

In the Spirit of Nehemiah

Aaron E. Elliott

Copyright © 2012 Aaron E. Elliott

All rights reserved.

ISBN: 1478198877

ISBN-13: 978-1478198871

Batter my heart, three-person'd God ; for you
As yet but knock ; breathe, shine, and seek to mend ;
That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend
Your force, to break, blow, burn, and make me new.

I, like an usurp'd town, to another due,
Labour to admit you, but O, to no end.

Reason, your viceroy in me, me should defend,
But is captived, and proves weak or untrue.

Yet dearly I love you, and would be loved fain,
But am betroth'd unto your enemy ;

Divorce me, untie, or break that knot again,
Take me to you, imprison me, for I,

Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.

-Sonnet 14, John Donne.

CONTENTS

Introduction	Pg 5
1 Pastor Pierre and Nehemiah Vision Ministry	Pg 7
2 The Rocks Cry Out	Pg 18
3 Cholera	Pg 25
4 Gifts	Pg 31
5 The Man with No Face	Pg 37
6 Visions and Dreams	Pg 44
7 An Unforgettable Easter	Pg 47
8 June 15, 2011	Pg 55
9 Fedlaine	Pg 61
10 A Great Morning in Haiti	Pg 67
11 Lightning Strikes	Pg 71
12 Pendulum	Pg 77
13 Voodoo is in the Air	Pg 82
14 Where Can I Go?	Pg 88
15 Do the Poor Know You by Name?	Pg 93
16 Home	Pg 100
17 Appendix 1	Pg 107
18 Appendix 2	Pg 112

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thanks to Dave Rod, Chris Shore, Doug Perrigin, Tim Ayers, and the leadership of Grace Community Church for granting me a one-year leave of absence to pursue this adventure with God and Nehemiah Vision Ministry.

Thanks to my pastor and friend, Keith Carlson, for which none of this would have happened if not for your belief.

Thanks you to Pastor Esperandieu Pierre, Dianne, Nathan, Charissa, and Lemuel, to opening your home and your hearts to a family of crazy Americans.

Thanks to Geoff Wybrow, whose love and life prepared me more than anything else for my time in Haiti.

Thanks to Jay, Amy, Anna, Jeremiah, Jacob and Fifi Shultz, who we will forever share a special bond of love.

Thanks to Kacie Davis, Aubree Dell, Jim, Cheryl, Janessa and Jaime Warner, Adam Burgraff, Brooke Smalley, E'Tienne York, Brodie Herb, Clerice Attis, Lupson, Michel, and all the staff and NVM family of which there are too many to name.

Thanks to Steve Clark and Jonathan Raves for your technical support and for coming to see us during the year. Thanks also to Kristen and Brian Raves, and to Momma Roush for your time spent with us in Haiti. To the 5 teams from Grace Community Church, and the nearly 1000 other people who we hosted in our year...thank you.

Thanks to our parents who always love our kids so well and are the best grandparents in the world, Jerry and Jane Elliott, John and Diane Hanschu, and Wendy Roush.

Special thanks to Curtis Honeycutt and Sara Sterley, editor-in-chief. Without the initial push of help from Curtis, and the long hours invested by Sara, this work would not exist. Curtis also designed the cover, which is on par with his usual awesomeness.

This book is dedicated to all our partners who supported us in prayer and financially throughout our year in Haiti.

In the Spirit of Nehemiah

To All of our Financial Partners:

