



Two Steps Further:
True Gentlemen
Go Global

story and photos by Nicholas A. Ziegler, Editor-in-Chief



Nightfall has a way of changing the character of a place.

In our American hometowns, we're used to streetlights and headlights and constant illumination, but the streets of Pignon, Haiti, where only a few lights shine on a few street corners, most of the village sits in darkness. Dirt roads, winding and confusing in the daylight, became pockmarked mine fields. Low cinder-block walls become tripwires. To make matters worse, we had been told that things at night were not nearly as friendly for Americans as they were during the day. Nothing we encountered helped the general sense of unease that had settled on the group since a breathless messenger five minutes prior had told us we were needed urgently.

“Will,” he said, out of breath and speaking to the trip’s leader, “the doctors need you at the hospital. Now.”

This was a problem. Either someone from our group had done something colossally stupid, something that couldn’t wait to be remedied in the morning, or the hospital’s owner had returned early from his trip and needed our help.

After carefully making our way through trash- and dirt-filled streets — praying that the village’s sole generator didn’t switch off, leaving us in total darkness — we stepped through the hospital’s iron gate, the one that warned us to leave our guns at the door, and looked for friendly faces. We were alone; no one spoke English. The only others around were poor Haitians, looking for healing the way the faithful congregate at a church in times of distress. The scene was looking even more grim until we found a friendly face: The doctor who sent for us.

“Thank you for coming,” he said. “A woman on the operating table needs a blood transfusion. She is very sick.”

We didn’t know what to say, so we looked at him blankly.

“We need one of you to donate blood.”

This wasn’t what we expected. These 11 men, undergraduates from the University of Arkansas, had signed up for a mission trip to build things and make friends, not to serve as donors for

a woman in danger of bleeding out from an emergency hysterectomy. The next three minutes were a flurry of discussion. “What’s your blood type?” they asked each other. “What if we’re not a match?” “Is anyone O-positive?” “Is it even safe to give blood?”

Very few things prepare anyone for decisions like these. One week before Christmas, when friends and loved ones 1,600 miles away were making plans to go out on a Saturday night and were finalizing holiday travel plans, we were wondering who was going to save the life of a poor Haitian woman. It soon became apparent that no one was going to volunteer.

Will Smith, our man in charge, made the final decision. We weren’t going to serve as donors. Making difficult decisions is part of being a leader, part of showing the right path. Without warning, Smith faced a choice he didn’t want to face and, using his best judgment, decided he couldn’t put any of his men at risk.

“Thank you for considering helping us,” the doctor said when Smith told him of the group’s decision. “I will do my best to save this woman.”

Our walk to the hospital was through the fading twilight, which did little to calm any fears, but the black night sky that greeted us on the walk home was as dark as our thoughts. Haiti needed our help in more ways than we could give,



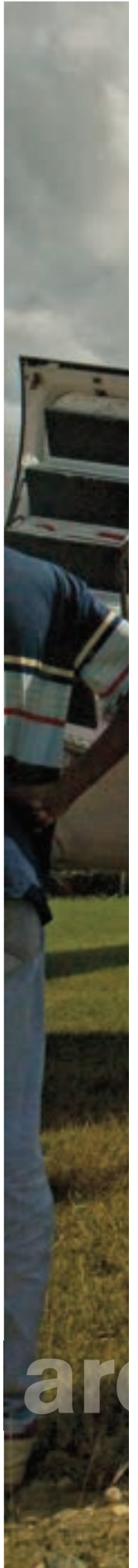
LEFT

The Haitian marketplace, at first glance a cacophony of noise and chaos, is surprisingly organized. Anything you could want — from digital watches to ibuprofen to large pots boiling over with lamb — is available for sale.

RIGHT

Despite the confusion of unloading a DC-3 full of missionaries, cargo and medical equipment, the Haitians were up to the task. Cadu, our guide, served as the point man for deliveries.

difficult decisions are





the part of being a leader

it takes a s



LEFT TOP

As we neared Pignon, some of the men wondered where we would land. The answer was simple: the grassy strip just below us.

LEFT BOTTOM

Our rusty Mitsubishi pickup truck served us well, transporting luggage and dozens of missionaries with equal ease.

