

# Banshee

Pray for the dead, Fight like hell for the Living



# EMERGENCY



V.1, Issue 4

## THE BANSHEE

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## DISTRIBUTION

As per usual, special thanks to all the EMTs and paramedics who get this paper out all over the city. Without you this thing couldn't function: our thanks always goes out to you.

Please feel free to reach out for us to lend a hand with our rabble rousing purposes in the good fight to restore the morale of citywide EMS.

Mischief and mayem  
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The opinions expressed herein are those of individual writers and not necessarily of the Banshee Newspaper and association as a whole.

## EDITORIAL

So, for issue 4 our bottom line remains the same—that the EMT and Paramedic is a beat down, ignoble creature, a folk hero with a backstory meandering in an inglorious existence largely due to their own stubborn refusal to fight back. On our backs a lot of green money is made, via our toil a lot of firemen have jobs, a lot of company men have two cars, and two homes. We at the Banshee completely respect that many of our co-workers view our work as a communist plot to subvert this work force, or a mob of shiftless agitators sticking it to the man without a plan. But, we are in this for you with or without your permission, because there is a growing network now of emergency medical personnel that are tired of lying back and taking it. You

can't expect there to be respect for our work unless we go harder for the public, you can't expect to be handed a damn thing if you won't fight for it. A special focus this issue is on the intra-agency volunteer effort down in Haiti, because it was a perfect example of our common theme; when EMS unites across agency and goes hard for the people then our real glory and purpose is made plain. Big ups to the Bed-Stuy Volunteer Ambulance Corps and the Haitian Physician Association (AMHE) who made that immediate relief effort possible. Big ups to the women and men who get harassed for handing out this paper. Big ups to you EMS, because one of these days yer gonna see all the damn potential our work has to offer this city and yer gonna know yer real worth.

## Helping Heroes' Program Offers Training for Fire/EMS Pros in Need

Three companies that offer training services for emergency responders jointly announced the launch of a program called Helping Heroes, which offers certified first responders, EMTs, and paramedics who are affected by the recession free continuing education to maintain their professional license or certification during their layoff or furlough.

The companies, CentreLearn Solutions LLC (Shrewsbury, Pa.), EMwSResponder.com (Fort Atkinson, Wis.), and Emergency Preparedness Systems (Plover, Wis.) together set up the Web site RapidCE.com for the program. James Eastham, Sc.D., CEO of CentreLearn, said the reason for the initiative was because, "Across the nation, many EMS personnel are feeling the effects of the recession firsthand, in some cases even losing their jobs." EPS President Greg Friese, who also is a paramedic, added, "Maintaining EMS certification has real costs -- I am honored to have this opportunity to help lighten the financial burden of EMS professionals who are out of work."

Enrollment in the Helping Heroes program is available at [www.rapidce.com/helpingheroes](http://www.rapidce.com/helpingheroes). Documentation of circumstances and EMS certification or licensure is required. Certified first respond-

ers, EMTs, or paramedics who qualify will receive a free subscription to RapidCE.com, which offers unlimited access to more than 200 CECBEMS accredited continuing education lessons. CE certificates will be awarded after viewing a lesson and successfully completing a post-test.





# The Haitian Airlift

## WALTER ADLER EMT

On December 12th, a quake of 7.0 magnitude ripped apart the city of Carfour killing nearly 150,000 people outright and burying an additional 100,000 under the rubble, thereby creating an evolving MCI that would cause traumatic injury to and additional tens of thousands in a nation lacking even a rudimentary EMS system.

Haiti, one of the poorest nations in the western hemisphere, was the first free black nation and a bastion of liberty throughout the colonial experience. Haiti sent 7,000 troops to fight in the American revolution against the British in INSERT. Haiti armed and supported Simon DeBolivar in his fight to liberate Columbia, Bo-

livia and Venezuela in exchange for ending slavery. Haiti fought England, Spain and France in an 100 year war of attrition and isolation. Haiti cast the deciding UN vote to recognize the State of Israel. The Haitian Diaspora produces more millionaires than any other Caribbean nation and composes a vast segment of the healthcare industry in the tri-state area.

Yet, what we in the West know Haiti for is far more inglorious. We associate Haiti not with its libertine nature: we are obsessed with its role as a drug trafficking hub, a human trafficking center and its string of brutal military dictators. We see in Haiti in a sense what we wish to see, a poor destitute country unable to advance its condition.