Alison Brown, Amy Fosnaugh, Amy Manley, Amy Miller, Austin and Linda Kirchhoff, Barry Rodriguez, Bob and Pat Pfeifer, Brad & Heather Witter, Brian and Karin Cain, Brian and Kristen Raves, Cheryl Thornell, Chip and Meredith Mann, Curtis and Carrie Honeycutt, David & Megan Schlueter, Denise and Mike Adair, Doug and Ruth Endicott, Eric & Joanne Smith, Gary and Karen Thompson, Grant & Sara Sterley, Greg & Kathy Guevara, Greg & Teresa Overby, Sharon Van Hoozer, Jeff and Sarah Gibbs, Jeff and Krista Davis, Jerry and Jane Elliott, Jim and Donna Meacham, Jocelyn Post, Joe and Tia Bennett, John and Margo Jurgensen, Jon and Deanna Reinoso, Jonathon Raves, Josh and Joanna Burress, Justin and Carrie Gilliam, Karl and Brenda Zachmann, Kathryn McKinley, Keith and Ros Carlson, Ken and Chyrise Ney, Ken and Diane Klotz, Margie Altekruse, Margot and Wilf Bacon, Mark and Sarah Flagg, Michael Jacobs and Mary Jo Norton, Mike and Diane Palma, Nick and Caroline Pease, Patty and Erica Lindley, John and Paula Raves, Phil and Jill Caldwell, Polly Harrington, Richard and Cindy Benedict, Robb and Kim Logan, Robert Hahn, Russ and Michele Luzetski, Sam and Emily Jackson, Steve and Julie Buczkowski, Steve and Susan Clark, Ted and Jennifer Weaver, Terri Richert, Tim and Sharon Murphy, Timothy and Jennifer Tomlinson, Wendy Roush, and Wesley Addington

To All our Prayer Partners:

Kristen Raves, Adam Burggraff, Amy Manley, Amy Osgood, Amy Shultz, Austin Kirchhoff, Barry Rodriguez, Bob Pfeifer, Brad and Heather Witter, Brian Cain, Brian Raves, Carrie Honeycutt, Catherine Bell, Cindy Benedict, Curtis Honeycutt, Dan Altekruse, Dan Oberski, Dana Huckstep, Dave Rodriguez, David Williamson, Denise Adair, Diane Klotz, Eddie Coatney, Emily Jackson, Eness Jarvis, Gary Thacker, Gary Thompson, Grant Sterley, Jane Elliott, Jay Schultz, Jeff Gibbs, Jennifer Weaver, Jerry Elliott, Joe Miller, Joe Reed, Jon and Deanna Reinoso, Jonathon Raves, Julie Buczkowski, Kacie Davis, Karen Benson, Karin Cain, Kathleen Bloxsome, Kathryn McKinley, Keith Carlson, Kevin Roth, Kim Logan, Krista Davis, Laura Plumer, Linda Kirchhoff, Lisa and Joe Miller, Marcus Casteel, Margie Altekruse, Margo Bacon, Mark Lambert, Mary Speer, MaryJo Hein, Michael Leirer, Michael Poorman, Michele Sheets, Michelle Leach, Michelle Luzetski, Mike Mutterspaugh, Nick and Caroline Pease, ORob Childs, Pam Sardar, Pat Pfeifer, Patty Lindley, Phil Caldwell, Polly Harrington, Rena Childs, Ron Stohler, Ros Carlson, Russ Luzetski, Sam Jackson, Sara Sterley, Sarah Gibbs, Sharon Murphy, Sharon Van Hoozer, Steve Buczkowski, Steve Clark, Steve Heiniger, Susie Belford, Ted Weaver, Terri Richert, Yah Buor, and Yvonne Irish.

And thanks to Shelli and the kids for going on such an adventure with God and with me. May God bless us all.

To connect further with *In the Spirit of Nehemiah* go to:
www.facebook.com/inthespiritofnehemiah

INTRODUCTION

The following is a portion of my story of living in the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere following one of the most devastating natural disasters the island of Hispaniola has ever seen. We are a fairly typical Midwestern family of five, except that we lived in rural Haiti for a year. This is our story.

I decided to write this book for a number of reasons. First, it has become a way of talking about what I have experienced this year. This year has been anything but easy. The blessings are probably more than I have ever experienced in one year, but the cost has been great as well. Writing has been good for me to make sense of the year.

Secondly, I have always wanted to write a book. I have started and stopped many times, but never finished anything. Either I found myself saying things that were unoriginal part-way through, I would get bored of the subject, or I just simply lacked the discipline or confidence to finish. I have always felt like I didn't really have anything worth saying. This time I believe I have found something that I can write that is worth sharing. It is my story, and it is the story of God's faithfulness in a very difficult context.

