

BEING THE WHO STOPS

by Kristy Engel

Two IM volunteer nurses, Josh and Michelle, working in La Romana, the Dominican Republic (DR) heard about a man in the El Salado batey (sugarcane work camp) who suffered from the results of a stroke and needed a visit. So Josh, Michelle and I traveled with Andy (a translator) to El Salado. Upon our arrival, I saw a church deacon and asked him about a man who was very sick. He said, "You must mean Merlieu," and pointed me in the right direction.

Merlieu lived in a corrugated metal shack no bigger than the space of a king-sized bed. There were no windows and the door was closed tightly in the sweltering August heat. As I approached his door, a young man told me that Merlieu had screamed throughout the night for water. Without a family member nearby, Merlieu was dependent on the kindness of others to survive. But, because of the fear of darkness in that culture, no one was willing to travel across the batey to get drinkable water.



*A reason to smile on the batey—
Kristy Engel shows Christ's love.*

When I knocked on the door, I heard a moan. I slowly opened the door, announcing who I was. The odors from his home hit me full in the face. As a result of the stroke, Merlieu was incontinent. His bed, a twin box spring, was soiled with feces and urine. On the floor was a small pile of cooked rice with maggots and flies throughout. The ceiling and walls crawled with spiders and cockroaches.

Upon finding that Merlieu's pulse and blood pressure were stable, I picked up his dry cup and asked a young man outside to get him water. Then I told Merlieu and the young man that we would be back. More than anything, Merlieu needed a bath, a clean home and a new bed with clean sheets. He also needed some food, water and new clothes: I left to gather the supplies I required.

Upon returning to the batey, many people began following my truck loaded with stuff to Merlieu's. Some asked if I had something for everyone. When I said, "No, it is all for Merlieu," they laughed and mocked us. I guess they decided that a dying old man shouldn't get those things. Josh and Andy brought Merlieu outside and bathed and shaved him in a chair while I scrubbed the house. We all got to work and ignored the snide comments.

Eventually, some onlookers wandered off, but a few stayed and began helping us care for Merlieu. They even asked to take over the dirty job of cleaning his house so I wouldn't have to do it. I thanked them but said, "No," and continued to work, even when a cockroach fell in my hair!

When both he and his house were clean, a newly bathed Merlieu was taken back inside as the neighbors helped him decide the best place for his clean bed. It was heart-warming to watch the change in the people and celebrate their newly found concern for Merlieu. When we were ready to leave, the young man who told me about Merlieu's night of screaming asked something that will stay with me forever.

He said, "Why did you stop to help?"

My reply was, "I couldn't NOT stop."

He then said, "See, that's what I don't understand. People have been walking by Merlieu for so long... Haitian, Dominican and American. Some may have prayed for him but most just said how terrible his life must be and then walked on. You didn't. You stopped. Why?"

I answered, "I guess because God sent me to stop when others don't. That's what I do."

He replied by thanking me. I wonder if he was thinking about who might stop for him someday when he is in need.

I believe that this is why I was sent to the DR—to be the one to stop for the forgotten and "invisible" people that are around us every day. I didn't use my medical skills that day to save a man's life. In fact, two weeks later, Merlieu died. The village sent someone to the hospital to tell me because they said, "We knew you would care."

There are people all around us who need us to stop and offer a hand, a kind word or even a mop and bucket! We need to stop and value every person around us. That's why IM sends missionaries around the world. . .not because we have such indispensable skills (although many are VERY talented!) but because we stop to care for those that others have forgotten or devalued. Thank you for sending me to be one of those who stops.



This "home" for a batey family is much larger than Merlieu's.