On December 12th, just four hours after the ramifications of the quake were reported, the Bedford Stuyvesant Volunteer Ambulance Company (BSVAC); a two ambulance outfit, self styled as the nation's only minority run ambulance service decided to respond to the disaster in the event that the world would be unwilling or unable. BSVAC went on Channel 12 and 1010 Winds and announced that if anyone who was willing with medical training to respond to the disaster in Haiti showed up at their door, BSVAC would find a way to get them on the ground to Port Au Prince. They didn't have a plan. Like the first responders at 9/11 (of whom they were also a part);

*CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE*

moved by a duty to act their volunteers mobilized immediately as did over 90 civilians who answered their call.

And clearly, based solely in the noble realm of heroic idealism they succeed. By December 16th 104 volunteers, 14 from their network and 90 assorted medical professionals boarded a VISION charter airline paid for by the Church of Scientology, and staffed with a motley crew ranging from the East Norwich Volunteer Fire Company, 40 nurses and doctors from the Haitian Physicians Association (AMHE), EMTs and Paramedics of Transcare, AMR, Assist, and FDNY both Fire and EMS, as well as Scientology volunteers covering the gamut of disaster relief specialists, to nurses, to midwives. 104 strangers boarded that plane, which following a layover in Miami touched down on a desolate and newly reclaimed airstrip December 17th, 1700 at Toussaint L'Overture International Airport, the stench of death in the air.

The story of the Brooklyn irregular medical column is the oldest story ever told. It is a tale of civilian volunteers picking up the slack of government negligence and inaction. As the world froze for a week and the media gawked awkwardly at this human rights disaster, 104 women and men took immediate action, by the 6th day the reclamation of the general hospital (a symbol of national pride) had begun and by sundown on that 6th day the only 24 ER in the nation was running with both Haitian staff, Haitian Diaspora with a 9 person EMS contingent, and 9 Miami Fire Fighter Paramedics using a bread truck as a bus. By the morning of the 7th day when a 6.2 magnitude quake ripped through the city shaking the foundations of the reclaimed General Hospital forcing an evacuation onto the street, amid the ashes and desperation it was clear that thanks to a legion of strangers, volunteers from around the world: the Dominican Republic, Cuba, Israel, Brazil and many more 5 separate hospitals had been established (one 300 bed ER staffed by the Israeli military), ad hock ambulances were running (one a four bed make shift Bread truck of Miami firemen), and the general hospital was despite numerous warnings being staffed overnight by NYC EMS, Cuban and Haitian trained ALS and nurses.

The miracle and voodoo magic of the irregular medical column was its synergy. 104 total strangers many responding to TV and radio calls for help, moved by their individual duty to act took part from the Tri-state area. In the January 17th First Wave: 40 BLS, 8 ALS, 30 nurses and 6 doctors, 4 FF and several assorted civilian specialists, in the January 24th Second Wave 36 EMS and 7 FF, operating under perilous conditions had in eight days (Jan 17-Jan 25) brought the general hospital under the control of the Haitian government and drawn international acclaim by making a permanent site for foreign aid groups to engage in 24 hour operations. Initiating a policy of first ones, in last ones out BSVAC and its allies Haitian Physicians Abroad and the Church of Scientology ran a triumvirate of innovative disaster relief where the civilian volunteer, not the multi-national NGO was the agent of change. Courageously EMS was the guerilla fighter of healthcare, the tipping point of the overnight ER and salvage operations, the initiators of urban search and rescue long after all the buried had been presumptuously pronounced 'dead.'

There was a fusion of interest, hope and need. Long belittled and notorious Church of Scientology provided two planes, compound safe houses, medical supplies and food with no strings attached. The

Haitian Physicians Abroad ensured an overwhelming Advanced Life Support professional response of Creole speaking volunteers. BSVAC supplied 48 shock troops of healthcare representing every facet of diverse NYC EMS. They utilized every skill and trick they ever learned to keep that ER running. In the days of the immediate response these 104, backed up by 46 more seven days in rewrote the book on disaster management. This is not to say it went smoothly, there was constant revision and crisis. There was petty infighting, there were critical supply shortages, crisis in the face of catastrophe, but by and large these junctures were overcome. These three motley allies changed the game with speed and ingenuity, and insured protracted involvement of all NGO and government factions on the ground, able to operate within the zone of greatest need. From search and rescue in, to food drops in the mountains, ER and EMS runs, supply salvage operations, as well as the training of Haitian emergency volunteers: EMS delivered well under pressure.

