

The night outside here on Lagonave looks like the intro piece of Dreamworks. You know, the clouds and the kid with a fishing pole sitting on the crescent moon. The same dark colors with clouds ready to jump out at you. And the moon looks pretty full tonight, too.

Today, after church at 8:00am, we got a view of some of the projects going on here related to the church mission. We went on a pickup truck with extra leaf springs. We used them all. The road is coral, so the longest smooth stretch was about 20 to 50 yards, then it was slow down to a crawl until we traversed spots rough enough to make my pedometer register. In fact, when I got back from our trip of sitting on the sides of this pickup bed, I registered 10,000 steps. That would be great but I only walked about a 1,000 of those. Don't tell the insurance company. They bank on me walking a lot for my health.

We looked at a place used in October to distribute UMCOR sponsored food after the hurricanes of a year ago. There were four or five hurricanes that hit here. Schools were mashed, and a windmill used as a water pump was mangled. Houses were destroyed, etc. Being outside in the heat and the roads from hell made us all tired. We drank lots of water, and wondered, "What's the best thing to do, find a way to get to a broken water pipe at 200 foot depth or scrap that well and dig another at a different location. The well is 500 feet all together, so that's a lot of weight to bring up. The well project was called "Rebekah" and was funded by the East Kansas Annual Conference five years ago.

We did run across two community gardens. One was just beginning and one was near harvest. It's hard to keep the seasons straight around here. As far as I know, it's just hot and rainy. The locals claim there is a rainy season--during that time it rains every third day. A dry rainy season means it rains less often than that. The ground is poor and red in color. There is little money for fertilizer. Animals are beyond free range. There are no fences or barriers of any kind. So dogs take out the chickens, so there are none of them. No eggs either (due to the lack of chickens, I suppose). Those kinds of protein need to be boated in from the "mainland" of Haiti. Goats, burros, and cattle are loosely cared for. When I think of the birth of Jesus, I'm amazed. The hymn says "the shepherds watched their flocks by night." Except for the annual Christmas pageant, I thought shepherds were guys with beards. The shepherds around here, though, average about 8 years old. That's old enough to find your way home under most circumstances. The animals seem to follow. The shepherd I met today was named Linus. Linus was responsible for three burros and a steer. He taught me how to say, "I'm going to Sousa Phillip, at the Methodist compound." That's where we are staying. I was glad to learn how to say something useful in French. Also in French, I said, "Thank you, Linus!" Then he asked me for a dollar.

He's old for a shepherd of eight years.

Thanks and peace.

--Fred