

A WARNING SHOT

October 2018

An earthquake is a sudden and unexpected guest who doesn't just enter the room, but fills the whole space. Quickly and without invitation. There is just that instant when the rumble starts before everything starts shaking so badly, and then the whole world is in motion. Violently.

It is so easy to say what you would have done had you been in the one in 2010. You know the rules. Get next to something solid, not under it. But that was then and this is now. Deb is asking where do we go? I am looking around us at the parts of the house that we redid in reinforced concrete and those that are original. Quickly. The walls are reinforced concrete on both sides of the dining room table so we are going under it, rules or not.

The next 20 seconds under the table with my arms wrapped around Deb were the longest week of my missionary career. A lot of things were going on in my head. The first is that this thing is lasting a long time. The second is that we were able to move to the table and get down which means that it is sixish and not one of those seven kind of events. The kinds of earthquakes that are really dangerous shake so bad that you can't move from where you are. Period. And the third through fifth things going on in my head is that this thing is going on forever.

And then it tapered away to nothing. Silence. Everything stopped shaking. Which is a really good time to go outside.

The house is fine. There aren't any (new) cracks. The dishes are still in the cupboards and we are OK. We will be righting the odd file cabinet, and picking up stuff that fell for the next 24 hours but all in all it is OK.

Cell phones still work. A good sign. The internet is working and we start searching the seismic sites to see how bad and where. After a half an hour of searching, we find out that it was directly north of us maybe fifteen miles. The north coast is the edge of the plate. The good news is that it was 'only' 5.9. If we were someplace that was affluent enough to have and be able to adhere to a building code, it would just be another day at the office. Here where life is lived at the lowest common denominator, people build with what they have and with what they can afford. The masons know how much rebar and cement they need to put in a concrete roof for it to stand, because from time to time one drops when they pull the shoring and forms out so they know they need just a little more. There is no allowance for even modest earthquakes.

Growing up the son of a structural engineer, while others were doing preschool, I was in the building and structures track. From the time I can remember, my father gave a detailed running commentary on all bridges, structures, and construction that we passed in the car. My sense of structural analysis and design leans more towards the intuitive.

Which can get you in trouble. Early in my missionary career I knew a family that owned a large bank in Port-au-Prince. They were doing something that didn't look OK on this ten story building and I told them so. Later I could see where the consultants called in from outside the country jackhammered into the side of the building to see if there was enough rebar. I assumed they were also looking at something called the slenderness ratio for a column. They said there was enough rebar and everything was OK. After that I learned to say "That's an interesting way of doing that, I didn't know you could do it that way". 25 years

later, the 2010 earthquake would disagree with their findings. What was left of the building has since been torn down, but I have learned to be careful of what I say to whom.

But Port-de-Paix is in a whole different league. One time I was on an airplane sitting in front of a consultant who went around the world to places like Haiti to troubleshoot their concrete work. I asked him to cut through all the stuff, what is the bottom line in what he sees. He said three things. #1, chlorides in the concrete (either the salt from using sea sand or using sea water to make concrete, #2 the aggregate is too big (people make concrete with gravel up to three inches), and #3 the water to cement ratio is too high. In other words they make concrete that is like soup and is runny. Easy to work with but the more water you put in concrete, the weaker the concrete will be.

There is no beach left in Port-de-Paix because all the ocean sand is in the buildings. The gravel comes out of the river and is smooth and huge. Only recently have local builders discovered hand broken gravel. The water to cement ratio is off the charts. And the amount of cement used is less than my concrete teacher thought possible in his wildest dreams. I often lay in bed at night thinking about Port-de-Paix praying and asking the Lord to keep an earthquake from happening tonight. Huddled with Deb under the table I am wondering how much of Port-de-Paix will be affected.

Everyone I can get on the phone is OK but it is dark and they won't know more until morning. Marc who works with us calls and needs our help getting an airplane or helicopter for a relative with serious head trauma. Our mission hospital has referred him to Mirebalais or Port-au-Prince where they can handle it but he can't bounce over the road. Marc says that the hospitals are busy and there aren't enough doctors.

Reports from the churches are coming in but are spotty and it is dark and raining in some places. Parents in our church are frantically trying to get word from their children doing high school in town that they are OK. Not much to do until morning except figure out where to get some tarps. We try to keep some in inventory. Costco used to sell the best quality and most economical tarp on the planet. We ordered them in after the 2010 quake and they were preferred over all other types of tarps, hands down. They are so good that Costco quit selling them and our stock is way down. I spent a good hour on the internet trying to find the equivalent for triple the price. It is the only sure material thing that I know we will need.

In the morning the administrator at the mission hospital 16 miles away says they are busy but they don't need anything from us. More and more people that I talk to report that there are collapsed or damaged houses in their neighborhoods. The pastor's niece rents a room in a house that split in half, another friend has three collapsed in his neighborhood. A church west and south needs tin to rig up something on eight badly damaged houses, the church closest to Port-de-Paix has 20 houses affected in the neighborhood including five belonging to church members. One of the pastor's Sunday school teacher's houses is most affected.

We don't go to church because the inch of rain in the night will make the road a mess and there may not be anybody there anyhow. With the pastor we strategize that we need to wait until midday for the roads to dry and then drive all the way through Port-de-Paix to the mission hospital at LaPointe on the other side.

