

Christmas '09

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A “White Christmas” in Haiti

Recently a missionary named Swanee shared why some Haitians love to sing Bing Crosby's classic song “I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas.” If you have web access I would encourage you to first watch the video my wife took of Swanee telling the story himself at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vg0T6QpZLSA>. You can also go to youtube.com and search for “Swanee White Christmas.” Below is a written version of his story.



White Christmas

Christmas music provided background noise as my 14-year-old daughter, Shela, and I sat amid the densely populated downtown market in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Time trudged on in the late afternoon as we waited for a friend. We could only wait because in 1980 no one had cell phones on our Caribbean island. This was my first Christmas in Haiti. As Shela and I sat in the shadow of a large building, we didn't speak for a long time. Eventually our eyes settled on one woman who took a complete bath in a pothole in the street. The hole held perhaps a bucket full of water, a free gift from a slow leak in a buried waterline. She sang as she bathed. Trying not to stare, Shela and I watched every move as our Haitian singer hiked up her skirt to wash above her knees. Cupping her hands again and again in the tiny pool of water, she finished her bath. For Shela and me, this was not our best Christmas and the music was just too weird. Through loudspeakers we heard the clear, mellow voice of Bing Crosby singing “I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas.” Very few Haitians spoke English, so why was this poor street woman singing along with an American icon?

Haiti was hot and dry in December. White dust hung like fog around our rented home on A-Thoby Street. This dirt and gravel road became the reason why our family sang “White Christmas.” When our Christmas celebrations ended, we carried our plastic Christmas tree outside to hose it off. During all those years in Haiti, singing “White Christmas” became our favorite family holiday tradition.

But in December 1986 I got hit in the gut with an emotional cannon ball. During our last Christmas season in Haiti, a street worker washed a friend's car in downtown Port-au-Prince. As he worked he sang “I'm Dreaming of a White Christmas.” My friend asked the worker a simple question, “Do you understand the words to that song?”

“O yes,” the street worker replied.

“When did you see snow?”

“Sir, I don't know snow. I only know the song.”

“Well, what does this song mean?”

“You know, a Christmas with food and a bed and gifts to give my family. I'm dreaming of a Christmas like WHITE people have.”

Suddenly I saw life from a new perspective. In the 20 years since I heard the street worker make that statement, I have been revamping my priorities. The poor have become my heroes. Those who are poor in spirit hold the secrets for happiness and I must somehow look beyond their gender, age, race, education, and economic status. It started in 1980 when God used a poor black woman on a Port-au-Prince street to begin teaching me that a dream and a song for Christmas may not be much ... but enough!

-Swanee

We, as Americans, have so many blessings. I hope that during this Christmas season you are able to see how much God has blessed us with and realize that some of the things we think are important won't last into eternity. I am thankful that God has blessed us by giving us His son Jesus some 2000 years ago.

A Boy Gives Up His Christmas Gifts to Help Others

Last fall Dylan, a 9 year old boy in one of our supporting churches in New England, heard the news about how the hurricanes devastated many parts of Haiti. He was moved with compassion and concern and decided that he wanted to send to Haiti the money his mother was going to spend on him for Christmas. How many of us would choose to do that, let alone when we were 9 years old? It took some time to bring his idea from conception to fruition, but a few weeks ago I finally received pictures and a note from the missionaries in Haiti who used the money to help a Haitian family of 7. The father's only job is helping unload the MFI airplanes for about an hour or so twice a week at the Cap Haitien airport. The mother has not been able to find work, which is not



surprising since the unemployment rate in Haiti is around 75%. Daily life can be almost unbearable where more than half of the people live on less than \$1 a day! The father tried to grow a garden in the area where they live to feed his family, but it would not grow. The missionaries who help feed this family regularly have used Dylan's money to send all five children to school this year. Unlike the schools in the U.S., education is not free in Haiti and it is very important for children to get an education in order for them to be somewhat "employable" later in life. Pictured on the left is the "door" to their home. I pray that this story touches your heart and helps you remember to focus on the needs of others instead of your own this Christmas season. I am grateful that God knows our needs and selflessly gave His only son Jesus to be our Savior.

Family Update

This year has passed by rather quickly for all of us. Jenni has finished her first semester at college and is now home for over three weeks with no homework, yay! She has made many new friends at college, especially in the theatre department. She also was the assistant stage manager for "Jane Eyre: the Musical" and has a role in next semester's play "The Imaginary Invalid". Jenni knitted a hat that was used in a Disney travel ad found on the back cover of the Sept/Oct issue of AAA's "Going Places" magazine and in the November issue of "Real Simple" magazine.

The newlyweds, Greg and Anna, are busy with school and have moved into a new place. Anna works part time at the college library and Greg works in Tech Services and really enjoys fixing everyone's computer.



Nate is doing very well in high school and continues to be involved in the local theatre. This Christmas he has the role of Charlie Brown in the show "Snoopy". He also has had his learner's permit for a few months now and sometimes likes the challenge of practicing on our old stick shift VW bug.



Joe's time at MFI is divided into flying on some days and doing his Vice President duties on the other days. He also has been dealing with a herniated disc in his back since the summer and was grounded from flying for a time. He is doing much better after some steroid injections in his back. Please pray for complete healing for him.

Much of Wendy's time is taken up driving Nate to and from rehearsals. She has also been teaching some private violin lessons in our home. Elizabeth is one of Wendy's students she had in West Palm Beach. After we moved Elizabeth took lessons from other violin teachers, but she loves Wendy's kind and creative teaching style the best. When she can't make it up here to our house they have a lesson over the internet using Skype. Elizabeth, who has Down's syndrome, has overcome huge hurdles to get to where she is today and she uses her violin playing to minister to other people. Check out her website at www.StoryofElizabeth.com.

Thank you for all of your prayers and financial support that you so generously give. We hope all of you have an awesome Christmas and a fantastic New Year. May the true Christmas gift be with you throughout the whole year.

Merry Christmas,

Joe & Wendy, Greg & Anna, Jenni
and Nate Karabensh

