

# Story of the Haitian Kidnapping and the Escape

*Transcription from a report shared by Sam Stoltzfus, one of the hostages. Shared 12-19-21 with the West Haven Amish-Mennonite Church*

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I stand in fear and trembling. I am rejoicing in what the Lord has done. Thank you for your prayers! **Thank you for your prayers!** God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. We serve the same God as Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who brought them out of the fiery furnace. The same God as Daniel had, and the same God who took Peter out of the prison. An angel appeared and the shackles fell off of Peter's hands and feet. The gates opened of their own accord. People were praying but they didn't really believe he would show up. I proclaim the faithfulness of this same God with rejoicing! The Lord has been walking with us every step of the way.

My thoughts seem to be scattered. It seems we have experienced every human emotion in these past two months, and I feel very emotional this morning. I ask for your prayers. I ask God to take over and give me words. I had only an hour at the most to prepare for this talk. I feel like I have 6 hours of information to condense into 1 hour.

On Friday we shared our story with the FBI. My interview took 6 hours. I had the opportunity to share with them what the Lord has done for us. I shared the Gospel with them, and they were moved to tears. Last evening, I shared with my family for 5 to 6 hours. May God receive 100% of the glory.

Two weeks before we were kidnapped, Christian Aid Ministries sent us an email requesting an update on the Orphan Program. Compared to the Liberian Orphan Program, ours was small and loose ended. None of our workers in Haiti were currently assigned to that program. We asked Dale to take charge since he was warehouse manager/medicine program director and had more free time.

Dale emailed the CAM Ohio Office a few times. Dale himself was only in Haiti for a few months so he asked me if I would contact the director of the Haitian

orphanage. I had been in Haiti for three years and was much more familiar with the Creole language and the Haitian culture. The orphanage was operated by Haitians under the Church of God in Christ Mennonite (Holdeman church). I had never been there but was eager to meet these nice people.

I called the director and asked if we could come to see the orphanage, take pictures to update our sponsors and play with the children. He said, "Yes, sure, come, and bring as many people as you want, and we will give you a tour of the orphanage!" Initially we talked of coming on Thursday until he mentioned that he would keep the children out of school for the visit. I didn't want to keep the children out of school. I learned they went to school outside of the orphanage and not at the compound as I had originally thought. We decided Saturday might work better for both parties.

Saturday October 16, 2021, started out as a beautiful day. Everyone piled into our 15-passenger short nosed van, or *the bus*, as we called it. Dale sat in the driver's seat since he was in charge of this project and Wesley the mechanic sat in the passenger seat. The ladies sat up front where there were more comfortable seats and I sat in the back. Before we left, we had a prayer. We asked that the Lord's hand would be on us today and for safety and protection.

Before we got to the orphanage, we came upon a roadblock. There seemed to still be a few, hot smoldering tires on the road. You must understand that the political unrest in Haiti is much worse than I ever imagined it could be in my three years of experience. This last year especially, things were worse. On any given day when you drove around town there were Haitian protests with roadblocks containing burning tires. This is what happens if people forget God and are sold out to Satan. But God was with us all the way. His will was to be done.

I was in the back when we came upon the roadblock. I couldn't see very well, and I sat tense and stiff in my seat. This roadblock concerned me. You see, Dale was band new to driving in Haiti since he only came a little over two months ago. Personally, if I had been driving, I would likely have tried to slow down well before the roadblock. He didn't. I sometimes have even stopped and gotten out to assess the situation. I may have

talked to the gangsters. Often it is something petty and you can talk them out of it. Dale seemed to speed up if anything. I am not saying he did anything wrong though. We were in the Lord's hands, and we got around that roadblock just fine. Praise the Lord! We were good to go.

The orphanage director gave us a tour. Some of us had a lively game of soccer with the children. Before we left, we were grateful for the snack of fried plantains, fried chicken, and cold drinks.

Soon after 1:00 we were heading North towards Tin Village. We had been planning to go there next as this was pretty much directly on our route and some of the staff had never been there before. At Tin Village they make unique pieces of art, using Bible verses and different sayings all in tin from old metal drums. *Ting, ting, ting*, rings out from the rhythm of many people pounding out souvenirs.

We were about 15 minutes out and I was again in the back seat. Others may have had a different view, but I will tell my side of the story from my observation. Suddenly, up ahead I see a Land Cruiser Ambulance. I don't know if they stole it or what, but it was a real one and it was blocking half of the road. Gangsters were running around with assault rifles. My first impression was that this was Haitian National Police, and we were in a hot area - we had to get out of here! Suddenly I was like, **No! NO! This is the Papaya gang!**

I had known there was gang activity in this area, and I had thought it was the Papaya gang. I had commented the night before that I hoped the Papayas (a tropical fruit that grows on trees) would all stay in the trees when we were in the area.

Our vehicle did a quick U-turn on the road, and we were heading south again towards the orphanage. We thought we were going to get away. We were good to go, even if we didn't know how we were ever getting back to the CAM base.

Then a truck started passing us to the left. The back of the pickup truck was full of men with assault rifles. We thought if they passed us, it would be no big deal: maybe they were after someone else. Suddenly they cut in directly in front of us. Tires screeched and we stopped short. We nearly T-boned them right there.

Now we were looking down the barrels of various assault rifles.

The staff at the CAM base had been planning to have communion on Sunday, which was the very next day. In years past, I have never had a better preparatory service. My life flashed before me as I was looking down the barrels of those assault rifles. My heart was pounding, but yet, I trusted in the Lord through the whole process. I felt I was ready to go to Heaven if God wanted to take me Home.

One of our staff members had been robbed twice in Haiti in ten months' time. Robbed at gunpoint. Haitians do that. You expect it. There are also kidnappings in Haiti nearly every day. But lots of them are other nationalities. I expected I may get robbed in Haiti, but I never expected to get kidnapped.

Soon these men with guns motioned for us to turn around. We headed back towards Titanyen, towards the CAM base. Great! This was the direction we wanted to go: maybe they were letting us go. We were crying out to the Lord, "Lord, save us. Deliver us out of here." Maybe they saw we were a whole busload of white people and didn't want to mess with Americans. Maybe ...