RIGHT

The children were often the highlights of our day, providing an air of innocence and a concrete reason why doing missionary work was so important in this small village.

At 12:30 p.m. on December 13, 2007, 11 men jumped off a 1930s-era DC-3 — their transport to the remote village via Missionary Flights International — onto the grass strip of a runway and did two things: They squinted to adjust to the bright, Caribbean sunlight, and they looked around, confused.

A crowd, black and white, young and old, was staring both at them and past them. A young American couple, toddler in tow, looked for a shipment of holiday wrapping paper. Church pastors checked items off lists while their assistants tossed items out of the cargo doors amid cries of “Careful, that’s fragile!”

While eight of the 11 continued to try and orient themselves, the other three sprung into action. Smith, Zeke Zachry and Blake Wilkerson, all on their second year of the Arkansas Alpha-Upsilon’s mission trip to Pignon, knew what had to be done.

“Zeke!” Smith yelled. “We need to get this equipment off the plane. It’s going to the hospital,” he said while struggling under the weight of what looked like some sort of respirator. Zachry and Wilkerson found help in Cadu, their guide and assistant from the previous year. The three



expertly guided the piece of heavy medical equipment to the bed of a nearby pickup, a Mitsubishi with a rusty, five-foot-high metal cage welded to its back. After ensuring that nothing would fall, including the luggage of the American missionaries and the missionaries themselves, the truck lurched forward. *ΣAE Worldwide 2007: Mission to Haiti* had officially begun.

While most chapters are content to raise money, to stay firmly in the comfort zones of their own campuses or communities, the men

pecial kind of dedication

from Arkansas-Fayetteville took their dedication to philanthropy two steps farther. They raised nearly \$9,000: \$5,000 from alumni donations, \$1,500 from local churches, \$2,350 from a chili-cook off and \$1,000 from t-shirt sales. They took one step forward, using that money to get them where people most needed their help. And they took one more step by meeting those people face-to-face.

“The guys who came back for a second year did it for a reason,” Smith says on the ride to the hospital. “I put the option of going on the trip up to the entire chapter, but for most guys, it’s not their thing at all.”

He’s right. It takes a special kind of dedication or a special kind of daring or a special kind of wanderlust to give up a precious week of holiday

vacation, the week after finals, to spend time scraping and painting the walls of a Haitian hospital or pouring the concrete floors of a rural elementary school in the tropical heat.

“Not too many guys were interested,” he says. “Most were on the fence. Others wanted to go, but their parents saw warnings” — according to the Department of State, U.S. citizens who travel to Haiti should exercise extreme caution — “and that was a no.”

But for those who take those two extra steps, the rewards can be life-changing.

“I’ve seen the commercials,” Zachry says, referring to the cliché-but-true sponsor-a-child spots. “They mean something, sure, but it’s not real until you experience it and see it for yourself.”





this was the real world

Leading by example.

The trip, Smith's second with the chapter, was his sixth overall. His father, Pastor Walter Smith, has been taking annual trips to Pignon for the last 15 years. After a decade and a half of one-week jaunts to a place, the man of God made such a household name out of himself that it's common to hear the townfolk speak of a "Pastor Buba," a takeoff on his nickname, Bubba. A school there is named for Will's mother: the Diane Smith Center of Learning. The town's *de facto* mayor, superintendent and overseer, Dr. Guy Theodore, is a personal friend of the Smith family.

But while their presence was a gift to the Haitians, Smith also wanted some of the men to take home a personal understanding of what they were doing. What he didn't know, however, was how difficult that second goal would be. Even before the blood-donation episode, he would face the collective misunderstanding of what a group of young, college-aged men thought about their trip or, more accurately, *didn't* think about their trip. On the third day, during a meal prepared by the staff of Dr. Guy — the village referred to him by his familiar name, pronounced "Ghee" — Smith wasn't happy with what he was seeing. Many of the men had been treating the trip as if it were half work and half spring break. After all, we were in the tropics, and the lazy heat that radiated from the dirt and baked us in tin-roof shacks gave the impression that we were in some tropical paradise. Some were more concerned with drinking Coke from glass bottles and playing cards than with finishing the afternoon's concrete-pouring project or ruminating on the Haitian way of life differs from ours in its stark, electricity-and-running-water-free existence.

