charged with caring for the sick in rural Haiti, had "a small little clinic with a dentist's chair and a bottle of aspirin for 30,000 people," said Osterman, who is now assigned to Immaculate Conception Parish in Everett.

People here died of conditions like malaria, typhoid, respiratory infections and diarrhea because they couldn't get to a doctor in time, or because they couldn't afford the medicine.

They still do, but less frequently.

"For the people, it's like God on Earth," said Jean Baptiste, one of the doctors – all Haitian – who work at the hospital.

On Fridays, the hospital's busiest day, about 150 people visit. They may trudge through mud 4 inches deep or wade through rivers where women scrub clothes against rocks and children bathe. For some, the journey takes more than a day. Occasionally, pregnant women in labor are carried on chairs hoisted above the shoulders of village men.

Hospital staff fan out on weekends and travel as far as 25 miles to vaccinate children in remote villages. Surgeons from the United States visit four times a year to perform operations. In the most severe cases, like a young girl who had congenital heart disease, patients are flown to the United States for surgery.

For people like James Joseph, the 15-year-old boy who could not eat, the hospital is a lifeline.

James now slurps down chicken soup prepared by the hospital's cooks. Being sick has kept him from school, but he's hoping to go back now.

Asked how the hospital has changed his life, James' response in Creole is simple, but it speaks volumes: "I'm not sad."

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## HOW TO HELP

For more information on the St. Boniface Haiti Foundation visit www.haitihealth.org.

Donations can be made online or mailed to St. Boniface Haiti Foundation, 14 Pond Lane, Randolph 02368.

People interested in making nonmonetary contributions of medicine or other supplies, or who want to learn more about the foundation's work retreats to Haiti, should call 781-961-6927.

## ON THE WEB

To view more photographs from this series and a daily slide show please visit The Patriot Ledger at **www.ledger.southofboston.com** and then **click on** the link for our **special reports**.

## FACES OF HAITI

■ **Doctors Jean Baptiste, right, and Inobert Pierre make morning rounds at St. Boniface Hospital. Baptiste says young people in Haiti grow up with little hope of escaping poverty.**

The first time Jean Baptiste visited the neighboring Dominican Republic, he nearly cried.

"If you go to the border there's a bridge over a river," he said. "Part of the bridge is beautiful. Part is really ugly. The really ugly part is Haiti. It's really hard to see that."

Baptiste, one of three Haitian medical doctors at St. Boniface Hospital, stares at his hands as he tries to explain what it is like to grow up in a place so poor that most Americans cannot possibly imagine it.

It is even hard to dream, he said, when everyone around you is struggling to eat, and jobs are reserved for the fortunate few.

"We have a few amount of kids, maybe their parents are educated, maybe they have some dreams," he said. "But a really few, few amount of kids can realize their dreams."

Baptiste counts himself lucky. Each year, the only state-run medical school in Haiti accepts about 100 applicants. Five thousand students applied the year he was accepted.

After working in a Port-au-Prince hospital, Baptiste, who is in his 30s and single, joined the staff of St. Boniface Hospital in Fond des Blancs three years ago.

He lives in a room above the hospital and makes $13,200 a year.

In a country where the annual per capita income is $250, he might seem wealthy. But he does not live the life of a doctor in the United States.

"I cannot buy a house," he said. "My car is from 1988."

## HERE AND THERE

■ **St. Boniface Hospital is less than 70 miles from Haiti's capital, Port-au-Prince, but the journey can take more than five hours by car.**

### Numbers that count
### HEALTH CARE

| | Haiti | Massachusetts |
|---|---|---|
| **Life expectancy** | 52 | 78.4 |
| **Infant mortality rate** (per 1,000 live births) | 79 | 5 |
| **Child immunization** | 33.5% | 81% |
| **Per capita health spending** | $21 | $4,887 |
| **Physicians** (per 100,000) | 25 | 350 |
| **Nurses** (per 100,000) | 10.7 | 2,031 |
| **Number of hospitals** | 49 | 68 |
| **Number of hospital beds** (per 100,000) | 90 | 262 |

SOURCES: World Bank, U. S. Census Bureau; World Health Organization; Massachusetts Department of Public Health. Data from 1994 to 2002.

MICHAEL BERTRAND/The Patriot Ledger

## LINKS TO THE SOUTH SHORE

■ **Bob O'Leary of Braintree**

A nickel at a time.

Since 1989, Bob O'Leary has raised more than $12,000 for the St. Boniface Haiti Foundation.

Each month, the 73-year-old Braintree resident makes his rounds to the homes of friends, relatives and just about anyone he knows in Greater Boston willing to stash away soda cans, beer bottles and other recyclables worth 5 cents a pop. He fills up his trunk, and sometimes his back seat, and then carts the empties off to a redemption center.

He sends the proceeds – at least $200 a month – to the St. Boniface Haiti Foundation. If he falls short of collecting 4,000 cans, he chips in his own money to make up the difference.

"I'm just a deliveryman, the can man," the widower and father of four insists. "I get enjoyment out of doing it because I know it's going to the needy. It's a group effort."

So far this year, O'Leary has raised $2,678. Last year his donations totaled $3,852.

A retired Boston police sergeant, O'Leary began his collection effort in 1982. He and some other parishioners at St. Mark's Church in Dorchester decided good money was going to waste because cans from church functions were simply being trashed. The group set out to change that and dubbed themselves the St. Mark's Salvage Crew.

For the first few years, the parishioners donated the cash to a priest who worked with the poor in Brazil. When the priest died a few years later, a friend told O'Leary about the St. Boniface foundation.

O'Leary has never been to Haiti and knows little about the country. The only pictures he has seen were in a newsletter published by the St. Boniface foundation. He has never even met the people who run the organization. But he knows this: Haiti is among the world's poorest countries. And that's enough.

"If they're in that range they can use all the help they can get," he said.