It seemed like they had moved the ambulance farther down the road to the south and again blocked the road. There was a very narrow road leading off to the right. That road was lined with walls on both sides. The road was full of gangsters again and they stopped us. Some rushed up to the windows and Dale, the driver, held up both hands.

They motioned for us to go down the narrow road. My heart sank. We were off of the main road. There was a box truck in front of us, and a Prado Land Cruiser (SUV type vehicle) that we couldn't see, in front of that. They were rounding up people to kidnap and heading them into this "cattle chute".

"Guns!" they shouted, "Give us all your guns!"

We explained that we didn't have any guns. We serve the Lord. He is our protector.

"Guns!" they shouted again, "Give us all your guns!" Finally, they believed us that we didn't have guns and walked away.

During the next 10 minutes the gangsters were walking back and forth. They seemed to be sizing us up and just looking at us. They asked for our phones and our money. They weren't very demanding at that point, so we didn't willingly give them all of our stuff. We still wanted our phones and our wallets.

Then the ambulance pulled in behind us and the whole procession started moving. What was happening? At this point we knew there was a chance we were being kidnapped, but were we? What were they going to do to us? We didn't know. I started sending messages to my family and youth group asking them to pray.

The road was getting wider. The gangsters must have thought this was dangerous and that our bus driver might try to take another road or something. They came running up from behind and opened the driver's door. They grabbed Dale out and smacked him across the face. They grabbed him and loaded him up in the back of the ambulance. We cried, "Lord save Dale!" What were they going to do with him? Oh, we were worried for Dale!

The gangster had the driver's seat now. He put it into drive, and we were on one of the wildest rides of our lives! Haitian roads are terrible, and we hit all those bumps and washouts at high speeds. We bounced so hard that our heads hit the ceiling. The vehicle almost bottomed out one time. The driver kept looking back. He would pull up his mask and smiled like he had a good catch or something.

All this time we were crying out to God. It felt like the Lord was right there with us. We felt peace, yet fear wanted to creep into our hearts.

At this point, I started messaging on a WhatsApp group called Haiti Happenings Update: it is a group of almost 200 people. The chat is to report roadblocks, news on gas shortage and all other country situations. Part of me felt like I shouldn't send that message. It felt like I was doubting God. It felt like I was dialing the equivalent of 911, if there ever was a 911 service in Haiti. My hand hesitated over the send button. It felt like it was a compromise of my faith. I was also afraid to send this message because kidnappings go deep into Haitian politics. I feared this message would get into the hands of the wrong people. Into the hands of senators and

people in government positions who are involved in these kidnappings.

I hit the send button, but we had terrible data coverage. The message didn't send. I prayed that the Lord wouldn't let the message go through if he didn't want it to. Pretty soon it sent.

The message said something like this: "Please pray for us, we are being harassed/kidnapped by the Papaya gang. About 15 Americans. Men, women, and children. They are currently in control of our vehicle." Soon messages came in saying, "We are praying, we are praying!" (*As we learned later, it was the 400 Mawozo gang that kidnapped us.*)

Another message instructed me to drop a pin quick. I opened Google Maps, but I could hardly remember how to drop a pin, or how to get the coordinates of a location. I dropped a pin, copied the coordinates, pasted it, and sent it. It went through, though someone else said it wasn't an accurate location. I didn't know, so I left it at that.

We are human and I feel like there were times through this process where we made mistakes. We had to cry out to God for forgiveness.

Our rough drive ended in a big parking lot. It was a big open circle that seemed like a staging area. They parked the Parrado, the box truck, our vehicle, and the ambulance. At that point, we were so thankful to see Dale again. We were all together.

The gangsters started to party. Smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol, and maybe dealing drugs. They seemed to be relaxed and were smiling and laughing. They looked us up and down as if sizing up the catch. We talked to them. We told them of Jesus and that we trust in the Lord. We handed them some copies of Gospel tracts and the Haitian version of The Torch of Truth.

They just kept on laughing and talking and sizing us up and our stuff. They started stealing more phones, money, and wallets, but it was still low-key. We were grateful that they just took the money out of our wallets and let us keep our ID's, credit cards and that kind of thing.

For probably an hour or so we were kept in that parking lot in our vehicle. At one point they opened the back hatch where Austin and I were sitting. Austin had only been in Haiti for 24 hours before being kidnapped. He was supposed to help with the International Crisis earthquake project in the South.

This gangster looked like any other, but later we learned he was second in command of the acting gang leader. He and the leader were the ones who initially decided to kidnap us. He kept saying, "My head is in the sky! My head's in the sky!" He starts patting Austin down, feeling his hair, and rubbing his face. What was going on? Does this guy like him or what? What was he going to do?

After an hour we still couldn't figure this situation out but one thing we knew, we were hot and thirsty. Parched, in fact.

Soon a gangster jumps in the driver's seat, and we start moving again. Where were we going? The road wasn't the same one as we came in. *Great! Hopefully this road leads back to the main road or something. The Lord is working. Maybe we will be out of this situation soon.* The road leads to a dead end. Beside us to the left was a small Haitian shack and another bigger building. Later we found out that they called the bigger building "the Devil's house." We stopped. It was not a good situation. We were tense and very scared.

They started demanding our cell phones and wallets. All of them! I had previously told everyone to cooperate if they demanded those things. It wasn't worth the fight. It wasn't worth risking one's life. So, we handed everything over.

They kept us there for another 10 or 15 minutes. What is going on? What do they really want? It seemed like the wheels in their minds were turning. *What can they do with a group of Americans? How can we use them?*

I was desperate to find out what was actually happening. Since I knew more of the language, I needed to have a good conversation with these guys. I have never met with a more wicked man than that leader. I have never dreamed of meeting people who blatantly say that they are serving "King Lucifer". But I believe that God could save his soul if he humbled himself and repented.