In Port Au Prince all that training yielded constant dividends. Thousands of lives were saved due to the intervention of a combined force of civilian volunteer daring and ingenuity, professional relief and Haitian civilian ingenuity and resilience.

Many volunteers took injury, put aside their families, were hassled by employers and faced grueling conditions on the ground. They did so because with their medical training they all felt a duty to act. While many of the volunteers were members of the Haitian Diaspora, many were not. Many non-Haitians simply felt looking at the images on TV and the stories in the press that if there was a brief window to do some good it was their duty to act.

And I conclude by saying this; while very few employers in EMS truly begrudge volunteerism, to get up out of the blue and travel across the ocean to another nation in need is not good for a bosses daily run down and operations. Suffice to say people should do it

anyway. Because as far as Hurricane Katrina and Haiti might teach us anything: at time governmental response to disaster is slow and cumbersome and lives are needlessly lost due to politics and ineptitude. EMS is a valuable for in the first wave as was demonstrated in Haiti and at times a woman or man has to choose between what is deemed acceptable by institution and what is fundamentally the duty of this trade. Disaster will strike again that is certain, but as experience has taught us time and time again; we are only effective when we are daring. Many of us that went to Haiti had a number of hours to make our decision to go, but in truth it was made for us in our minds long before. This job takes a lot out of people with all the bullshit calls and all the company politics. We were trained to go to the place of need quickly and deliver life saving intervention, be aware that in the coming years that place might not be your city, the stakes are going to be always higher than abdominal pains and sick jobs, and despite risk and consequence these type of irregular EMS deployments are noble, needed and heroic.

Special thanks to Bedstuy Volunteer Ambulance Company, Haitian Physicians Abroad, and other groups that deployed fast and reckless. Haiti is still quite in need, groups continue to go down in waves (seek them out) and always remember that the saving of lives knows no national boundary.



## HAITI DIARY

16 JANUARY

Apart from the hell a time I've had psyching myself up for this – the news images, the stories, imagining rotting bodies and dying babies and limbs and the violence wrought that I might witness, and my own emotional state and turning the tap back off as tight as I can – one of the funny things that comes up is the feeling of importance, of mission. I guess this is what someone going off to war with the cheers of his country feels like: something you've trained for, and the rules of society bent towards your purpose. The world is watching with its mouth open while you pack your bags, and they're asking you everything and thanking you, and suddenly some part of you takes in the hype and expects everyone to care as much. Riding my bike on the sidewalk towards BedStuy Volunteer Ambulance Corps (BSVAC), I see cops, and yeah I get off my bike (it's the law), but for a second, I consider riding by. When they'd stop me, I'd say, It's OK, Officer, I'm an EMT; I'm going to Haiti today to provide medical relief. "That's cute," said Mercedes, and, "That's so noble," said Ashton, and "That's amazing," said Pascale. I guess I care more who it's from than what they said – I don't know what I'd say myself. But, anyway, this thing ain't mine and I want to keep foremost the idea that the people in Haiti need it, that importance and compliments or not – ["Put me in a quote in that one; I said, Yo what up," Vic says, "what up"] – compliments or not, I have absolutely no idea what some pain is like and what I can do is put myself somewhere to help. They're singing Lean On Me on the bus, ha, while the plane gets fuel problems fixed. I'm not saying I don't do this for the adventure, though. Isn't everything we do, in the end, in some way for ourselves? Not everything – it'll

be in the details, the actual actions that I do for people, not in the general 'Going to Haiti'. That is for me?

the fucking plane leaks.

--> it doesn't leak. It was overfueled, and delayed, and we lost our time slot in Haiti for landing as assigned by the Marines. "Going to Miami/Bienvenido a Miami". Hurry, wait, Hurry, wait, Hurry...

flying is magic

17 JANUARY

The Church of Scientology got us here and THANK YOU to them but they're acting like it's a field trip.... We're also traveling and going to be working with the Association des Médecins Haïtiens à l'Étranger, AMHE.

