

Haiti Rescue

Missionaries lose limbs—not faith

Story by Debra Smith

When Haiti's earthquake struck January 12, "The whole earth swayed like waves of the sea," remembered Barb Lataillade. "Then everything under me was gone; there was nothing to hold onto, nothing to grab." Barb and her husband Patrick were on the second floor of their Port-au-Prince home when suddenly, a tremendous roar resounded from the south. Patrick stood to look, and half the house instantaneously collapsed. In its place, he saw open sky; then, all was dark. As the shaking subsided, Barb called out to Patrick. "I heard his voice," she said, "so I knew he was alive. But he said, 'I can't come to you; my arm is pinned.' I couldn't move either—I was trapped, with my foot barely attached," she said.

Patrick spent the next 18 hours buried by the collapsed concrete roof. Meanwhile Barb, with coaching from friends, made a tourniquet for her leg and managed to crawl out. Neighbors found a vehicle, but the first two hospitals the group visited were destroyed. Finally they found an operational hospital; there Barb was laid on the parking lot and left, with a friend, amongst the waiting crowd. When staff eventually looked at her, "They said they couldn't help me because the surgery room was gone," Barb recalled. All night she lay outside; Patrick remained under the rubble, his arm pinned by an iron rod. "The pain was unbearable," he said. "Many times I prayed, 'Lord, take me home.'" He repeatedly sang *God is So Good*, alternating between English and Creole. "It's best to lift up to God any challenge," Patrick said. "We need to glorify Him no matter what, and singing helped keep my spiritual sanity."

Patrick and Barb, 29-year missionaries to Haiti, have planted five Calvary Chapels in villages south of Port-au-Prince. Sent by CC Sarasota, FL, they established Living Word Ministries to train pastors, educate children, and spread the Gospel to remote areas. The organization runs a medical clinic and a sponsorship program that provides food, uniforms, and schooling to more than 200 children. "Spiritually, Haiti is a battleground," said Haitian-born Patrick. While voodoo is widespread, "Christian education is the main thing that's going to bring change in the country."

Patrick was dug out after an agonizing night and the couple reunited the day after the quake—each still without any medical attention. "Patrick was very sick from the crush injury," Barb recalled. "The infection had spread into his bones and kidneys. ... I knew it was urgent we find help."

Friends discovered the Lataillades' passports in their collapsed home. "God did that; there's no other way," remarked Barb. "It's just not possible." But at the airport, there were no U.S.-bound planes. After a soldier pointed out that without transportation the couple would soon die, a Canadian plane diverted its course and flew them to Florida.

Patrick's right arm and Barb's right leg were immediately amputated. Though Patrick repeatedly approached death, they both lived; "And so many others didn't," remarked Barb. "I ask, *Why? Why did we get the medical help we needed, and others didn't?* I think our mission on this earth isn't done. If our work were completed, God would have taken us."

The couple is recovering in Florida. Patrick has been fitted for his prosthesis, but Barb's progress is slower due to infection. Though she still feels phantom pain daily, "Life goes on," Barb said regarding the amputations. "I guess God knew we didn't need an arm and leg to finish the ministry, so He took them. I have no other explanation. I can't say, *Why me?*—Why not me? We will finish what God calls us to do with what He's given us."

The Lataillades said their experience has given them fresh urgency to reach Haitians with the Gospel and to exhort American believers. Patrick has already spoken at several churches; Barb has joined him on occasion and will consistently as soon as her recovery allows. "We want to challenge the American church to be strong in the Lord and to praise God no matter what," Patrick said. "As Christians, we are soldiers of the cross—and that includes suffering." ☞

Be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Ephesians 6:10b

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Patrick and Barb Lataillade

After the quake: Patrick is uncovered and pulled out of the rubble that pinned his right arm for 18 hours. It was later amputated.