I started asking questions. "What is going on? What do you want from us? You've got our wallets and phones. What more can you take from us? Please, can you let us go now? Can we leave?"

"No way," they said. "We need 3 million dollars!"

"We can't give 3 million dollars. We don't have it. We are Christians so we can't give you the Lord's money."

"Give us 3 million dollars!" they demanded.

"No." we said.

"Okay, then get out of the van," they said. Then I started fearing for the ladies. They were in the two front seats. They took them to the other side of the van. There was a brief pause. It seemed like they wanted to keep the rest of us in the van. Oh, we prayed for the ladies! We cried out to the Lord! It was probably only 30 seconds to a minute. They had taken some of the ladies and stood them besides the building. What was going on? Then it registered. They wanted to keep the rest of us in the van. They did NOT have good in mind for those ladies!

"Out," I shouted. "Everyone get out of the van! Go! Go! Go! Everyone!"

There was no stopping us! We all jumped out of the van. I stood at the front of the line in front of the ladies. The rest of the group lined up behind us. The building behind us was called the Devil's house as if it was haunted or a house to do Witchcraft or Voodoo in. It was a terrible place to be, like a ghetto. What were they going to do? Were they going to kill us?

We were singing and praying and trying to trust in the Lord. Probably hundreds of others had already heard of our kidnapping and were praying as well.

As we stood there, they started patting some of us down. I think the Lord protected the ladies as they didn't do a very thorough pat-down on them. The leader was patting me down and felt in my shoes. I took them off, but he didn't find any money in there. I thought they had taken all our money, but Matt had some Haitian gourdes (currency in Haiti) that equaled about \$12.70 US dollars. It proved very valuable during our time of escape.

We stood there singing but they told us to stop. We calmed it down but kept on singing.

Then they got out their phones and pointed it down the row of people. They said they are making a final video. Were they going to kill us? *Okay, Lord, we are in your hands, and we are ready to go.*

They put us in a house with two rooms. The room may have been ten by twelve. It was a very small room. They had previously brought two Haitian captives out of that room. They were tied hand and foot. They looked very dirty and in bad shape. We were grateful that we were never tied as the other hostages.

They told me to go into the now empty room. I didn't know what was going to happen. *Why do they want me in that little room by myself?* Soon I saw that everyone was following me into the room. They closed the door and then there was no doubt anymore. I knew we were kidnapped.

We sat in a tight circle in that small room. Even though we were kidnapped we finally had a sense of peace. We were all together. No one was separated. That would have torn us apart. The Lord knows how much we can handle. We started praying and talking and singing once more: *The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivers them...*

Our rooms had some mattresses to sleep on at night for which we were very thankful for. Some of them were uncomfortable but we were blessed. The other hostages in the next room did not have any mattresses. If anything, they slept on cardboard.

During the first few weeks we did more spiritual warfare than I have ever done in my life. It was literally exhausting. Satan was trying to attack us from every angle and discourage us. Satan would attack the children, especially during the night. Ryan and Melody have two little children, an 8-month-old and a three-year-old. There was also Ray and Cheryl's six-year-old boy. When the children were attacked their chests would seize up. It was almost like they were demon possessed, literally.

We would cry out in the name of Jesus Christ. *Come, Lord, deliver us. Fight the powers of Satan!* He did. After two or three weeks it wasn't the same. The Lord put a hedge around us.

Our condition from the outside probably looked worse than it actually was. They treated us well, so to speak. As well as can be imagined or dreamed of while being kidnapped in Haiti. It was like we were Americans and the cream of the crop. It was like the captors were saying, *we got you where we want you. We are going to treat you nice. But we will keep you here until you have met every wish of ours.* Occasionally they brought us Pringles and fresh fruit and cakes and cookies. They even brought in an *igloo* with cold drinks. Most importantly, they gave us water. We were given two meals a day. In the morning it was usually Haitian spaghetti with half a hard-boiled egg per person, and in the afternoon, it was rice and beans.

At first it surprised us that they brought us so much American food from the supermarket. Later on, they were more and more angry with us - they were trying to pressure us to beg for ransom. Then our food became less. I actually lost up to 17 pounds while I was there.

We were trusting in the Lord to deliver us and take us out of there. As time went on and the guards got angrier and angrier at us, Satan would tempt us. Sometimes we started to doubt. Why doesn't someone just pay the money?

Mackenson was a clean-shaven man but later we realized that he was a witch doctor. He was a very wicked man. At first, he posed as a Christian and acted like he really was one. He was the guy to talk to when we needed water or any other supplies. He was the town runner. He would go to town and buy toilet paper or water. Sometimes we got thirsty before he brought us another supply of water. Mackenson hated to buy water. It was as if he was allocated a certain amount of money for our supplies. If he could use only a little bit of it, then he could pocket the rest. Toward the last he really started complaining more and more. He seemed very reluctant to bring us the things we had enjoyed at the beginning.

The first evening of our kidnapping, the acting gang leader whom they called Lanmò San Jou, literally translated "Death Without Days", opened the door and asked for our boss's phone number. We told him, "We don't remember what the number is, but we can get it off one of our phones if you bring one to us." He acted surprised that none of us remembered the number, but

soon they brought Ryan's phone. He got Barry's number and dialed it on his own phone. He instructed me to tell Barry what has happened, that we are kidnapped, and that there is a ransom required for us to be released. Barry answered the phone and wondered with concern in his voice if we are all together and if we are doing ok. The news of our kidnapping was already being spread all around. I said "yes, we are all together, they kidnapped us here, and yes, we are doing fine." Lanmò then took the phone and told Barry that he doesn't have much time, "I am demanding a 17-million-dollar ransom. 1-million-per-person. I will soon be killing them if we don't get the money." Barry said, "Please remember, these are God's people. They are here to do God's work..." Lanmò stood up and walked away still talking to Barry.