Finally, I am fully aware that our family could never have done this without the support of so many. There are too many to thank by name. Writing this is my way to say "thank-you," especially to those who gave financially to allow us to come. Thank you for your investment. I believe you have invested well. Thank you also to the people who made up our prayer team. We would write a weekly update to this team to share what was on our hearts and to ask for prayer in certain areas. More often than I would like, I would send a mid-week e-mail asking for prayer over the latest crisis. Like the Israelites who would win the battle so long as Moses had his hands raised over the battlefield and needed his friends to hold up his arms (Exodus 17:8-16), this team has held us together. Thank you...our year here was a team effort.

This is dedicated to all those who supported us.

Just prior to leaving Haiti, I read Paul Farmer's book *After the Earthquake*. Paul Farmer has a voice and perspective that I greatly respect. A medical doctor who has served the rural poor for decades in Haiti, Dr. Farmer also has a view of things from the very top, serving alongside Bill Clinton as a special envoy advising the UN and US policy makers on things related to Haiti. He has one foot on the ground serving at a grassroots level and another foot among the most elite in Haiti. His book offers first-hand accounts of the devastating event on January 12th and concludes with Paul offering two very different possibilities for Haiti over the next five to ten years, one more optimistic than the other. I want to believe in the optimistic scenario.

Haiti is a remarkable place, and her people are even more remarkable. The deep faith and perseverance of these people inspire me. There is a great need for the most basic elements for human survival, things like clean water, adequate food, and proper shelter, but there are also great resources in the spiritual and indefatigable will of the people. One key component for the thriving of Haiti is the spiritual will of the people. As more people come and serve the "men of peace" in Haiti, the men of character, the ones who are called to rebuild, as Nehemiah was called to rebuild Jerusalem, then there is reason for great hope! The people of Haiti can indeed rise from the dust of the rubble.

This is our story of serving one such "man of peace" and the ministry God is doing in one part of Haiti.

1 PASTOR PIERRE AND NEHEMIAH VISION MINISTRY

In the Spirit of Nehemiah

Nehemiah Vision Ministry (NVM) exists to help Haitians move from darkness to light, from hopelessness to eternal life (www.nehemiahvisionministries.org). It is a ministry born in the spirit of the biblical character Nehemiah, the man who helped rebuild the city of Jerusalem and the Jewish nation thousands of years ago. NVM began in 2005 in the small community of Chambrun, just outside Port-au-Prince and sixteen miles to the northeast of Toussaint Louverture airport. The vision for NVM was planted in one man's heart about 20 years prior to the ministry's inception in 2005. That man was Pastor Esperandieu Pierre.

In Pastor Pierre's words:

“As a native of Haiti I desire to see the young people grow, to find out their potential, and develop it and fulfill their destiny. If you were to sporadically go to Port-au-Prince and pick up 100 people from ages twelve to nineteen and ask them, ‘What is your greatest heart's desire?’, I guarantee 90 percent of them would talk of going to Miami or to New York because many of them feel there is no chance to make it here. You need to get out... And with that tendency they probably will not help. One time I was coming from Indiana, stopping in Miami and spending the night in the Motel 6. It was not that clean, and you know, it could be better. But I did not care because I was there for one night, and I was leaving. Many Haitians feel like, ‘I'm here until I can get out of this situation.’ With that tendency, you know they will not get busy trying to fix things. So we would really like to teach them, ‘you are Haitian and you've got the ultimate responsibility to make things different.’ Yes we have partnerships and they are important for us to accomplish our goals, but change will not come until we teach them that it is their job to change it. The Americans cannot change it for them. This is Haiti. You are Haitian. We are trying to teach them and to help them to understand, you are Haitian. We've got a job to

do. And it's huge. January 12, 2010, the date of the earthquake, just increased it. Forty-three years old, I don't know how many years the Lord has for me... but I'm looking to invest whatever the Lord has given me, to see if I could impact what is here, to see if my people could see themselves as becoming an element of solution to Haiti, rather than to join the problem.”

This is Pastor Pierre's story of his beginning.

