

While other students were on school break, six local students from Drury and Hoosac (Rachael Barrows, Olivia Mazzacco, Skylar Moresi, Carrie Cellana, Lana Kingsley and Holly Boudreau) were embarking on a life-changing journey to Haiti with Haiti Plunge Inc. Despite skepticism from our peers about going off the grid with no running water or electricity for ten days, we dove in head first. There was no turning back as we drove through the city on the back of the Plunge's famous pickup truck, "Auntie Alice" with the "purple cage". Though this was my second trip, the stark difference between the cities in the US and the Haitian cities of Port-Au-Prince and Cabaret amazed me once again. The chaos of people walking in the streets while trucks, busses and cars moved in every which way brought a new sense of excitement and thrill to the trip.



Turning onto the mountain road leading to the village of Brely we embraced small huts scattered throughout the hills, and the lone sound of our truck. The best part of the ride was seeing the smiling kids along the way waving to us. When we arrived in Brely, it was evident they were awaiting our arrival. Despite not speaking the same language, we learned each others names and they began teaching us all of their favorite games and pointing to our clothing or facial features so that we would tell them how to say it in English. Midway through our trip we celebrated Mardi Gras with the village kids playing different games so they could win prizes. It was refreshing to see kids at that age genuinely enjoying life without phones or video games. Their passion for learning was truly inspiring, and reminded me of how lucky I am to have an education provided for me.

Our main project for the week was to finish building a storage room that would house the team's equipment. This project required a lot of physical effort on the part of the team. Sifting sand to mix cement, shoveling rocks into buckets and transporting these materials to the base of the room were the most challenging parts of the trip.. We also learned how to mix concrete and hauled cinder blocks. All of this work was done with the villagers. We completed the storage room by the end of the week with a great sense of accomplishment.

We were impressed with how independent the young children were. Five and six year olds were carrying baby siblings around with them for the day while others would trek down the mountain, 2-3 miles each way, to the spring to carry 5 gallon buckets of water back for their family. We also traveled to other villages that HPI serves and were totally immersed into the culture of the mountain people in Haiti. We saw how many things in our life we take for granted, and how there are so many things we thought were necessities but are really just wants. The team gained a new understanding of how precious things in our life are, especially food and water. We had to learn to maximize our resources which meant using as few dishes as possible in order to conserve water. We always made extra food to share with the children. Their hunger was a harsh reality. The older kids made sure that the younger ones ate first. One day, we started a fire and made s'mores with all of the kids, and they absolutely treasured that experience as much as I did. While they were enjoying the s'mores I was touched by the fact that this was a once in a lifetime experience for them.

There is a sense of humanity which is lost in our culture. The mountain people we visited were excited to spend time with us and all the other Haitians that joined us. I was able to sit at a table with 5 other teenage girls and be a part of a real conversation without screens in our faces. We were able to learn so much about each other in ten short days, and shared so many laughs that we would never had experienced at home. At the same time, we were able to sit and listen as the Haitians spoke to each other in Creole without any distractions. Despite not understanding every word, I appreciated how beautiful their language is.

Having this opportunity to spend school break off the grid was truly life changing. I go through everyday thinking about how grateful I should be for little things. I think about how the village kids like Darwins, Brinna or Benji would react in whatever situation I am in. Taking a trip like this is something I would recommend for anyone, at any age, because it is never too soon nor too late to be enlightened, simply by the lives of other people.

**(Author, Holly Boudreau is a senior at Drury High School in North Adams, MA.**

**She recently received her appointment to the Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs. )**

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