During the first week we were getting pretty desperate to talk to Barry or someone else we knew. We wanted to let our families know that we were okay. We asked to make a phone call, but we still hadn't memorized any phone numbers. We kept asking to call. Lanmò kept acting weird, acting like he didn't have the number. Probably about seven days into the process, Lanmò pulled out his phone and he had the phone number we needed. He asked us to call and tell our boss that we need the ransom money. He called Barry and even let us talk to him. The phone call was very short, maybe only 30 seconds. Instead of pressuring Barry for ransom money, Barry starting firing questions our way. "How are you? Are you all together?" and Barry told us that the whole world was praying for us.

Even though the Gang leader did not know English (or any of the other guards), he grabbed the phone and hit the off button. He must have understood enough to know we were not saying what he wanted us to say.

We were only one week into the process, but we had already felt very alone. Oh, we broke down and cried! The whole world was praying for us! Oh, the joy through the tears! I believe it was true. God's people from every corner to the world were praying for us.

We got the phone number off of Lanmò's phone, wrote it down, and some of us memorized Barry's number.

We also had two pens. The first day we were given a big roll of commercial paper towels (the kind that would come out of a dispenser). We would tear off sections

and use it as writing paper. I wished I had kept a journal as some of the others did, but I expected to be delivered during the first week. We thought this was a high-profile case. Seventeen Americans would surely be out in a week or sooner.

We only met one person who could speak English well. We wondered why they would kidnap so many Americans if no one knew English? This almost perfect English-speaking person was, he said, American, and just walked into camp late the first evening. He was black. He said that he was on our side. He had a mask on and said he feels like he needs to remove his mask so we can talk friend to friend. He said he feels like he could get harmed because of coming in and trying to help us out.

Having been in Haiti for three years I thought that this man is more likely to be the real gang leader. He was probably into Haitian politics. He asked us which states we were from and kept saying, "Yup, I've been there. I've been there."

About a week and a half into our captivity, Mackenson comes in with the radio blaring on the evening news station. The radio was saying that the US military is coming to Haiti. It was all in Haitian Creole and Wesley, the mechanic, knows a little Creole as well. He understood some of what they said. Basically, they were coming to free the captives. The US military was coming, and our guards were scared. We were excited. Hopefully they would deliver us. The Bible says that they don't bear the sword in vain. It is their job to execute justice. We praised the Lord. Maybe He would use the military to take us out of there.

I was in the "bucket" shower room at the time, but I heard the announcement on the radio. A shower came from drums of water brought from the creek. The water looked clean, but it was not. It had what they called tiny microbes in it (I guess that is how it translates into English).

The first few days, the mosquitoes were especially bad. Our feet were covered with mosquito bites and ant bites. When we itched them, it would open up the skin a little. As we poured this "clean" looking water over our skin during showers, those microbes or worms entered our skin openings and ate around them at night. Soon we developed sores that would puss. I still

have some of these huge sores on my feet. I may still have one or two that are not quite healed. Eventually, I believe this was the reason that some of us were released. Two of the ladies could hardly walk anymore. I was told that Cheryl had 50 of these huge sores that looked like boils all over her body.

Back to the blaring radio. Our guards were scared and told us to pack up. We are moving. We were scared too! Were they going to take us to a ravine somewhere and kill us? Would they dispose of our bodies or what was going to happen?

They loaded the mattresses and everything up. They tore down the fans, and the generator in preparation to move. Both had been wired with exposed electric wires that weren't quite OSHA approved. Haiti is a hot country, and it was still hot in October. We were grateful for the fans and the generator. As the weeks and months went by it became much more pleasant.

Our new location was much more beautiful. It had open fields with farmers out tilling the soil and rows of coconut and mango trees. We were in a beautiful area which we enjoyed during the daytime when they left us outside, but we had to stay in the compound. During the day we had about five armed guards. At night we had about seven to ten guards as they would call in more reinforcements with real big guns. Every evening at about 6:00 they would usher us back into the house and lock us up again. We praised the Lord for a nicer location.

There were less mosquitos now, but still lots. The guards would have someone pick coconuts for us and let us eat them. It was refreshing and so very, very, good to have fresh fruit.

There were times of deep discouragement. One morning, I felt so low, and I needed some time alone. It was early in the morning. I went around the corner of the house and was just praying, alone with God. After 45 minutes or so I saw something out of the corner of my eye. I saw Mackenson, the runner who brings us stuff, at the last mango tree in the row of trees and he reaches down. I hadn't noticed it before, but there was a black plastic bag there. There was a wine bottle with a weird looking lid. It had wires going through it like a cork or something. He puts the lid on the bottle.

Mackenson saw me looking at him out of the corner of my eye.

He said, "This is the Devil's stuff, don't you touch it, or it's going to bite you!" And then he walked away.

I didn't say a word. I prayed, *Lord, what should I do?* Aren't Christians to confront evil? It felt like a direct challenge. Shouldn't I do something to show him that I am not afraid of it? After a while I took the bag and moved it away from the tree. Something was done. He would know I wasn't afraid of it, but what would he say?

After a while I joined in the morning devotional, prayer, singing, and sharing time. We usually prayed and sang about three times a day with much singing morning and evening. Many, many, hours were spent praying and witnessing to our captors. I think the guards heard the gospel being preached for 63 days while we were there.

I shared with everyone what happened with the bottle. What should we do? Destroy the bottle? Austin, the one who was kidnapped after only being in Haiti for one day, said, "Yeah, yeah. Let's just get rid of it." I asked him if he wanted the honors of doing it and he said he was willing. I picked up the bottle and we said, "Satan, I rebuke you in the name of Jesus Christ." I gave the bottle to Austin, and he threw it as far as he possibly could out into the field. From my observation, the bag and bottle and whatever other stuff was in there, hit the ground and burst open. There was a red liquid that shot out. Praise the Lord! We were rid of the stuff!

I was nervous about the outcome of this, but we committed it to the Lord. The day went on and I became less worried about it. Every morning the witch doctor would close the lid of this bottle and every night he would open it up again. They are so superstitious, and they think that during the night they need to close all the doors and windows to keep the evil spirits from coming in and harming us. We were constantly trying to open the windows for fresh air.