Born into poverty in defiance of voodoo

“I was supposed to be in a building, and most of those who were to be with me died. You know it's got to be God because I could not know in my wisdom that I should plan to be elsewhere that day. I probably would have been sitting right there and would have seen the concrete coming right over my head. But God spared me, and He's got a purpose for that. And the earthquake has caused many things to speed up.”

These are Pastor Esperandieu Pierre's words. I have heard his story so many times that I joke that I could tell it to teams if he would rather take the night off. Pastor was supposed to be with his classmates at the university in downtown Port-au-Prince on January 12, 2010. Instead, he was in Trinidad with his oldest son, Nathan. Every one of his 62 classmates who were in the building died when the earth shook at 4:53 PM local time.

But I am getting ahead of the story. Let's start at the beginning. Pastor Pierre was born into a very poor community. His family comes from a region known as the Artibonite Valley, a place that sustains itself mostly by rice farming. His father was on his way to another village to sell his rice one day. He left early in the morning while the sun was not quite up and before the heat of the day would set in, leaving on foot with a donkey to carry his rice, no shoes of course. As the sun would rise, the dirt would heat up, and in the heat of the day, you would find people resting at a well-known crossroads, a place where the river flowed and where many trees offered shade in which to rest. It was here that many women would set up shop to sell a little food for people to eat lunch. And it was also here that this particular day, a team of missionaries came to share the good news of Jesus Christ. Pastor Pierre's father was among those listening to the message that day, and he was moved by the Spirit to give his life to Jesus Christ. This changed everything.

His father was the first one to become a Christian in his entire village after hearing this evangelistic message. The missionaries were wise and followed up with Pastor's father a few weeks after his initial conversion. Their encouragement was key in his faithfulness through very difficult circumstances. Being the *only* Christian in the village made him an instant outsider, especially to a village that was greatly influenced by voodoo. Pastor Pierre to this day takes great care in his own evangelistic efforts to be sure and follow-up with any person who makes a decision to follow Christ due to the difference it made in his own father's life.

The local witchdoctors had a lot of power in this community and warned that if Pastor's parents did not come to them for their voodoo rituals, then they would never have children. You can imagine how their faith was tested when the first two children born to them became sick and died within days of their births. Pastor's blood relative, his cousin, was one of the witchdoctors who was cursing Pastor's parents. The pressures were strong. In this area, there is a strong belief also that if a woman has a miscarriage with more than one child, her womb is cursed and the husband should start looking for another wife because she will never have children.

But Pastor's father stayed faithful. He had learned that “if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has gone, the new has come!” (2 Corinthians 5:17). He was not going to have anything to do with voodoo. They stayed faithful, prayed with great fervency, and God revealed to them that if they would boil the water before they gave any to the baby, then the baby would be healthy. Pastor became the third child born, with lots of prayer and the absence of any witchcraft and was named “Esperandieu,” which literally translates “Hope in God.”

Esperandieu has two brothers and six sisters.

Pastor had a typical childhood for a boy growing up in rural Haiti in the midst of very poor conditions. His days were filled with helping his mother, looking after his siblings, and going to school. Pastor was certainly ornery and had his share of discipline from his father, as you might expect from any young boy, but he did well in school and had the opportunity to go to high school in Port-au-Prince. When he landed in the big city, he only had enough money for the first month of school.

God is Personal and Provider

Pastor always thought of himself as a Christian. His father became a pastor and being a Christian is all he knew. But shortly after he was on his own, he learned that being raised in a Christian family does not make you a Christian. There comes a time when you have to make a personal decision. It was at this time that he heard a message in a chapel service where the speaker turned his world upside down. He spoke from John 1:12, and these words became real and powerful to Pastor Pierre:

“yet to all who received him, to those who believed *in His name*, he gave the power to become a child of God.”

Pastor has a Haitian passport. It means he is a citizen of Haiti. But this is just a fact. The truth is that he is a citizen of the Kingdom of God, and he has the power to become a child of God. He doesn't simply belong to the people of Haiti, but belongs to the family of God. Understanding that he is a child of God was the starting point for Pastor for all that God is doing today. As a Kingdom citizen, he has access to the resources of God to become the person God intended him to be.