Towards the end of the meal, during a lull in the conversation, Smith looked at me and apologized. Before I could ask why, he stood up and addressed the group, telling them in no uncertain terms that, even if they didn't fully comprehend the good they were doing, the trust that had been given to them, the responsibility they had, someone was watching — this was a story for *The Record*, after all.

"Right now, someone's writing a story about us," Smith said, referring to me. "And right now, that story is that the frat boys went to Haiti and nothing else."



LEFT

Augustin, a native Haitian who spoke only Creole, made us feel welcome — shucking coconuts and inviting us to try them.

RIGHT TOP

Aaron Lynchard, Tom Daugherty and Greg Smith await their next destination atop our pickup truck's rusty metal cage.

RIGHT BOTTOM

Despite his handicap, a young Haitian was still included in our gifts. Will Smith presented him with toys and clothes.

As I said, being a leader is about making those tough decisions, and sometimes the best way to show leadership is to provide that proverbial kick in the rear — because it wasn't just their own dignities at risk. Smith's family has a strong connection to Pignon. We were directly representing Dr. Guy. We America's emissaries to the larger world. This wasn't a vacation because classes were over for the semester. This was the real world, and real people needed help. No one spoke for the rest of the meal. At least there wasn't time for hard feelings; it was time to go back to work.

If the men hadn't thought more about their project of laying a concrete floor, they had better start.



and people needed help

Developing as an individual.

Hard work is touted as a virtue, often in the “what doesn’t kill you makes you stronger” sense. But it takes a conscious effort to make that growth happen, and Smith’s speech may have been the galvanizing event, the turning point, that Aaron Lynchard needed. Some months earlier, as the trip was forming, Lynchard had mentioned that he’d like to go.

“A spot just opened up,” Smith told him, “and it’s \$300. If you’re serious, I need your deposit.”

A few minutes later, Lynchard presented Smith with three \$100 bills.

“Don’t you need to ask your parents?” Smith replied.

“I guess I should,” Lynchard said, as if the thought hadn’t occurred to him.

His parents proved to be much easier an obstacle than the logistics and planning for the week-long mission trip. “I just told my parents I was going to Haiti,” Lynchard says. “They said it was fine, if that’s what I wanted to do. It was.”

That kind of resolute decision-making would serve him well. The day prior, a group of the men took the rusty Mitsubishi to a remote primary school, intending to lay the foundation for one of the classrooms. They had bags of concrete, smoothing implements, shovels and buckets.

But they didn’t have any sand.

All concrete in Haiti — unlike the ready-mix variety in the States — requires sand as a stabilizer. So what looked to be a day-long job turned into an embarrassing scene, as confused Americans stood around and lamely tried to look busy, while group of 50 or so Haitians were no doubt wondering why these young men would be so shortsighted as to come to their village without the simple knowledge of how to mix concrete.

After the fiasco was solved, courtesy a dump truck full of sand, the same group of men returned to the Rocky Mountain School. On the surface, the work was simple, but, like all things, reality was a bit more complicated. There was the matter of clearing existing desks and materials out of the room, there was the problem of getting a system to mix, transport and smooth the cement and there was the situation of the gaggles of small children who were so curious as to why these Americans were doing things to their school — and who would inadvertently block the path of a Fraternity man who was struggling under the weight of a full bucket of concrete.



the seeds of

LEFT TOP

Augustin, the unofficial manager for the school-foundation project, directs Chase Rittelmeyer in the best way to pour water into the concrete mix.

LEFT BOTTOM

The Haitian children weren't just faces. Aaron Lynchard put one to work steadying a two-by-four he was cutting to smooth out the newly poured concrete.

RIGHT

The entire village of Pignon has water pumps, courtesy a previous missionary group. The pumps provide potable water for the entire town.



Lynchard, though, took to the task. Instead of wondering why the children were in his way, he had them help steady a wooden plank he was cutting. He gave one of the kids his sunglasses and posed for pictures. He busied himself as the go-between for the mixing station and the pouring station — and he knew

when to step back and let Augustín, a Haitian who led the charge on smoothing the new floor, be in charge.