It was dark already that evening when Mackenson came. We were sitting in a circle sharing, praying, and singing together. Mackenson posed as a friendly man and a Christian, but he was not. He had a real temper. (As mentioned, we think he was actually the witch

doctor.) He talked to the other guards and was very excited.

Then he said, "Samuel, Kot bidon?" (Where is the bottle?)

I said, "Nou te jete li." (We threw it away.)

"No, No," he said, "Where is the bottle?"

He starts coming in as if ready for attack and I yelled, "Satan, stop, in the name of Jesus Christ!" He moved back. We were all in a circle just crying out to the Lord. He said, "I need to have the bottle before the light of dawn! You are not going anywhere until you show us where this bottle is! We will beat you! We will kill you!"

I said, "I am ready for that. Go ahead. Start beating me."

Mackenson comes in for another attack. I say, "Satan, I rebuke you in the name of Jesus Christ." He stops. He is powerless. He can do nothing. After a while he goes over and stands in front of the house. His plan is that he is not going until he has that bottle. They weren't going to let me into the house until I tell them where it was. I was not going to tell. To them, this was the equivalent of burning a Bible or destroying God's Word.

Since I knew Haitian Creole, the others looked to me as somewhat of a leader. We were praying. What was going to happen? I thought I was going to lay down my life that evening! It was getting later and later into the night. This two- or three-hour ordeal was exhausting! They wanted to keep me outside of the house and put the others inside. At one point the ladies went into the house but kept on praying. The other men in the group would not leave my side. They supported me and prayed for me. We prayed and prayed and Mackenson would come in for another attack several times. The same thing happened. His attacks from Satan weren't working.

A man called Chèf la who was the head guard of the camp, came over and said, "If you don't show us where the bottle is, we will beat you without stopping until you show us!" He pulled out his gun and said, "Do you know what this is called? This is called a gun. Do you know what this can do?"

I said, "Go ahead, I'm ready to be beat, I'm ready to die." I wasn't afraid of him. Oh, the peace and joy of

knowing the Lord, the joy of Heaven. If he shot me, I would be in Heaven. It would be a lot better than being here. I praise the Lord and can testify of His greatness.

They were completely powerless to do anything. So we went into the house, but even after going in, they came inside and continued to ask me to show them where the bottle was. I declined to do that. I thought we might have to stay up all night and keep praying and seeking the Lord, but we did get some sleep.

During the night, if you had to use the restroom, they would let you out of the house. One evening a group of about five all went at one time. Apparently, the guards were scared we were attempting an escape. They started shooting into the air. Our hearts were pumping fast even though they weren't aiming at us. We knew they were afraid something was going on, even though we had no intention of running away.

After about three weeks at this new place, they moved us back to the original location. This time we had both rooms of the house, and all the other prisoners were removed. This house had multiple doors. We were only supposed to use the front door to go in and out of the house. The back door was not nailed shut. It had a big bag of hard cement (kind of like a big rock) resting against the door and holding it shut. It also had a prop. Originally it had two props, but one was taken away and used for tying up other prisoners. The prop was a split rail fence post with holes in it.

Now we were ready to see the Lord work. I kept trying to encourage the group. *The Lord is with us. Let's have faith and just walk right out to freedom. The worst thing that can happen is that they will kill us. We will go to Heaven, where we will be better off than here.* But some in our group there were very afraid of that. I don't blame them. I was too, but I was ready to completely rely on the Lord and let Him take full control.

There was a whole progression of events that led up to the escape and the Lord lead in every step of the way. If God would not have blinded the eyes of those guards, I believe I would still be sitting in that prison camp right now.

Andre, Ryan's three-year-old son, was running a fever almost every night. He was sick and burning with high fevers. We prayed and during the day he would often

get better. We were getting very, very, desperate for deliverance.

Maybe we doubted the Lord and put our hope in man. There were airplanes that would circle almost every day. *Surely someone was going to help us.* We had to get out of here! We made two signs with cardboard and wrote with charcoal in big letters. **S.O.S.** The other one said: **WE NEED HELP!** We held up the signs while we were out in the mornings. The one airplane throttled down one time. It was a confirmation that they saw the signs, but nothing happened. The FBI later told us that they saw Andre from the plane. They saw he was sick, and his stomach was bulging, but they were powerless to do anything. I don't know why they couldn't do anything, but I believe the Lord wanted to receive the glory and honor. We showed our signs for three days but still nothing happened. The guards were around there but we had a system. If a guard would be coming around the corner, we would say "tails." If the coast was clear, we would say "heads."

The Lord wanted us to put our complete trust in Him and let Him work out the details. It wasn't by the arm of man that we were delivered at all. It was a progression of events and miracles. The Lord did great things for us! We were so excited!

Monday evening, we were having our devotional time on the other side of the house between the two buildings, you know, by the Devil's house. I was praying most for deliverance from the constant smoke. Breathing in secondhand cigarette and drug smoke was terrible! I hated this, and the drinking, and the drugs! The rap music on the radio was terrible! I could understand it and Satan was trying to get a foot hold in my life. Profanity was constant, and they would bring in prostitutes.

We kept talking about escape. That Monday evening there was a beautiful double rainbow in the sky. We were so encouraged by this sign of God's promise! We had a very good time of prayer and singing. That evening it poured down rain, turning everything into thick, deep mud. That night we talked about escaping because the guards were really, really, drunk and high on drugs and alcohol. *Here is our opportunity! Let's do it! Just walk out into the mud! We would be muddy and*

*look like pigs, but it would be well worth it, and the Lord could work for us.*

It was a constant struggle to get everyone united and on the same page in faith. But God was moving in our hearts and leading us every step of the way. The next day it was a little drier and the mud was slowly drying up. We were still not united as Wednesday rolled around. That was the night of our deliverance. The Honda generator had run out of oil. We thought it would be great if that generator and the fans were running during the time of our escape. They would create some white noise. By now, Ryan and Melody are desperate to get their children out of there. Andre is not in good health!

That morning, we had Wesley secretly go into the bushes to scout out a trail for an hour or two. We did the heads and tails thing with the guards again. Was there any way to get twelve people and two little children through?

