

## Disconnected:

Living in Haiti and dependent on Haitian cell phones was often a frustrating event. My cell would only connect when I was standing on one certain step or the rock next to it. A new cell phone required I stand up to make a call, and then I could sit back down, IF it was not too cloudy. Frequently calls would disconnect when the other party answered or within a few seconds of conversation. One call could mean frequent re-dialing. From the US I have learned to just "keep dialing" until my party answers.

It seems our entire Haitian experience was a series of disconnections / reconnections. Beginning with our appointment as Long Term Volunteers. After 18 months of working disaster response / recovery in Mississippi we felt called to explore an appointment to Haiti. Both of us were familiar with La Gonave and a recent visit raised awareness of increased poverty on South La Gonave.

After jumping through all the GBGM hoops, making an introductory visit to La Gonave and with church leadership in Port a Prince, we were notified the Jurisdictional Director had received an invitation from the EMH and we were ready to go.

Following the 4 storms of 2008 and an application for GBGM Emergency Grant Application, we discovered the invitation had never been issued or received. This helped us understand some challenges we had faced in working with church leaders. In actuality we never really became the Long Term Volunteers we've identified as the last 4 years.

January 12, 2010 we were at the VIM Guest House in Port au Prince when the earthquake occurred. The internet and cell phone service was seriously compromised with frequent periods of no service or disconnected service. I managed to communicate with home offices in New York until all our colleagues had been located, teams evacuated and food and fuel ran out. We returned to the US.

Since my first visit to Haiti, following Georges in 1995, the image that replays in my mind frequently is how very poor children and old peasants will step off the path into the overgrowth and disappear as a car passes. They sort of blend into the brush and "disconnect." I never had courage to photograph this phenomenon as it speaks more to me of the culture than any other event. It is always sobering and saddens me.

As I prepare to teach the Haiti Mission Study for UMW School of Christian Mission I read all the articles in Response and New World Vision Magazines and the Mission Study Guide. I become aware that our time on La Gonave, just like La Gonave is disconnected from Haiti mission awareness. Few know of the existence of this island and of the 120,000 people who live there in absolute poverty.

A recent book I read on Pastoral Care cautioned about "unseen" people. Those so disconnected their existence is unrecognized and they suffer alone or dependent on others who step "out of the way" or just blend into the scenery. The book made me sad as I recalled finding old ladies living in mud filled apartments in Bay St Louis, long into the response phase.

I'm uncertain if it is possible to illuminate those who have been relegated to a life of shadows. Once disconnected it is difficult to find the right "circuit" that provides visibility. If a tree dies in the forest it disconnects from the forest and returns to the earth.

*Pastor Shirley Edgerton, still connected to La Gonave. July 13, 2011*