landed 5:00 pm 1/17/10

The landing and waiting for the plane's stairs, and waiting as the sun sets and dims the dust that's miles into the sky, and sleeping in my seat for I don't know how long until finally we shuffle out. Haiti, holy shit. "Volunteers to help unload bags?" and then bam bam bam get the bags out bam bam make a chain

bam bam bam we need people to unload the supplies one more up here, up here! and up into the belly of the plane yelling and sweat and broken water bottles, you stay there, we need one more! and sweat and your back tickling the beauty's ribs. On the ground piling boxes and sweating and piling boxes, straps and moving, sweating and water and then we sat. And sitting and standing and sitting, the tarmac as a world – the UN Japanese, the media, pictures, shout out and interview, sitting and standing and waiting, writing by tarmac light and directly above you a few constellations, the moon like God's fingernail that was there reminiscent at dusk now gone – interrupting your writing to catch the football but no you guys can't play here, then helping the Spanish firemen been here since Thursday. Shit they're all kinda wild, their eyes, but talking to them maybe that's what firemen are like in Castilla de León or maybe they've just been here since Thursday. The Spanish and the Japanese and the Brazilians and the EU, the Canadian military "evacuating citizens, and everyone," BedStuy and our shirts, the military zipping everywhere in golf carts or 4 X 4 or not zipping but a heavy, heavy presence with all those planes and neon lights everywhere, and everywhere the sound of propellers or jet engines and the indecisive wind of this first night in Haiti. Whew. And waiting.

And piling the bags of like 50 people into the last two rows of the bus – it's our system, and the other buses use it, and more sweating and when finally we finish and the ordering, organizing is done and it's so goddamn nice to have simple and clear goals, to think hard and on the instant and work hard and then sit back tired on what you did. After waiting we drove out (10:45 pm), past the variety Marines' planes and past the people lining up to leave on the same shits? we came in on and past the hummers and the gates, onto the dirt road. We're away from the jets now and it's all silence and a lil ringing in my ear and the Third World. If it weren't for the faces and vegetation and the letters on the walls it could be La Paz, or Costa Rica, Syria, or Cuba, India. Maybe I'm lumping things together. But it's there: the dust dust dust; what it is to know so well the smell of car exhaust, and where the smell itself takes you; people on top of things, agile; concrete and concrete crumbled and faded paint; el Inflatable Perro. We drove through some shit, didn't see hell a destruction, but at night things are different. Staying at T. Ness Club, a gym. They use car parts for weights on the dumbbells; the Third World. Outdoors sleeping on an unpitched tent for cushioning, fuck mosquitoes and this light is dim. I don't know about this journal type thing. A first is a first I guess, we'll see. I'm in a group (Team 1) with Victor (Team Leader), Sammy, Jacki, Tanisha, Stephania, and Cassidy. A dormir.

JANUARY 18

Patience is a virtue. Merde, humility is too.

JANUARY 19

Yesterday we woke up at 6 am, sat around till like 2, got word from the meeting with the UN and were at the hospital by around 3 pm. Tried to coordinate finding Ketty's relatives, she told me from NY she hasn't yet heard from them, but it's not possible right now. Yea, it's the third world and I'm ten places at once but also it's specifically and absolutely Haiti, and Haiti after what they're calling the worst earthquake in 200 years. Driving you don't see every house upside down, or not at first, like the news would make you think, but you damn well see a good number of the city blocks fucked up and it's crazy. People still living their lives but hell a those lives now on the street and off of broken houses and buildings. We drove yesterday to the hospital by the presidential palace and by Champs de Mars park (Ketty's uncle and 1 month old nephew?) and they gave us two big, adjacent rooms in an abandoned part of the hospital and said, "Here." When I was a kid, and since, there's been always a little of an adventure in exploring things broke down – derelict buildings and dark rooms full of trash and trashed offices. We set up a 5 station ER type room (check-in, triage/vitals, code green, code yellow, code red) and the world is ours and we kicked down doors and dug

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HAITI DIARY

through destroyed rooms looking for supplies, and whatever appeal I picked up from movies and climbing shit as a kid swelled up to grown-up size with our purpose and getting shit down and ready for people that six days after the quake still need a splinter or a cast or an amputation.