That morning Ryan prayed. He was feeling discouraged and like he needs some time with the Lord. He prayed with his whole heart just seeking the Lord. *Lord, if you do not want us to leave and try to escape, please make Wesley come back and be discouraged and say this is not going to work.* Unknowing to him, his wife prayed a similar prayer. Wesley came back out of the brush with a big smile on his face and said, "I think we can do it."

Melody had been combing the girl's hair with the only comb available, a plastic fork. Ryan had been walking around and praying. He heard his wife relating a story. I wish Ryan could tell this story as he could relate it much better and knows the details better. To the best of my ability this is the story: Ryan's grandparents had three mentally handicapped children. They may have taken care of one of them some of the time. The parents of these three were getting older and wanted to take care of all of them, but it just was not possible anymore. They sent them to a Handicapped care facility. One of them passed away, but the other continued to live at the care facility. There she was raped multiple times by a male staff member.

The care facility found a lump in her stomach and checked her out. They found that she was with child. The facility said to the parents, "Look, this child is never going to be normal. There is not a chance of it being

normal. Here are the papers. Sign here," they pled, "we will take care of the abortion."

At sixty years old these parents already had three mentally handicapped children and now very likely would have another. What did they say or do?

They said, "No way, we will not sign the papers." It took faith to make that decision! Months later the baby was born prematurely. He was a perfectly healthy and normal baby boy! This boy was a very special cousin to Ryan and about his age. One of Ryan's uncles stepped in and offered to raise this child, and they did.

At the one o'clock prayer meeting that Wednesday afternoon, the Lord moved Ryan in a mighty way! He shared this story with tears to everyone in our group.

We had three watches that hadn't been stolen but we never changed the time so it would have been 12:00 regular time that afternoon as he related this story to us.

This story was shared in tears! He sensed the Lord asking him a similar question as in this story. *Are you willing to take this same step of faith that your grandparents took?* It scared him that the Lord would even compare the step of faith that his grandparents took when they accepted this child, to something like an escape effort!

Before we prayed, he said he feels the Lord is telling him that he needs to take his family out of here. I was right on board with it all. Through most of the two months I was saying, "Brothers and sisters we need to take this step of faith and let the Lord work out the details." But we were not all united and I knew if our hearts were not united, failure was imminent! It wasn't going to work! Many times, I thought I needed to escape for my own sanity and health. At one point when I was depressed, I told them I was leaving next week. *I am going alone. If you're not going with me, then have a nice day.* I was very desperate, but later confessed to the group. The Lord worked in my life, and I said that I was wrong and was sorry. I would not run without the group. We would stay together.

Then Ryan said, "I believe the Lord wants my family to escape. Everyone is welcome to come along." The guards had told us if we try to escape and they catch us, they will kill us. If only part of the group escapes, then

the guards are going to shoot the ones who are left. If everyone escapes, the chief will kill the guards. Ryan told us he thinks the guards were only threatening and may not carry this out. He asked to hear from everyone.

Finally, everyone was on board. Finally, the Lord would deliver us from this ghetto of smoke, drugs, vile language and all the Satanic forces! We all had faith and finally we had the power of unity! Collective faith that moves the hand of God! Jesus said we could move mountains with faith as small as a grain of mustard seed. One of the tiniest seeds on planet earth!

Everything is looking good. We feel joy and I'm glad we are all together in this decision. We have preparations to be made. Ryan said that we don't have to wait for the perfect time. The Lord is going to intervene if He wants us to get out of here. He will put the details in place, and we can take a step of faith and follow him out of there.

We started making preparations. Ryan said that if it doesn't work out tonight then we will wait for another night. But let's make plans and work together. We can do this since the Lord is on our side. We planned to leave in the window of time between one o'clock and three o'clock. We packed our bags with keys for the mission, our wallets and so on. Oh, the joy of being united and making plans. We were scared - of course we were scared - but everyone was happy!

We had moved the couches to the other side of the house because we didn't want the guards to sit down where the door was. We thought we could encourage them to nestle down on the other side of the house. There were some things we did in preparation of an escape, but we weren't trying to help the Lord. We were just acting in faith and trusting the Lord to work on our behalf.

That evening was one of the most beautiful sunsets that we had seen during our entire time. The storm clouds had rolled in early, and we were rejoicing. We thought rain would help our efforts. We sang, *Is That the Lights of Home.*

It rained just a little bit. Enough to get our hopes up real high! It pushed the guards onto the front porch. Because of the shower, the guards ordered us into the house early that evening.

Another event for rejoicing was that the guards had removed a power strip from the back door during the downpour on Monday night. They moved the entire thing to the front door. That meant they would no longer sit at the back door to charge their phones. Oh, we were rejoicing! The Lord was working out every detail of our escape.

Another concern was that the generator was still out of oil. We had asked Mackenson to bring us more oil, but he was one of the most forgetful men I have ever seen. We would be out of toilet paper for like two days and he would say he forgot it. That evening at suppertime, someone asked Wesley if we should remind Mackenson of the oil. Wesley said, "I thought of that, but I've committed it to the Lord." We decided not to remind him of the oil. We were still trusting the Lord and committed the oil to Him. If He wanted the generator running, He would make it happen.

When we were in the house, we discussed the order of filing out the door. That day, we had brought sticks into the house. Our plan was to push the rock away from the back door with a stick using the crack in the middle of that door. There was also a prop to move away. On Monday morning after the rainstorm, I had moved it a little to the left where we could get a hold of it better in the event of our escape. They never picked up on the move.

Late that night, lo, and behold, Mackenson shows up and says there's no oil for the generator. We said that it would be nice if we could have some because it is very hot. Ryan was fanning Andre with a Styrofoam plate. He stood there for a long time as if debating whether or not to get the oil. Finally, he dialed a number and called his chief. I don't know where they got it, they said they needed to go all the way to Port-au-Prince for oil, but that evening the oil showed up. Before we knew it, the generator fires up and the fans were running. Praise the Lord! Thank you, Jesus! Another miracle in the progression of events. Our faith was boosted, and we trusted the Lord more. God was working out the details.

