

Bling Bling by Christine Topinka

Sometimes it is the voice of a child that really drives a message home. I say that because on my last trip to Jamaica it was the voice of many children that reminded me to be thankful for all of the little things I was so fortunate to have. I was spending the morning at the Basic School in Hagley Gap. We had just received a big drop of supplies which contained numerous school items such as glue, paper, and colored pencils. Most of these supplies are used on a daily basis for most school-aged children, but not here in the Gap. In the Gap the kids are lucky enough to have one writing tablet and pencil to do their daily work. Their chalkboard is nothing more than a piece of wood painted black. I was a little shocked at first, but then realized it didn't really matter what the chalkboard looked like as long as it had writing on it.

The kids were so animated as I spread the newspapers over the table. I had planned to show the kids how to trace their printed names with glue and then sprinkle glitter on the glue to make a nice print of their name. As each child picked which color of paper they wanted to use, the energy in the room was bursting. I showed them how to print their names in pencil on the paper first, and then I helped them trace their printed names with a thin line of glue. They couldn't wait till it was their turn to smear the white runny stuff all over their paper. Yet each child patiently waited their turn, and then giggled as they were able to smear the glue all over their name leaving a raised white print. When it was time for shaking the glitter, it was almost too loud to concentrate over the squeals of laughter and excitement. They all were so anxious to use the shiny flakes that stuck so easily to their glue printed names.

It wasn't until Obed, a sweet four-year-old, was shaking glitter on his name that I thought to ask the children if they knew what this material was called. They had never even seen Glitter before let alone used it so freely. No sooner did I ask if they knew what it was we were sprinkling did the whole crowd of kids yell, "Bling Bling!" My heart melted. These sweet little children had made the connection of eye-catching accessories to the shiny flakes of glitter that dotted their page. How shocking to see the blatant overlapping of cultures and the interpretation of evolving pop culture. The truth is that most of those kids seemed as excited about the glitter that other kids would have been about real "Bling Bling". I was reminded that it is the simple things we should hold dear. That true joy really is a matter of perspective and I should keep mine grounded as long as possible.



Christine Topinka was moved by the time she spent with the children of Hagley Gap last summer.

Upcoming Events

- March 18-25** Florida International University Alternative Spring Break
- May** Ripon College Maymester
- June 17** Annual board meeting in Hagley Gap
- June 24** Jamaican Jamboree and Health Fair

New Staff in Jamaica



Meet Nurse Eula Johnson, better known as "Myrtle," born to "Mas Tookie" and "Ta Coolie Girl" of Minto, St Thomas. She now lives in Mavis Bank with her husband and 14 year old daughter. She enjoys church, singing and good conversation with nice people. Myrtle has been a nurse for 20 years and is excited to be working at the Clinic. She began working for the Blue Mountain Project in February 2006.

Here are items that are needed in the Clinic for day to day operations and renovations:

Fans, Stove, Fridge, Storage Cabinets, 6 ER Curtains and Tracks, Scales, Trash Cans, Antibacterial Soap, Aspirin, Cough Syrup, Children's Tylenol, Aleve, Yeast Infection Creams, Condoms, Ice Packs, Tongue Depressors, Medical Lights and Covers (Ears, Nose, Throat), Scrubs (especially sizes L-2XL) Crutches, Walkers, Ace Bandages, Manila File Folders, Green Hanging Files, White Copy Paper, Color Copy Paper, Envelopes, Notebooks, Plastic Bags (especially small sizes), Garbage Bags, Potato Sacks, Work Gloves. Hammers, Screw Drivers, Levels, Wire Cutters, Nails, Screws, Shovels, Pick Axes, Tool Box