“It was a lot of work just to get there, just to make the project work,” Lynchard says. “Without Augustin, we would have been in a lot of trouble.”

But the work paid off in the end, as Lynchard and the others on the project — Tom Dougherty, Chase Rittelmeyer, Greg Smith and Wilkerson — spent the last 30 minutes of their time at Rocky Mountain playing with the very kids who were so interested in their work.

“These weren't the city kids,” Lynchard says, referring to the main villagers who are used to the sight of missionaries with deep pockets and guilt complexes, “who were begging for money and candy. They appreciated us playing with them. And now, the kids don't have to walk on a dirt floor. It's simple, it doesn't mean much, but a cement floor is a big deal in that rural area.”

The first task, pouring the floor, was finished, and with it came the beginnings of change. Lynchard and the others had finally done what they set out to do: They made a positive impact on the lives of people who needed a boost. And, perhaps most importantly, they learned the simple pleasures of work. The seeds of personal growth had been sown.

And there were three more days of work to go.



The True Gentlemen of Haiti 2007

SENIORS

Josh Callaway
Tom Dougherty
Will Smith
Blake Wilkerson

JUNIORS

Zeke Zachry

SOPHOMORES

David Deaderick
Blake Jacks
Aaron Lynchard
Greg Smith

FRESHMEN

Alex Borgognoni
Chase Rittelmeyer

growth had been sown

The tale of Dr. Guy.

The men worked for a total of five days, toiling under the hot sun, sweating in stuffy sleeping lodges and bruising their fingers scraping paint, but it wasn't until Dr. Guy invited the chapter to his home for a farewell dinner on their final night that they grasped the big picture. It was a light-bulb moment for many of them, because painting hallways, scraping baby cribs and installing ceiling fans — as well as pouring concrete — might not have been what they had in mind when they signed up for the trip.

The hospital, the center of the town in every possible way, wasn't just some two-bit operation in the middle of nowhere. It was the Mayo Clinic of Haiti, a highly specialized, highly selective operation that outperformed any other hospital in the country. They had been inadvertently working in the hub of all things missionary. The village of Pignon has been around for some time, which is like saying the city of Denver was founded at some point in history. Unlike Denver, though, there are no records for the beginning of Pignon. As a small village in the middle of the mountains, it was probably no more than a large outpost for travelers. Its modern history started in 1983 when Dr. Guy came back to make good on a childhood promise.

"My father was a Baptist minister," Dr. Guy begins during our final meal. "After church, we would go and visit the community."

So far, we were following his story. Two days prior, we attended a Creole Baptist ceremony in the morning before spending the afternoon walking around, visiting the locals and passing



out food and toys to children in outlying areas. "Hey," we thought, "we're pretty much the same as Dr. Guy. Good for us."

"One day," Dr. Guy says, "a friend of mine did not appear. I asked my father about this, and he said, 'Guy, your friend is so sick. He is not going to make it through the night.'"

Again, we could understand him. We had seen that even Haiti's best medicine had its limits, a fact none of us could forget as we walked through the dark streets on the night of the blood-transfusion incident. Yep, we were still doing really well.

"We left that night," Dr. Guy says, "and prayed that I would pass my medical tests. 'Dear Lord,' I said, 'bless me so that I may go to medical school and become a doctor and come back for my people.'"

It was here that we started to see the point of what we were doing. Coming to Haiti, being a missionary — it wasn't about doing something good in a poor country or helping paint a room or even bringing medical supplies to a village in the middle of nowhere. It was about a promise. It was about an obligation. It was about the realization that you have the capacity to give, which means you have the duty to give.

But, like so many of us, the pressures of daily life can make those responsibilities — or, in Dr. Guy's case, promises — seem irrelevant. Years later, after initial medical training in Port-au-Prince, a tenure with the United States Air Force and enough savings for a home in New York, Dr. Guy was ready to move on to a life as a successful doctor.

"One night, I had a dream," he continues. "My father showed himself to me and reminded me of my promise. So the money I was going to use for the deposit on my home I used to start the hospital. That is the story of Pignon."