As a young high school student, unsure of how he was going to pay for school, Pastor began to hang out at a local Christian bookstore. When people would come in and make purchases, he began to help them take their items to their vehicles. One day, a woman had a large number of books, and Pastor helped her carry them to her car. The lady gave him twenty American dollars. That is a huge amount of money to a young Haitian student. He immediately took it in to the owner and explained what happened, and she said that he could keep the money. God was providing.

Pastor is a visionary and entrepreneurial in his spirit, and he has been this way since a very early age. Pastor took some of the money he earned and bought a small camera. All of his fellow classmates were required to provide a small passport-type photo for their school IDs. Pastor started a small business in which he would take the pictures of his classmates and have them printed for a fee, which helped provide for his school fees.

At another time, a pastor in Chicago that was in the same denomination as Pastor's father heard about what Pastor Pierre was trying to do in Port-au-Prince. He offered to pay for his schooling when he couldn't afford it otherwise. I was able to meet this Pastor from Chicago one time and saw how Pastor Pierre was still thanking him. He said that any success he had achieved was attributed to the investment this pastor made long ago. I could see the pride and pleasure in the Chicago pastor's eyes as Pastor Pierre shared these words.

Time and again, God found a way to provide for his schooling until Pastor found himself graduating and earning a scholarship to go to Bible college in Jamaica. When Pastor told his father he was leaving the island, his father wouldn't believe him. It wasn't until Pastor was on the plane and leaving for Jamaica that he finally believed that it was happening.

In the Spirit of Nehemiah

The four years spent in Bible college in Jamaica were exciting and important years. Pastor fell in love and married Dianne, a quiet and soft-spoken woman from Trinidad. She has proven to be an incredible match for Pastor's loud and out-in-front-of-the-crowd personality, helping to provide stability and support. They continue to love and care for one another and are strong partners in the work God has given them.

He also learned so many things that would prepare him for a life in ministry, including a basic construction course. Pastor had built three buildings at the time of the earthquake, including his own two-story home in Port-au-Prince. While most of the homes in his neighborhood suffered great damage or collapsed altogether, Pastor's home and the school buildings on campus at NVM stood strong. Pastor will tell you that God protected them--and that they were properly built.

Towards the end of Bible college, before Pastor's final year, he was preparing to go back to Haiti and start his new life in ministry. It was the fall, and the school was suddenly flooded with all the Haitian students that were supposed to start in the spring. Pastor sought them out and asked them how things were in his hometown. After all, he was getting ready to return. The reports he heard left him with a heavy heart. Politically things were very bad, and there was violence in the streets. The students said he should not return.

One night Pastor couldn't sleep, and he felt led by the Spirit of God to go and read Nehemiah chapters one and two. It was while reading about Nehemiah's heart for his own people and for his homeland that Pastor

began to dream about what a ministry could look like in Haiti that was in the same Spirit of Nehemiah. What would it look like to bring the Kingdom of God to Haiti and help the people recover their identity as the people of God? A vision was born, and it was actually put to paper at this time too. Pastor produced a seventeen page document that would later become the foundation for what we know as NVM today.

But as life would have it, the plan was put on the shelf until the season would come for it to be put into action. Pastor was recruited in 1994 to join the staff of Campus Crusade for Christ and was sent to live and train in Kenya for nine months. After completing his training and some time spent in the United States, he returned to Haiti to begin his work with Campus Crusade. His work with Crusade and the Jesus Film project took him all over Haiti, further entrenching his deep passion and love for his people. Eventually Pastor found himself living back in Port-au-Prince and becoming the National Director for Campus Crusade Haiti.

Hurricanes and Chambrun, the time is now

In 2004, two life altering events came together. First, in September 2004 Hurricane Jeanne caused major flooding and mudslides in the city of Gonaïves. 3,006 people were confirmed dead in Haïti, and the death toll in Gonaïves was believed to have topped 2,000. Every building in the city was damaged by the storm, and 250,000 people were left homeless. It doesn't take much for Haiti to have problems with water. With only 1.4 percent of its trees still standing (the rest having been cut for firewood and charcoal), the water gushes off the mountains and causes massive flooding.