JANUARY 20

--> About images: in Camera Lucida the dude says something like, "Whereas in the mid- and early 20th Century we were a nation of ideals, now we've become a nation of images." Try separating yourself from what you think of yourself; Goddamn, and now we keep hearing what the US media is reporting: looting/riot, one in a million saved people amazing miracle stories, the aftershocks still coming strong. Yes, but it's hard being here and feeling like you can break it down like that. We've felt protected the whole time, especially now with Army everywhere at the hospital, and we could write an encyclopedia on miracles (and the opposite), and the 6.2 quake of this morning was a tremor for us, small, out here in Santo where we now are, moved yesterday - me and my group are still at home and hearing a lot of conflicting information about the aftershock but it was still big, the kids working overnight at the hospital felt it strong, they say. So things are thick out here for sure; I guess packaging it into headlines just feels like you're cheating someone of something. I don't know.

It's strange because after all the psychological preparatuion I did I find that this isn't emotionally as tolling as I thought. I guess I haven't been much exposed to the death of it (yet?), oh boy I've seen the pain but my role in it is proactive, and I think the purpose and system (ha) and busyness of it all keeps your mind working and concentrated on the next wound, the next broken bone, holding the next hand while the kid trusts you but screams. And when you're done you're so tired it ain't hard to sleep, and you wake up feeling the urgency of everything still and make your way back to the wounds.

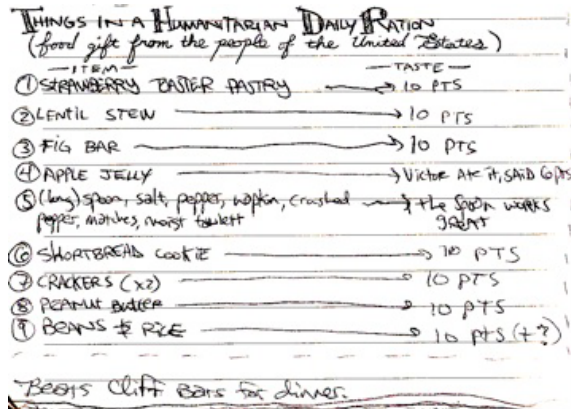
Yesterday spent like an hour or so changing Dave Something's wounds - 8 year old with degloved right leg, degloved right hand, some exposed bone, abrasion on left buttocks taking up the whole cheek, large abrasion lower back, 3 cm X 2 cm laceration back of head, a hole that took off half his nose and upper lip, hard as fuck to get a line and an infection that passes just about everywhere open and makes him hot, very very hot to touch. I was starving and thirsty and needed a seat, but changing the dressings by flashlight (generator out), the child's father holding the flashlight for me, helped me turn to him and smile, the way the kid smiles. "The Haitians are some of the strongest people I know," said one of the doctors the first day, and seeing Dave's dad sleeping under his son's "hospital bed" on a flattened cardboard box I see the doctor was right. Maybe you see the trauma of it all more clearly in writing; maybe I said it hasn't been as emotionally tolling as I'd expected, but the emotion knows how to find you anyway. "Ain't no reason things are this way, it's how they've always been and they intend to stay." Going to check on Dave today, when we get to the hospital.

I said coming to Haiti reminds me, certain elements of it, of a general Entering the Third World - but here, now, in a lot of ways it's like you take those elements and intensify them a hundred-fold. Things are broken and crumbled everywhere; daily living is so raw sometimes that all the life pushing through feels that much more taut. It's bold the way a freak accident is, and people push on even harder and the beauty and strength of it comes through even brighter and even bleaker than it does in other dire situations in Third World countries I've seen. Got to stop giving myself so much credit: these things, in different ways, happen in a million places, and there are some big differences between peaceful, systematic poverty and disaster or war-torn poverty. I'm learning. El Inflatable Perro here is a small frame of bones draped with a gray or tan and black or white, loose coat of hair.

We're still outside after the tremor, people are getting their hair cut with a generator, I'd go if it wasn't \$5, should've buzzed it

before coming. Yesterday was only Day 3 out of the US, but we are already thinking in terms of, "Hey, I heard there's a bathroom down that hallway across from the ER." "Oh shit, word?" "Yeah, and with a toilet that flushes!" Last night after the generator pumped enough water up I took the first shower since I've been here, and I don't think I remember being so dirty before, what with the sweat and dust and blood and sweat and dust and all. I pull pieces of charcoal from my nose.