There is a badly damaged house before we go up over the hill into town. A 300 pound chunk of concrete beam lies on the bed where someone was resting when the earthquake hit. They say the person is at the hospital. And from then on it is obvious that this crisis isn't made for television. Most of the houses and businesses along the road look fine on the surface. I know where the areas are with the damage but getting off of the main road is something I am afraid to do because I don't want to get blocked on the inside if



300 pound beam that fell on bed. The person who was on the bed when the beam fell is in the hospital.



Home damaged by earthquake near Port de Paix.

more buildings collapse. We pass a concrete portico that has fallen and on one side street we pass concrete block rubble that the government didn't clean up in their before day street clearing efforts. But that could have been any day when someone was doing a little construction. Only when we passed the four story Philadelphia church do I see real damage. The lower story with the windows and doors is all cracked and fissured and the upper story is intact. The building is in danger of falling down any moment. If it doesn't fall, it will have to be taken down. I make a note to self: don't drive back this way in front of a building about to fall.

I see someone who has to be a reporter coming by from the other way in a rental Landcruiser. He doesn't look happy as they speed by. I wonder if it isn't that he was looking for the perfect pictures to show the tragedy here, but most buildings still look OK on the outside. This tragedy is private and individual, spread out among each person with an injured foot, a broken bone, a rented room for school they can't come back to, the disruption of paying a few dollars to relocate that they don't have, days of lost revenue, or a damaged house they can't afford to fix. You can't see it. You can only feel it when you see and talk to people.

At the hospital, the (all Haitian) staff and a visiting team are treating people and moving them through. The administrator, a good friend, says we have to keep everyone moving to make room for the people still pouring in. There is a lot of activity around here for a Sunday afternoon. He doesn't seem to be overwhelmed by it or the Haitian television news crew that he has to break away from me to be interviewed by.

As I leave the hospital, my sense is that injuries will run into the hundreds, most treated and sent home. Foot injuries (as in stuff falling on them) are common, there are broken arms and legs, and a few cases of head trauma. Deaths are somewhere between a dozen and twice that.

Driving away, a woman comes out of a concrete roofed house fast with a two year old hanging from one hand. Emphasis on fast. The intense expression on her face I momentarily mistake for child abuse. Then I notice there are five girls hot on her bumper following in line into the street. And people spilling out of every other house up and down the road. It is obvious that we are having another seismic event that I can't feel because the road is so rough. What I mistook for abuse is the intense concern of a mother getting her child out of danger. And fear.

All the way back through town, everyone is in the street. A gas station is open. Life has to go on in a poor country. There is a motorcycle with three guys on it. One of their feet is wrapped in a huge cloth. The guys with me are telling me it is one of our workers' sons and his foot is broken. I am asking him what he is doing here. Get that moto turned around and beat it back to the mission hospital so they can treat your foot.

I thought the portico over the gas pump was a metal column with a metal frame roof or I would not have stopped to purchase fuel. Once at the pump, on closer inspection I notice that it is concrete. I am going to the bathroom which is not under the concrete roof on a post and timing it to get back to the vehicle when the gas pumping is finished. The pumpist and I joked about the concrete roof while I paid and tipped him. We headed out of town by the road with the least overhanging buildings that I knew of.

With this second earthquake, there is a huge crowd at the bus station as everyone is trying to get out of this shaking town before dark. Pickup trucks are jammed with people piling in. I send Clebert to purchase eggs to meet us on the way out of town. He comes back with his daughters and niece and wants to know if we can give them a ride out into the country. Every motorcycle we see going out of town has two or three

people on the back with lots of household goods. All the motos coming towards us have the driver speeding back to town for another load.

Personally we are physically untouched so far by the human tragedy going on around us. Emotionally, I can tell by my reaction to each tiny aftershock during the night that I am on edge. The buildings and infrastructure that need work or replacing after flunking the 20 second shake test are weighing on me. We still have a list of churches and school buildings that need major work or replacement from the hurricanes of the last two years. And now all this other work crowding to the top of the list like the church building we attend church in.

Sadrack (the Haitian engineer who works with me) and I have time to talk. We feel somewhat vindicated for the amount of rebar and cement we waste (according to some) in foundations and structures. We took the seismic course together after the earthquake in 2010 and know that more powerful events are possible. He says this one is a warning shot. Something needs to be done about a lot of buildings around here.

Other News: Bruce visited the ship in Miami while the Coast Guard was there inspecting it. The Coast Guard is looking into what can be done and would like to see the situation resolved. Please continue to pray. Most of our cargo should still be in good shape. There is a spiritual battle waging over this cargo. Please pray for Mike, the boat owner, who needs Jesus. He also needs to make repairs to the boat to make it seaworthy and pass a Coast Guard inspection.

We are so thankful for you, your friendship, prayers, and support. Thanks to many of you who have responded and prayed for the "ship" to sail and then recently about the earthquake. Your concern and prayers are priceless to us.

Bruce and Deb Robinson

Mailing Address:
Bruce and Deb Robinson
Unit 2269-CROSS
3170 Airmans Dr.
Fort Pierce, FL 34946
Haitibruce@hughes.net

Mission Address:
Crossworld
10000 N Oak Trafficway
Kansas City, MO 64155
Robinson account # 37670
www.Crossworld.org

Special Projects:
ODRINO USA
Tim Harford
20332 Hacienda Ct.
Boca Raton, FL 33498
harf0012@hotmail.com