We planned to wake up at one o'clock, Thursday morning, December 16. Most of us had not gotten much sleep. Our legs were like jelly and my feet were shaking. We had our small bags of water in our pockets. We would move ahead. The stick was pressed against

the rock. When it fell away from the door it made a thud. That noise was in the Lord's hands. Soon after, Brandon (15) who had been trying to spy on the guards, removed a fragment of a board that was loose so he could see better. The nail holding the fragment made a nice little screech. It alerted the guards on the other side of the house. Earlier, I had heard the chief of the camp yelling and telling the others guards to rouse. He told them that they weren't doing their job. They would shine the flashlights around. One of the guards took a walk down the lane. The camp chief did a good long inspection of the door. We hit our beds. We were ready to say, *Lord are you showing us that this is not the night?* After inspecting the door for a few minutes that chief walked away. I believe with all my heart that the Lord blinded his eyes. The rock was no longer against the door where it was supposed to be. He had been looking at that door after he heard the noise, but he walked away.

We were in bed, but we thought he was going to put the rock back and come in and ruin our plans for this night. We waited for up to 45 minutes. Our window of time to leave was nearing the end. In talking with Austin, he said, "You know what? I think the Lord blinded his eyes! Let's go!"

I said, "You know, Let's do go!"

By this time the babies were sleeping again but the parents picked them up again. They whimpered a little but not too loud. We had made manikins from sheets to make it look like people were sleeping in them. I was hoping our exit would be calm, but we did a lot of whispering. There was a lot of last-minute planning to be done. The guards seemed really, really, nervous. They had heard noises coming from the house.

Despite everything we were ready to take this step of faith. This was the Lord's time and His will. Slowly Wesley and Dale eased the door open. They slid the prop, and with the stick, hooked it onto the holes of the split rail fence post. Wesley went outside and took a good look this way and that way. He said, "The coast is clear." So, we filed out single file.

Our hearts were pounding. We were ready for the guards to yell at us, ready to hear gunshots. Dale and I were the last people out, so we closed the door. I grabbed the rock and put it back in front of the door.

Dale grabbed the prop and put it back into position. Off we went into the brush. At first the guards could have easily seen us. Our 12 pairs of feet went, *crunch, crunch, crunch* through the vines and sticks. Would they hear us? All the way through the brush we crunched but we didn't hear a thing. No yelling, no gunshots, so we went deeper into taller brush where we could duck and hide more.

We got to a fairly wide irrigation ditch a little way down the trail that we needed to cross. I was able to jump over it. The ladies had a lot of trouble. We were still not very far away from the house, and we needed to go! *We've got to go! Got to go! Got to go!* I realized the ladies were not making it! I had offered my shoes instead of their crocs and flip-flops but they declined. I got into the creek part way with my one foot trying to brace up and help the ladies across. Finally, we were across even if our feet were wet. A little farther down the path we were like, *wow, the Lord has humor!* If we would have walked a little farther, there was a bridge, and we would have been able to cross without getting wet. But we were moving, and we were making time. We hiked cross-country towards National Route 3 that we had spotted while still at the house. We had traveled on that road before. It was not the road we were kidnapped on. In the distance there was a big mine or quarry that we could see.

As we were heading to Route 3 the Lord provided us with a bright security light to follow. We were still making good time crossing the country through the fields. We thought we may have a two- or three-mile hike. Later we found it was more like 7 to 10 miles. After we were a good way from the house, we got to a huge lake. All the ducks and birds were alerted, and they flew out. Before that, we had little noise. When we came to little Haitian towns, we stopped and prayed. *Lord, keep the dogs quiet, keep the animals quiet, don't let anyone see us.* This quietness was no small miracle. Haiti is densely populated with people, dogs, and roosters.

Now it was 4 or 5 o'clock in the morning and we were at a lake. *Do we go through the lake?* I think Ryan was getting prepared for a swim. I said, "No. Let's keep going around the lake towards the West."

After the lake, was the thicket! We had to keep going but we kind of lost our bearings. Thorns and cactus plants abounded that were three times as high as we were! Those walls of cactus were nearly impenetrable! It was a painstaking process to find the path of least resistance. *Help us Lord, get through the thickets of briars, thorns, and cactus!* We were trying to follow the North star attempting a Northwestern direction. There were times the thickets were so thick that we couldn't see stars above us. We would stop every few steps to pull thorns from our footwear. The going was painfully slow, and we had wanted to be at Route 3 by daylight. It was not to be the case!

About two hours later, we were finally out of the thorns. We were in a more Northernly direction from where we should have been. I believe it was the Lord guiding our every step. After the thicket we were glad to walk on cow paths where there were less thorns. Another miracle was that we didn't meet a single Haitian person on the trail the whole time. This is rare indeed for the populous country of Haiti! Maybe if you lived in Haiti for three years you would understand what a miracle this was to walk about 10 miles and not meet a single soul! We heard voices sometimes, but we never met anyone. We were scared of everyone as we were still in gang territory and thought they would report us back to the gang.

By now, the bulk of the group was pretty much nestled down where we wanted to be. We were really close to the road. Too close for comfort. I thought we might be spotted! We saw a peasant woodcutter in the distance. He was cutting trees to make charcoal. We prayed. What can we do? Where do we go? Where do we start? Wesley and I decided to go and try to make contact with him in hopes of finding help. We were afraid the woodcutter would report us back to the gang, but we committed it to the Lord.

Before we got to him another person came walking down the trail. I said, "Bonjou." (Good morning). I was trying to be friendly and asked him how he was. We were trying to be discreet we told him our phone batteries had died and we needed a phone. I believe that was the truth. They had long since died after the gangsters took them. No. He didn't have a phone.

"Can you please show us which house to go where we can find someone with a cellphone?" I asked. He pointed us to a house down yonder. "Do good people live there?" He pointed us to some people we could talk to.

