

HELPING



HAITI

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At 4:53 p.m. on Jan. 12, 2010, senior Jacques Pape received a life-changing phone call as he walked into his Atlanta apartment. Jacques, you almost lost your mother,” the voice on the other end of the phone said. It was Pape’s mother calling from her sister’s hospital bedside in Haiti seconds after the unprecedented 7.0 magnitude earthquake struck just 16 miles west of Port-au-Prince, the country’s capital.

“The whole notion of an earthquake hitting Haiti was hard to grasp,” said Pape, who is from Haiti and came to the United States to attend Morehouse.

Pape remembers spending the subsequent few hours trying to get in contact with his uncle, older brothers and other family members. He was desperate to know whether his family was safe. >





Morehouse students join relief efforts in Haiti. Left to right: Jacques Pape, Regis DeVeaux, Stevon Parris, Malcolm Clyburn, Ezekiel Phillips, David Wall Rice '95, Nasser Muhammad, Paul Underwood, Le Mel Lindsey and Rodrigus Graham

It would have made perfect sense for Pape to feel immensely lonely while much of his closest family members were trapped in the devastation of the earthquake's aftermath. But members of the Morehouse community quickly began to reach out to Jacques as the natural disaster began to seize the world's attention.

Around 8 o'clock that evening, Pape received a voice message from Gwendolyn Wade, director of Student Abroad and International Student Services. "She said, 'If you need anything, don't hesitate to ask.'"

"And of course I asked," Pape recalled.

With Wade's administrative support and guidance, Pape put together a Morehouse College Haitian Relief Fund and initiative in less than 24 hours. Through the official fund, members of the Morehouse community were given the opportunity to raise funds donated directly to non-profit organizations that were active in the relief efforts.

Just seven days after the quake shook Haiti, Pape and young alumnus Roosevelt Ducleus '08 (also a native of Haiti) stocked their cars with as many donated supplies as they could and drove from Atlanta to Miami. From there they boarded a privately chartered plane and

flew to the distressed island. They took the most essential donated goods (medical supplies, water and tents), and what couldn't be taken was donated to the Salvation Army to distribute through its own Haitian relief efforts.

"I was going down there to see what happened. That's the place where I grew up, but to other people [the disaster] was just a picture," Pape explained of his impetus to venture into the heart of the catastrophe.

"As we approached Port-au-Prince, the only lights that were on were navy ships...everything else was pitch black."

Pape arrived with a group of volunteers from Hospitals for Humanity, a non-profit organization that seeks to decrease barriers in healthcare access in some of the world's most impoverished countries. Upon their arrival, the 50 Hospitals for Humanity volunteers were informed that their lodging and food arrangements for their five-day undertaking were through family and friends.

Along with Pape, the volunteers found themselves filling a crucial void and taking over night shifts at General Hospital, Port-au-Prince's main hospital, for two nights. Pape now serves as a coordinator for Hospitals for Humanity.

The organization makes weekly missions to Haiti, sending groups of volunteers to work in make-shift hospitals and clinics in an effort to ease the high demand for desperately needed health-care services. The organization hopes to open and operate a hospital with what would be only the second trauma center in the country.

While many students spent their spring break on beautiful beaches riding jet skis and indulging in other leisure activities, Pape—not entirely satisfied with his already impressive humanitarian efforts—and fellow senior Ezekiel Phillips led a small group of Morehouse students on a mission trip to give out food, water and clothing to people throughout the Port-au-Prince region.

"When everything happened, I was the only student in the AUC who went to Haiti," Pape said. "Yet one voice was only so strong. By bringing Morehouse students to Haiti, they serve as ambassadors for not just Morehouse and the AUC, but the U.S. in general because not many Americans have been able to go down there."



Jacques Pape (standing in middle) helps with building a roof.



David Wall Rice '95, assistant professor of psychology, stands in front of a crumbling building in Haiti.

In one day, the group of student volunteers laid the foundation for 150 homes in a small Port-Au-Prince province that hadn't been touched by any international organization up to that point.

"Our focus wasn't on one particular cause," Pape said. "We wanted to do everything that our expertise could allow."

During the week, the Morehouse group would have debriefings about their days' work and experiences. Phillips, who captured the entire trip on film, said the trip truly changed his life. For eight days he filmed the group's activities and everything it entailed.

"There was one moment in Haiti that I'll never forget," Phillips said. "When we pulled to the side of the road to give water to children in a village, we had enough water for all the children who were present. Yet they still fought over the bottles as if those bottles would be the last ones they would see in a long time."

It was during one of these debriefings that Pape was inspired to start his own nonprofit organization. He named it in honor of his father – Foundation Eric Pape. The goal of the organization is to facilitate the building of sustainable communities in Haiti.

"We came to a consensus that as stu-

dents we should focus our attention on building a school," Pape said.

The cost for the first school the group will attempt to build is a mere \$7,500 U.S. dollars, which includes not just the expense of the school building, but also the salaries of the school's teachers for one year.

In the months since the earthquake, Pape feels few improvements have been made.

"Nothing has improved yet because people are constantly being moved around without any long-term sustainable solutions being found," he said.

Although many countries responded to appeals for humanitarian aid by pledging funds and dispatching rescue and medical teams, Pape said more must be done.

"The Haitian government is an obstacle because multimillion dollar projects can't be achieved [due to] the corruption," he said. "On a smaller level, the people aren't doing any better."

"I want people to see that they don't have to rely on the government for basic supplies," Pape said about the impact he wants his

foundation to have. "It would be in the interest of redeeming our status of being the first independent black nation, not the poorest."

Only time will tell if the relief efforts in Haiti will create a better nation for the people there.

As he looks toward Haiti's future, Pape feels suspended between optimism and a stark reality. He laments the tumultuous and deadly political climate that has plagued Haiti for most of his life.

"My mom tells me of the Haiti she knew, where she could play with friends and ride her bike in the streets. That's not how I grew up," said Pape. "It's up to my generation to stand up and take a stand for the future of Haiti. Hopefully, we'll be able to restore it to where it can fulfill its name as the pearl of the Caribbean." ■

Editor's Note: A special fund has been set up for the Morehouse community and supporters to make financial donations. Go to <https://giving.morehouse.edu/NetCommunity/SSLPage.aspx?pid=344> and click on the menu to select Morehouse College Haitian Relief Fund.



View Ezekiel Phillips' video presentation "Haiti: The Wake Up Call (3:33)" on YouTube at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RQxdZcz2T4M>.

