

Art Therapy

Earthquake Trauma Care



Project Medishare
Port-au-Prince, Haiti
February 11-16, 2010

Rodashka



When I first entered the Medicare tent one month after the earthquake, Rodaska caught my eye. She was withdrawn and had an angry air about her. I approached her with a box of new crayons and a pad of blank paper. I spoke to her in French and the few words of Haitian Creole I knew. She allowed me to sit beside her and we colored together in silence. Her Mother watched from the chair beside. We exchanged silent smiles.

After awhile I got up and made my rounds to some of the other children. I could feel Rodahska's eyes following me.

The next day I returned to her bedside. The nurses had changed her dressings and were encouraging her to practice with her walker. She was resisting her exercises.

We colored together for awhile. I asked her if she knew any of the other children in the tent. There was a young girl who had to remain lying down in the row at the foot of Rodashka's bed. Rodashka said she didn't know anyone's name. She believed she couldn't make friends and that no one would want to know her.



I asked Rodashka about her likes and dislikes. She was 14 years old. She had moved to Port-au-Prince with her Mother from Cap Haitian about 6 months previously. She liked to watch Hannah Montana on TV after school. She preferred the natural Hannah Montana as opposed to the blond wig. I agreed and we laughed about that.

After awhile, I got up to make my rounds and color with the other children. She watched me and gave me smiles as I checked in with her visually from various beds in the pediatric tent.

Rodashka 's left leg was broken below the knee, and her right leg was severely shattered. She wore an orthopedic brace with several large pins running through her thigh. She kept her right leg hidden under her covers.

While we were coloring, I asked what she thought the children with amputations felt. She thought long and hard about that. She responded with a story she had written about a girl in Africa whose house was burned down and who was alone with no legs. I listened and cried silently behind my smile.



She drew a picture of a heart with an arrow through it, with tears streaming down from the tip. The translated text says: The heart of Haiti is transpierced by tears. Thank you for the words of encouragement. Pray for us. We, too, from our side, for you.”

The next day, I brought in an Episcopal Priest to give a blessing to one of the critical patients who was about to be airlifted to the U.S. I brought the Priest over to Rodashka. She stood up with the help of her walker. He gave her a very special blessing.

A few hours later, after touring the ruins of Port-au-Prince, I returned to the Medicare tent. My heart was torn and confused while trying to process the events of the past few hours amid the ruins of the city during several aftershocks. I entered the pediatric tent, and sat on Rodashka's bed. She started pouring out her story...how she was alone in the house watching Hannah Montana when the quake hit. How she was knocked unconscious when the wall fell. She had passed



out, and awoke in darkness with severe pain in her legs . She was covered by debris and did not understand what was happening. She cried out, over and over. She didn't know how long she was there. Suddenly she heard voices and people were pulling at her one exposed arm.

She continued to spew her story, half in French, half in Creole. I sat there and absorbed all that I could. I held her as she cried in my arms. I, too was crying, as my heart was so heavy from all that I had seen during my afternoon in the city during the National Day of mourning.

The next day, which turned out to be my last day, I entered the tent and asked her to color another picture for me. It was a picture of a blooming flower with 3 pedals. The translated text says: “The care that I receive represents a quarter of my life”.

I brought out a coloring book, I’d found in the supply tent and asked her which picture the girl at the foot of her bed might like. Rodashka leafed through the pages, gaining momentum as she studied the girl. She selected some new markers in the colors she thought this girl might like. We repeated the process, which quickly gained momentum. She chose pictures and colors for each patient in the tent. Her Mother became the runner, delivering pictures and markers to each patient as directed by Rodashka. We decided that Rodashka should be the “Directrice of coloring” for the tent, with her Mom as runner. I gave her this project, asking for each child to show



me their designs later . We took a vote as to whether or not the children who were bedridden could keep their markers. After much discussion, we decided they could keep 3 each, since I'd found an adequate supply in the depot.

When I returned to the tent, Rodashka was using her walker with her Mother beside her . They were laughing and joking with the other patients. They cheerily handed over the collected artwork. It made my heart happy to see how empowered Rodashka had become, and how she was able to reach out beyond herself to help others with the help of her Mother, a stranger with a safe shoulder, a blessing, and the healing power of art.



Leslie Sosnowski

Earthquake