It was at this time that a pastor friend of Pastor Pierre's in Gonaïves called and asked if he could help. He knew that he was a part of this large organization in the United States that had access to resources and wondered if there was any way he could come and help out in the crisis. At the time, Campus Crusade did not have a humanitarian arm to help with disaster relief (today they have organizations like the Global Aid Network: www.gainusa.org) that were crucial in leading the response to the earthquake in 2010). Pastor communicated that they could come and do evangelism or counseling and development, but beyond that, they just did not have the resources to help. The pastor on the other end of the phone put a question to Pastor Pierre that would haunt him, "Are four spiritual laws all you have?"

Fortunately, shortly after that phone call with the pastor in Gonaïves, someone from Canada called with \$10,000 dollars that had been raised for disaster relief. Pastor was able to collect up supplies and take them to meet the needs in Gonaïves, and thus began the first relief work in which Pastor was involved. His work in Gonaïves laid the foundation for much more work in disaster response ministry.

The second thing that happened was Pastor was introduced to Chambrun. The area is a forgotten place and actually reminded Pastor of the Masai Mara in Kenya. It was filled with tall grass and covered in dust. (If you looked closely, you would swear that you could see a lion crouched down in the grass, waiting to spring on its prey). Pastor had a friend from the community named Gestin who invited him and Dianne out to see the conditions of the community. The name "Chambrun" comes from a French word that means "charcoal," because the community was known as a place to buy charcoal for fuel. What Pastor and Dianne found upon arriving there broke their hearts.

Pastor recognized in Chambrun much from his own upbringing. Some 35 years ago, he was one of those children running naked in a village. The children showed signs of hopelessness, most of them hungry, without clothes, living in mud huts mostly unsupervised, with little or no options for school or a future. And then they met some of the young ladies, thirteen and fourteen years old, attempting to breast feed babies. The babies struggled from hunger as the mothers were barely old enough to feed them, not adequately developed physically. Pastor knew poverty, but he experienced poverty at a whole new level. Having seen what they had seen, Pastor and Dianne could not ignore it.

When Pastor was promoted as the National Director for Campus Crusade in Haiti, the late Bill Bright laid hands on and prayed for Pastor Pierre. After prayer, Bill asked if anyone had any questions. It was at this time that Pastor asked the question of what national directors should do when their context included great humanitarian needs, where the greatest testimony to the gospel of Jesus Christ is to meet the basic human needs of people. At that time, Bill Bright explained that Crusade didn't have a way to meet those needs. Their focus is evangelism and discipleship. But he went on to say that national directors have the full blessing of Crusade to start things on their own that will serve the work of Campus Crusade in their home country.

So in 2005, Pastor and Dianne began to pray and realized the time had come to dust off the original plan for Nehemiah Vision Ministry. They found the old plans, began to rework them, and then took \$200 of their own money and started a small school in the village. A couple teachers were hired, 25 kids were enrolled, and NVM began.

Steady Growth

NVM experienced steady growth for the first five years. By the time 2010 came along, Pastor had acquired some land that was a fifteen-minute walk from Chambrun and managed to build two buildings. One served as the primary school building and the other as a preschool/office building. There were a couple of hundred children enrolled in school. There was a dentist who came twice a year to care for the children's teeth. There was a group of medical professionals, doctors and nurses, that would come twice a year to care for the children's health. Things were growing at a steady and manageable pace.

I was in Haiti for the first time in March of 2009. I can remember sitting up on the top of the mountain that overlooks Chambrun and asking Pastor "what do you see five years from now?" Pastor began to describe a full campus, complete with a church, a school, possibly a hospital, a field for crops, a trade school...a whole host of things. I could practically see it as he described it. "And after five years?" I followed up. "And then we go and do it again in another community. I already have some communities in mind!" he said with great enthusiasm.