As Dr. Guy finished his story, we sat in silence. We had been working, learning and living as selflessly as possible for the past four days, but this man had been in service to his village for 24 years, on the magnitude of 2,000 times longer.





have the duty to give

As we walked back to our dormitories, the men spent time in reflecting on what Pignon represented. Through all the poverty and the lack of electricity and the dirt and trash and animals roaming the streets, it provided a way for those with means to provide for those who don't. In the traditional Baptist framework of Haiti, it's understood that those who are blessed to turn those good fortunes into blessings for others. You receive a blessing in order to give them away. The men had done just that.

Conversations began, dissecting the time, three days prior, when the men drove to Pignon's outlying farms to pass out toys, clothes and candy. They had done the same on the 2006 trip, but when we arrived in the Mitsubishi, the gratitude of the Haitians was immediately evident: A young mother, infant in her arms, was wearing the shirt Smith and his crew had given them a year ago.

And, judging from the stains and stretched fabric, it looked as if she had been wearing it the whole time.

Children jumped and clapped and screamed and crowded the Americans to get another box of candy or another small doll. Parents appreciated the baseball caps — “Give them to the old men,” Lynchard said, “the ones who look like they’ve been in the fields all day” — and the little girl who Zachry said was on the edge of death from starvation last year was happy and round and healthy.

And of course there was that first step off the plane, the time when the abstract notion of “yeah, those poor Haitians” ceased to be a late-night commercial and became human beings who needed help and who appreciated what the Fraternity men gave them.

“I’ve done things like this my whole life,” Wilkerson says when I ask him about his experiences in Haiti. “I’ve done projects like building decks and painting houses. I’ve always enjoyed it, but this year I got much more out of this Haiti experience personally.”

LEFT TOP

Two young worshippers, in their Sunday best, wait to enter the Baptist church for services.

LEFT BOTTOM

Will Smith presents Dr. Guy Theodore, the hospital's founder and our benefactor, with a t-shirt to commemorate the 2007 Haiti trip.

RIGHT

Just outside the operating room of the Hospital de Bienfaisance, nurses and doctors decorate the hospital for the upcoming Christmas celebration.



TOP

The entire group of Americans and Haitians came together in the spirit of improving the village of Pignon — and in having a little fun.

The return home.

Any memorable experience, from your first day at college to your wedding to the five days you spent in a Haitian village the week before Christmas 2007, takes time to sink in. The full meaning of what you did only becomes significant later because it's the thoughtful understanding of what those events meant then, what they mean now, what they could mean tomorrow that makes the difference. And the months after the trip have been, possibly, the most critical — because it's not solely a man's actions that define him, but it's the retrospective, the understanding, that makes those actions worthwhile.

After the holiday season had subsided and life had returned to normal, free from spur-of-the-moment assertions like "We just don't deserve Christmas presents this year," the men saw what being in Haiti had done to them. There were large-scale changes, like schoolchildren who returned to classes with a solid floor beneath their feet, but the Fraternity men also made leaps forward as individuals.

Zachry, on his second trip to Haiti, is in line to lead the group next year. "When I left in 2006," he says, "I knew that this is what I wanted to do. I changed my major from business to journalism because I want to tell the stories about people who need help." Smith has now passed the torch to him.

"I know [David] Deaderick and Greg [Smith] are planning on doing it again," Lynchard says. "We looked at the photos, saw the people we got to help and decided we needed to go back."

Smith, the man who made it all possible, concurs.

"This year's trip was worth it," he says. "When we got there, I wasn't focused on improving the chapter. I wanted guys to get something for themselves out of the trip, but I never expected people to react the way they did."

Smith uses the vague "they" purposefully. On the surface, he refers to the other ten men who, back in December, landed in what they felt was the middle of nowhere, only to find an experience that would change their lives. But he also refers to the response the chapter received from its alumni — and not just those who ponied up \$5,000 for the strange idea of traveling to Haiti — and he also means that the wider audience, the world at large, that sees Greeks as incapable of giving back to the world they live in.

Next year will bring the Third Annual ΣAE Worldwide: Mission to Haiti trip. While Smith will be retiring from the event, he's groomed a group that can take the reins and run with what's been established. As they say, no good deed goes unrewarded. If that's true, the men of Arkansas-Alpha Upsilon will be reaping their rewards for years to come. 🌞