At the house, we tried to be vague and very brief. He asked if we were broken down on Route 3. "No," I said, "Just out walking. Our phone batteries are dead. We need help."

He asked all kinds of questions and wondered how many more of us there were. He said that he was out of minutes, or he would let us use his phone. "Look," we said, "We have 500 Gourdes (equivalent of \$5). Go ahead and put 250 Gourdes worth of minutes on your phone or the whole 500."

"We really need to talk on the phone," we said.

"Okay, sure, yeah okay," he said. He jumps on his bicycle and pedals away. Fifteen minutes later he comes back panting and sweating with 250 Gourdes worth of minutes on his phone.

We dialed Barry's number. "Hello. Hello. Hello," he said.

We were on speaker phone. We hadn't wanted it that way. We didn't want them getting more information. Because the phone was broken, we had no choice but use the speakerphone as we talked to Barry.

"We are delivered," we told Barry.

"Ah. Ah. Ah. Ah. What?!" Barry wondered.

"Yes, The Lord delivered us and rescued us this night. We are by National Route 3," we said.

"Where's that," Barry questioned. "Can you drop me a pin?" "Where are you? All, are all of you out?"

"Well," we explained, "We are using someone else's phone. We are on Mon Kabrit." (Goat Mountain.)

"I think I know where you are," he said. "We are coming right now! We are on our way!"

Barry is the Country Director and Phil is the Country Supervisor from the Ohio office. They came in two vehicles. Wesley had gone back to get the group and I was still talking to the men with the cell phone.

"Look," they said. "There are police down there right in this little town," Okay, but I was afraid of Haitian police. I figured that there was so much corruption in their politics. I called Barry back.

"Look, we are here on National Route 3." I gave him farther directions. He said, "Be very careful with what you say, and be very vague. The FBI is involved in this, and this is a real mess."

I walked down the road a little. I was afraid, and there were a lot of vehicles. This was news all over Haiti. Nearly everyone knew about the kidnapping. It was strange for a white person to be walking down this road. A person with hair covering most of his ears, with a mustache so long that it was going into my mouth, and my beard was longer than it had ever been.

Tap-taps, other vehicles, and even a motorcycle with a gangster with long dreadlocks, all came to a complete stop on the road. They all looked at me. I was wanting to get out of there!

I shook the hand of a very nice man.

I said, "Look, can I sit here in the brush and wait for a ride? Someone is coming to pick me up."

"Yeah, sure," he said. "That is fine."

I sat down and waited.

A man asks, "What is going on?" He calls me over. He is a nice man, tall and stocky, and just a gentleman. I try beating around the bush.

"Just tell us what the trouble is. What is going on?"

"Yeah, Yeah, we are in trouble," I said.

"Where are you from? Where do you live?"

"United States."

"NO, no, where do you live in Haiti?" the man asked.

"Titanyen".

"Are you with a group of 17 missionaries that were kidnapped here in Haiti two months ago?" he asks.

"Yeah."

"That is okay." He said. "Look! We are going to help you get out."

He asked me more questions. "Did the gang release you?"

"NO," I said. "Actually, we escaped. The Lord took us out of there."

The man is likely thinking that the gang is already looking for us. Soon Barry pulled up and it was perfect timing. The other group came down the road and met us and we all jumped into the vehicles. The people were sure we needed to wait on the reinforcements that were coming. We needed an escort to get out of there.

Barry is a man of strong faith. He said, "No, thank you! No, thank you! We don't need anything." We were out of there. We got into a serious traffic jam. Our hearts were still pounding. But we were happy. Happy to get back to the compound at Titanyen.

Oh, the rejoicing and the joy to be back at a safe location. Praise the Lord. We were comfortable. Praise the Lord!

I still need to share this with you. Love your enemies. Bless them that curse you. Do good to them which despitefully use you and persecute you. We had times of temptation. Satan was telling us just to grab the guns and shoot the guards and get yourself out of there. We thought of that, but we always overcame. We would have had opportunities to get a hold of their guns. Worldly speaking, I don't think it would have been hard to take those guards out and get out of there. But you know what? The Bible way works! The Lord Jesus Christ is our deliverer! This is a stronger weapon than the sword and earthly forces!

All the glory, honor, praise belongs to our Almighty, Eternal, Heavenly King. The Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End. The First and the Last who is to come back someday soon for his Bride. Will you be found faithful? Will you lay down your life for the sake of the Cross if that is what the Lord calls you to do?

May God Bless you. Let us stand for prayer.

Dear Lord Jesus. We come to you thanking and praising you. We come lifting up your Almighty name. Lord, we thank you for the miracle you worked on our behalf! Truly for us to live is Christ and to die is gain! But Lord, we want to share this testimony around the world if that is what it takes. We want you to receive all the

honor and glory. It was only through you! We couldn't have done it any other way, Lord. It was you. Thank you, Jesus, for saving us. Thank you for answering the prayers of likely millions of people around the world. Thank you for friends and family and for loved ones. Thank you for our heritage, Lord. We were raised up and taught of you. We didn't deserve this. We could have been born a gangster and grown up serving Satan and sin and lost eternally. Lord, we don't deserve salvation! You have pulled us out of the miry pit! Out of the clay! You have set our feet upon the rock and established our goings.

Thank you Father. God, I pray that you would raise up men and women in this ever wicked generation who would stand in the gap! Those who are ready to raise up the standard of the cross of Jesus Christ and proclaim Him Lord of their lives with full surrender, unconditional surrender, poured out like wine upon the alter for you! Broken like bread to feed the hungry! You said in Your Word to pray that the Lord of the harvest would raise up laborers into the harvest in these last days. Those who are willing to go and face the Enemy. Laborer's that are equipped for the task.

Lord, I thank you and praise you. Thank you for the group of Brothers and Sisters in Christ and for my family. They mean more to me now than they have ever before, Lord. And just the way the Saints all over the world can lift each other up. Lord, I look forward to your coming and your return. No more tears. We love you, praise you, and worship you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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*God the Almighty freed the remaining 12 hostages on December 16, 2021. They returned to the United States the same day.*

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