On January 12, 2010, the five year plan and steady growth that NVM had experienced suddenly went into light speed as the world responded to the great needs in Haiti. Haiti was the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere before over 300,000 died on January 12, 2010. The needs were great, and now Haiti had the world's attention. I was on the ground five weeks after the earthquake helping facilitate a medical team in many of the Internally Displaced People (IDP) camps. So many people came to help that NVM saw unprecedented growth in 2010. A medical clinic was opened, enrollment in the school grew to 350 children, the church ballooned from 500 to 750 in attendance, a dining hall was built, a warehouse was begun, a project to provide housing for visiting teams was started, and many more things all took place. It was a crazy time.

Whom Shall I Send?

In the midst of this, I was invited to come and help serve NVM by serving as a missions coordinator on the ground in Haiti for one year. The invite was completely unexpected and totally caught us off guard. I had been a pastor at Grace Community Church (www.gracecc.org) for nearly ten years at this point. Grace Community Church has always been a special place for me, a source of great healing and growth in my own gifts and leadership, and I recently became really comfortable with a sense of calling to the local church. I was extremely well cast for my role and was challenged and excited by my work.

My wife Shelli's immediate reaction was "ummm, NO!"

To fill you in on a little background...the first time I met Pastor was over a lunch meeting in the summer of 2008. When people from the church want to introduce our church to the ministry they are involved with, I usually take that call. I was excited to meet Pastor Pierre because he was Haitian, and we have a bias for indigenous leadership when it comes to overseas partners. And he was from Haiti, which I knew was a place of great need for people. As a result of that meeting, a meeting where Pastor spoke with such passion for his people that we had to box most of his lunch up because he didn't stop to eat it, we left knowing we wanted to pursue more of a relationship with Pastor Pierre and NVM.

It was in March 2009 that I was first able to visit Haiti. This time, having heard the stories of how things began, having seen with my eyes the progress and work that was taking place, having smelled the trash in the village and witnessing the life-changing difference the school was making in the young children's lives, I was hooked. I wanted to get the people from my church involved in any way I could. Initially that looked like sending our youth pastor to see if NVM could serve as a site to send a youth team. Our youth pastor went in the fall of 2009, and the relationship continued to grow.

When the earthquake hit, the church was deeply moved by the devastation that was being reported on the news. Because of our growing relationship with NVM, we were able to respond and help in some significant

ways. We were able to send two medical teams within weeks of the earthquake. I led the first team in February of 2010. We were also able to help by sending relief food. Kids Against Hunger (www.kidsagainsthunger.org) set up in our gymnasium and close to 1000 people participated in packing food and loading it on forty foot shipping containers that were sent to Haiti. It was a privilege to participate in helping immediately after the crisis.

I was joined by my wife Shelli in leading the third trip we took as a church in July 2010. My wife is a very experienced short-term trip leader in her own right, having taken five or six teams into Guatemala to run medical clinics and do construction projects. She is a pharmacist when she isn't being a wife and mother, and it isn't often that we have an opportunity to lead together. It was while we were leading our team that NVM approached us.

So back to the invitation to move to Haiti. Chip Mann, the acting director for NVM stateside, shared with us that they identified two roles that NVM would like filled by Americans, and then asked us to come fill one of those roles. We talked with Pastor our last night in Haiti, although later he admitted he did not believe we would come. Even though he doubted, he was still faithful to ask. Shelli and I flew home on separate flights from the rest of the team due to some scheduling challenges, and it allowed us to think and pray about this possibility. By the time we landed, we assumed an open hand posture. *As long as God continues to open doors, we will keep walking through them.* This was the attitude we adopted, a very scary position to take I must say.

Over the next four months, so many miracles took place it is hard to account for them all. By August 31st, which was our drop dead date for either getting the approval we needed from my job, or not going at all, I received the phone call. My boss called to say Grace Community Church would be granting me a one year leave of absence. I still remember the exact spot on the road where I was driving with Isabel, my seven-year-old daughter in the backseat, when I took the call. She was the first one I told that we were moving to Haiti, and she cried. Thankfully Shelli, the second person I told, didn't take it quite so hard.

