

Thinking Tony: We have a friend who went to Bangladesh more than two years ago and has not been able to leave his mission to come home. His family can't understand that, and friends have gone as far as suggesting he is being held hostage. Today, doing final planning before leaving for the US in two days, I better understand Tony than ever before.

We are trying to get off the island before the next hurricane arrives. No boats have made it to the mainland for two weeks and mission air service has been grounded. I'm homesick and this has been the longest, hardest and most frustrating 3 months of our first year here. Yet, as we worked today to find food for the thousands of hungry and miserable, I secretly wished we had not rescheduled our flight.

There is no food on the island. When boats can't get to market on the mainland there is no food for the four weekly markets on La Gonave. With no food and roaring wind and rain the markets just don't happen and small retailers sell out to those few who can buy overpriced food. Fishermen can't fish, gardeners watch sun rotted crops wash down the mountainside in the too late rain, and goats huddle all day under eaves cuddled close to buildings.

People are not only hungry but miserable in the wind and rain. Most homes are little huts divided in the middle to provide two small rooms with a family on each side. Living and cooking is done outside and if there is water to heat or soup of some unspeakable something, it is done on the small porch.

I used to think the old suffer most, but know differently now. The young are fearful and anxious as the storms just keep coming, and days go by with no food to buy even if they had money. Old Madam Connell, with her little braids sticking out all directions, her crooked back and ulcerated leg, makes nearly a daily visit to our office or up our steep hill to assure me, "Bon Desi Bon!" pointing to the heavens. She's lived it before and knows it will get a little better one of these days. Because, "God is so good."

Yesterday we tried something new. We offered to match the funds of one retailer with money to purchase staples in Port A Rocquette. The truck and some guys wallowed the 6 miles in 3 hours to purchase rice and beans to bring back to sell at half price to the community. Their return was greeted by 50 families with cans, bags and towels for purchases of food. The unexpected response quickly emptied bags with many families waiting.

Today we assured those who didn't get food yesterday we would do it tomorrow. and they are on the list. Wonderfully, people without money are helped by those who just bought half priced food. News of other communities in serious need started plans for some similar program for them. Then came the feelings of "how can we leave, with so many needing food?" I thought of Tony.

Shirley, La Gonave, September 4th (Happy Birthday Joe)2008.