



MÈSI

Laurie Ness Gordon

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Mèsi ('Thank you' in Creole)

Good evening. Thank you for inviting me to speak to your Rotary Club. It's my pleasure to share with you tonight how your donations to Feed My Starving Children have improved the live of Haitians.



As you know, in January 2010, a magnitude 7 earthquake struck Port-au-Prince causing massive destruction.



In less than a minute, buildings collapsed, displacing 1.5 million people. Almost 250,000 died and many more were injured.

The desperation and enormity of the situation mobilized many, like your Rotary Club, to give generously. In the first two weeks, 40 charities received over half a billion dollars in donations to support their relief efforts in Haiti.



Some provided shelter...



or latrines...



heavy equipment...



food...



and water.



Today, after living through the earthquake, cholera outbreaks, hurricanes and an unstable government, many people have returned home, but about one-third continues to live in temporary camps.



Feed my Starving Children was among the first to provide meals and we continue to feed the poorest of the poor.



Because we have volunteers on the ground in Haiti, we can ensure that our resources reach those who need it most. Unfortunately, if this is not the case, even the best intentions go awry.



For example, if clothing bundles meant for the most destitute, arrive at the port without someone to receive them, the clothes are picked up by entrepreneurs....



and sold in the marketplace.



Extremely poor families just cannot afford to buy them.



Our shipping containers are met at the dock and taken to a distribution point.



Each carton contains 36 packages of fortified rice and dehydrated soy products designed to be easy and safe to transport, simple to make with boiling water and culturally acceptable. Each package clearly explains how to prepare the MannaPack Rice to provide a meal for six.



Food is distributed only to the neediest families, according to lists provided by local agencies. Parents line up to receive their portion based on the number of children in their family.



I'm pleased to report that Feed My Starving Children has shipped over 185 million meals to Haiti. Thanks to Rotarian support and the generosity of all our donors, little girls like Clytie have a better chance in life.



Clytie

“Clytie, Clytie, vin isit la. Off with your church dress. Time to work.”

“Oh, Manman.”

“No arguments. Prese. I don’t want you to get dirty. I have no time to scrub your clothes just because you want to look pretty.” Manman has already taken off her shoes and changed into her everyday dress and bandana.

With a resigned smile, I shrug and wave goodbye to my friend. I pull back the plastic tarp and enter my home. The two corrugated iron walls magnify the 40°C temperature. I breathe as shallowly as possible, quickly strip off my best dress, and set it on top of the other clothes in the cardboard box by the wall.



The moment I emerge in my T-shirt and shorts, Manman catches my arm and hands me the water jug. “Chache dlo.”

I envy my two younger sisters squatting nearby drawing designs in the dirt with sticks, but I know better than to argue. Besides, they’ll be put to work soon enough. I balance the jug on my head and set off for the water pipe.



Weaving through the tents and makeshift homes, I meet Blessèd and her mother. Blessèd has her water jug too. She's still wearing her church clothes, but she's traded her shoes for flipflops.





We chatter easily until Blessèd’s mother heads for the market.

“Light the charcoal before I get back with the meat and vegetables,” she calls to her daughter.

Blessèd checks that her mother has gone.



“We’re having goat stew for dinner.” She looks at me, raising her head as high as the water jug will allow. “What are you having?”
I purse my lips, say nothing, look straight ahead.



“I saw your mother in the line yesterday, getting those packages from the blan blans. I bet you’re having those for dinner. I didn’t know your family was poor.”



I thought Blessèd was my friend. My cheeks burn. I think of her father. He has a job clearing rubble. Mine doesn't. No meat for my family. Only beans and food in plastic packages.



I hurry to the water pipe and push in front of Blessèd. Without a word, I set the full jug on my head and hurry home.

“Good girl, Clytie.” Manman takes the water from me. “Now help your sisters.”

Venaïke and Celianne have dumped the food packages onto a plastic tarp on the ground. They are busy separating the rice and throwing out the dry bits.

I pick up an empty package. It's covered with strange black words. Must be angle. I have no idea what they mean. I can't read – not even Creole. No one in my family can.

I turn over the package.





**Four smiling woman stare back at me.
Two are blan blans and two my colour.
Why are they wearing plastic hats in
such heat? Stupid women.**



“Hey, get busy, my girl.” Manman wiggles her finger at the pile of food on the tarp. “You can take those empty packages to the storm drain later. They’re too small to use for anything else.”



She puts charcoal on the fire and stirs more water into the beans and rice.



Venaike looks up from the tarp. “Manman, les blan blans.” She motions to three women heading our way. “Bon jou,” they say, smiling. I try not to giggle.

Don’t they know it’s afternoon?

The women point to the food packages. They talk happily. “May - I - take - your - picture?” asks one, pointing to the camera slung around her neck.

Manman holds up a finger at the same time she tells me, “Clytie, mete yo sou rad ou. Prese.”





Reluctantly I enter my stifling home. When I come out, I am once again wearing my church dress.

Manman poses me away from the others for the picture. One woman picks up a food package. “Would you hold this?” She hands it to me.

Manman nods. “Di mèsì. Di mèsì.”

Clytie

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Mèsi was originally created and delivered as a spoken presentation by Laurie Ness Gordon with visuals provided by Cheryl-Ann Webster.

Upon request, this ibook has been created by Cheryl-Ann Webster www.theARTtoLife.com