The plan was for us to go and serve for a year, and then I could return to my staff role at Grace Community Church. December would be the date for me to begin my leave. Permission to leave and having the blessing of my local church were the first of many big dominos that needed to fall. When this first domino fell, things moved rapidly. Over the next eleven weeks, many things needed to happen. We needed to raise \$60,000 for our plane tickets, living expenses, medicines, insurance, etc. Shelli needed to find out her options with her job as a pharmacist at Walgreens. Would they grant her a leave or have her resign? We didn't know. We needed to figure out what to do with our house. We did not want to sell it with the plan being to return in a year, but could we find someone to live in it? We would be the first family to move to Haiti, so we needed to pack all the furniture and items we would need for our new place in Haiti. And we also needed to set-up all systems and processes by which teams come to NVM, including build a team of coordinators. Did I mention we only had eleven weeks? Or did I mention I would be in India for two of those weeks in October? We needed miracles if this was going to happen, and it was miracles that we got.

Our small group stepped up and said they would help us in our fundraising efforts. Shelli and I invited a ton of people to our house to share with them our story and invite them to support us financially. I think we hosted three of these events, and it was amazing to see the money and the commitments start coming. I also built a team of over 80 people who committed to praying for us on a regular basis. Walgreens was very committed to Shelli, granting her a leave of absence, and her store manager made it very clear that she would like her back in the same store, which is three miles from our house. We had a young man who is like family to us commit to living in our house. My kids know him as Uncle Jonathon, and he is actually the brother of Shelli's sister's husband. Did you follow that? Like I said, how this all came together in such a short time is nothing short of miraculous.

I can remember one phone call from Shelli very clearly. We were down to a few days left to load whatever we could not pack in our suitcases onto a container that NVM was shipping down. We still needed a dresser for the kid's clothes and a table for our new place. Shelli had twenty minutes as she was running from the library to drop the kids off at the sitter before heading to work. She found both the dresser and table for the amount of money she had in her wallet at the time, which was about 20 dollars. They both were packed, along with everything else we needed, on the container and shipped to Haiti.

I am still not sure how it happened. I mean, I know it was a combination of hard work, a good plan, and tons and tons of support from our community. We had open houses, we shared our story of what God was

doing, we had many people commit to support us in prayer and financially...and it all came together in time. We landed on the ground in Haiti on December 4th, 2010 with two adults, three children, one family dog, and one of the ten bags we originally loaded on the plane. I hoped the luggage being lost in route was not an indication of how the rest of the year would go!

Not Alone

It turns out we were not the only family on this path. Jay Shultz was asked to fill the role of Director of Operations for NVM. I was familiar with Jay from my work with NVM and had met him once or twice before, but I had not met his wife Amy or their three kids, Anna, Jeremiah and Jacob. Jay and Amy were also in the process of adopting a little girl from the NVM children's home, so moving down would allow them to take little Fedlaine into their home while working to complete the adoption. It was definitely a motivating factor for moving, but not the only one. Jay had always envisioned himself in missions from very early on in his life, and he was excited to join Pastor Pierre in Haiti. Jay had been involved with NVM since the first day it started back in 2005 having served as the chairman of the board until December 2010 and currently serving as the secretary of the board of directors.

When we learned that the Shultz family was considering coming down, we wanted to get to know them. We had many fears that seemed natural...what if this family was awkward to be around? What if we didn't get along? What if their kids were super annoying? We went to their house the first time for a cookout with all of these questions running through our minds. Shortly after we arrived, Anna, their sixteen-year-old daughter took our girls to meet her horse. She was instantly cool in my girls' eyes. It was quickly clear that these were great people that we would love to live and work alongside.

The Shultz family became a big chapter in our story of living in Haiti.

The Adventure Begins

On December 4th, we moved in with Pastor Pierre and his family. They were incredibly gracious and hospitable hosts, and our kids loved being there. One of my first tasks was to get our "house" set up out at Chambrun, a circus like tent that would cover much smaller tents that would serve as our rooms. We lived with the Pierres for two weeks, and the adventures began almost immediately after landing. Little did we know what was to come.