



■ A man carries sacks of imported American rice on his shoulders in the Haitian capital, Port-au-Prince.



■ A man uses a machete to down a tree that will be smoldered and turned into charcoal for cooking.

## PERSONAL JOURNAL

Thursday, Aug. 28

You're back in the car, heading toward Port-au-Prince, toward the airport, toward America, toward a place that seems to be separated from here by centuries, not miles.

A construction crew is out on National Route 2, trying to repair one of the many stretches of road where there's not much road at all.

The Rev. Gerald Osterman says the crew should keep going, right to the dirt road that cuts through Fond des Blancs, then on to St. Boniface Hospital.

Your driver, Jean David Edume, leans out the window and says something in Creole, passing on the advice to the men.

He smiles. They said OK, he says.

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In Port-au-Prince, President Jean-Bertrand Aristide's face stares down from a billboard, as if watching every move within the city.

He looks out on a scene like many others in Port-au-Prince: Traffic is stalled, a pile of trash festers by the road, vendors hawk bottles of soda and bags filled with water.

Aristide does not rank high on the U.S. government's list of favorite world leaders.

But Nannette Canniff is more kind. She's been visiting Haiti for 20 years and says she's seeing new roads and schools built for the first time.

She's met Aristide several times, sat in his house and shared her thoughts on Haiti.

"I don't see Aristide as being the bad person painted in our press," she says. "He has always been a man for the poor. His parish was in Cite Soleil. For the first time, the rich are feeling a pinch. He wants to have taxes. They don't even pay their electric bills."

"They say things have never been so bad as they are now. If you've come for 20 years, you know that's not true."

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You drive past Cite Soleil, the poorest of the poorest slums. A shantytown of tin shacks leaning against each other for support. It seems to go on forever.

Not much later, you're driving through an upper-middle-class neighborhood. If not for the dirt and rock roads, you could almost imagine the large concrete houses in a town back home.

Father Jerry, as the Rev. Osterman is almost always identified, is looking for a house. A Haitian woman from his parish in Everett is applying for a visa extension and needs a letter from her bishop. The woman who lives here is supposed to have the letter, and the Rev. Osterman is to retrieve it.

You drive up to a heavy, rust-colored gate that hides the house from passers-by. Edume, the driver, parks and knocks, then knocks again.

Someone finally emerges, but Father Jerry leaves empty-handed. The woman does not have the letter yet. He asks her to send it by DHL, the shipping company, when it arrives. Back in the car, Father Jerry sounds skeptical when he asks Edume if the woman understood. He says he hopes the letter will arrive, and soon.

It's only a short drive to the airport from here.

Edume hands over your bags and thanks you for visiting his country. He tells you to come back.

You promise, at the very least, not to forget.

## 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.

**SATURDAY:** Basic medical care is saving lives

**MONDAY:** New homes become the foundation for a better day

**TUESDAY:** The everyday struggle for food and water is eased

**TODAY:** Education and jobs provide hope for the future

### ■ HOPE

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have been putting people into the operating room because they didn't have any room for them."

The foundation has grown and expanded its mission during its two decades by enlarging the hospital, launching programs to feed and shelter Fond des Blancs residents, and paying for education in an area where people cannot otherwise afford it.

Last year, the foundation raised more than \$950,000 for the people of Haiti, the poorest country in the hemisphere.

What began as a local organization now draws volunteer workers from Florida, Illinois and Maine. In 20 years, 890 people have made the journey, including an entire medical team from a hospital in Florida.

"What I'm hoping by bringing so many people is that they will be touched and help other people somewhere else in the world, in their own country," Canniff said.

The Rev. Osterman and Canniff each travel to Haiti four or more times a year, and have been doing it for 20 years. Both know they won't be making that trip forever.

They speak confidently, however, about how the foundation and the help it provides will continue.

"We have been thinking about that," said Canniff, who is 66 and the mother of 10 children. "Fortunately, I'm in good health, but at best I can do 10 more years."

The Rev. Osterman is 61 and is assigned to a parish in Everett. He said there are young people on the foundation's board of trustees and others who are



■ Trash fills a drainage channel along the streets of Port-au-Prince.



■ Children frolic in a drainage stream after a heavy rain in the village of Tapion.

volunteering to spend a year or longer in Fond des Blancs working with the foundation. These may be the people who will become the new leaders when the need arises, he said.

Until then, the Rev. Osterman and Canniff are constantly looking for new ways to help.

The Rev. Osterman, for example, is searching for a product, possibly gourmet coffee, that the people of Fond des Blancs can cultivate and export. He is looking for a venture capitalist willing to help get the project into the ground.

More immediately, the St. Boniface Haiti Foundation plans to launch a senior housing project in Fond des Blancs where three or four elders without family can live together. They would be enrolled in a nutrition program and nurses would make regular visits.

As for health care, the Rev. Osterman said he eventually expects the hospital to open satellite clinics in remote villages in Fond des Blancs so people don't have to walk many miles to see a doctor, often carrying a sick young one or a failing elder.

Canniff insists she and the others who built the foundation have taken as much from Haiti as they have given. And the people of Fond des Blancs, she said, deserve credit for persevering, even smiling, through the hardships that surround them.

"We could not have done anything without the community support, and they cannot do it without us," she said. "It is a mutual marriage."

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# Faith and **GROWTH**

## LINKS TO THE SOUTH SHORE

Sheila McIntyre climbed into a pickup truck for an unbearably bumpy ride over dirt roads to help immunize Haitian children.

It was nearly two decades ago when McIntyre and a small group of companions traveled Haiti's back country and found themselves complaining a little about the less-than-ideal ride. But as the truck pulled up to the throngs of waiting parents and children, something happened: The Haitians started cheering their arrival.

The parents applauded

us for coming but they were the ones who walked miles," said McIntyre, the widow of former Quincy Mayor James McIntyre.

The image of little girls wearing what was likely their only dresses, with colorful ribbons in their hair, remains locked in her mind. McIntyre, 71, has been to Haiti twice, in 1985 and again the following year. It has been 17 years since she last visited, but she can't shake the memories. She doesn't want to.

She still serves on the board of trustees of the St. Boniface Haiti Foundation,

and she helped organize the group's annual dinner tonight to celebrate its 20th anniversary.

She hopes to return to Haiti in the next few years.

"I will never forget their appreciation and dignity and serenity," she said. "Once you've gone, you can't forget it. I haven't been in so many years, but I still feel connected."



■ Sheila McIntyre of Quincy.

## HERE AND THERE

### Numbers that count EDUCATION & ECONOMY

	Haiti	United States
Literacy	52.9%	97%
Enrollment in primary school	54%	95%
Enrollment in secondary school	22%	97.5%
Teacher/student ratio in primary school	1:50	1:16
Per pupil expenditure	\$43	\$7,216
Workforce in agriculture	66%	2%
Passenger cars per 1,000 people	4.4	489.2
Unemployment rate	70%	5.80%
Per capita income	\$250	\$25,237
Minimum wage	\$2.30/day	\$5.15/hour

Sources: CIA World Fact Book, Pan American Health Organization, UNESCO, Beyond Borders, UNICEF, National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Census Bureau: Census 2000, Pan American Health Organization, U.S. Dept. of Commerce; World Resources Institute

MICHAEL BERTRAND/The Patriot Ledger