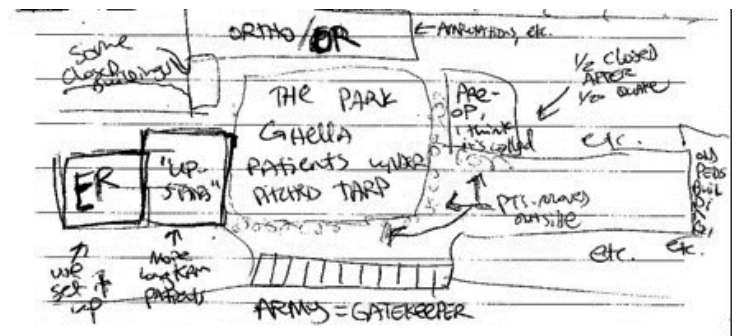
Last night Raeburn brought a box into our ER/triage thing (working out hella nice, though people and experience still short - I've put in lines and set casts and dispensed intermuscular antibiotics - more on that later) and the box was full of Humanitarian Aid meals from the US:



Seen Bolivian UN twice now, iViva Bolivia! Jimmy is teaching me Creole. "Jimmy apran'n mwen pale kreol."

JANUARY 21

We got to the hospital yesterday and they'd moved most the patients outside. The place looks a lil like this:



Throw in the Red Cross, IMC, PIH, MSF and the other groups of the NGO soup, media, militaries, me, the people putting on medical gowns and sneaking into the hospital in search of work, and, fuck it, even some firefighters from Europe or the Mid West into the hundreds of people hurting and waiting, hoping to get better and out of there....

So we spent the first hella hot like four hours caring for people in the sun. Giving morphine like a holy grail, sweating through ya boots, just about, outdoor surgery and femur fracture traction with cinder blocks and people missing calves and a cut from the hip to the ankle like an anatomy lesson; people flirting and people yelping and people chasing Anderson Cooper and his cameras, people people people, the OB team giving birth outside and we're trying to sneak a view, we're running through wounds like words at a spelling bee, doing more in one day than some EMT's do in their lives. Still feel like we can handle anything, despite the exhaustion - imagine giving a 12-year-old Halloween 'soldier' a real tank to drive to school. Got to make sure to pay all attention and ask all questions before doing these things we ain't

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learned; it's exciting and empowering to help people so directly and in such an involved way, but you don't keep a solid eye on your humbleness and you'll be hurting someone who needs no more of pain, though she's singing as you stick your finger through the incision into her stomach to clean the infection. We walk around with a hundred pockets and backpacks full of supplies, strapped with that purpose and presence and sooner or later it's hard not to feel like you're filling into some part of something. Guess we are a part of something, oui? People who worked that overnight of the aftershock said when second quake hit it was chaos, people running outside like they still had both legs, ripping out IV lines, craziness. Those kids had it tough – they then had to move everything out.

I asked about the 'lil kid Dave and heard he was one of the first to go to surgery after they started operating, hope he pulls through. Found a patient on a bed outside waiting for attention with like three right lower leg fractures, bone protruding on both sides of leg, left femoral fracture without traction. Glad to get him to pre-op soon, splinted with casting. I've run into some death already. Worked ourselves numb but somehow felt we paced ourselves and found people to laugh with, laugh at, drink water. The variety is nice, people's energy and how strong they push through and all the crazy things we're seeing and absorbing and loving apart from what we're pushing through ourselves makes it a silently growing, giant of an experience. Bonjour Papiiiii, from the crazy lady from two days ago, her foot's worse, and I'm saying Bonjour Mammiiii. Found out the husband of that pretty, pretty girl who's been around for a few days was under rubble for three days before they pulled him out; he says his eye popped out and he put it back in. Fuck not with Haitians. This is from driving back the first night from the hospital, looking out the open back of the tap tap:



It's dark and dust from the road swells behind us, the cars behind with headlights like flashlights highlighting the endless silhouettes of homelessness on the streets; tires burning, people on bicycles, people selling mango or loaves of bread or something in the dark. These shadows come and go the way the shapes of buildings buckled to sections and still crumbling come and go, leaning power lines and car exhaust and the way we ourselves pile into a bus or van or tap tap and come, and go. I've seen the presidential palace and it is destroyed – it is one thing to marvel at how big man can build, but it's another, significantly more astounding thing entirely to see it fallen.

Sammy has friends who have friends here who're about to pick us up and drive us to a few addresses, we're trying to find people that have family in the US (who we know) that haven't been able to get in touch with them. A bunch of people are hella anxious to go home – home to real showers and real shits and the freedom to cook or buy McDonald's, to use a mattress – and they're leaving tomorrow probably. Me and Sammy been hanging out all day, drove around a 'lil in the van back from dropping people at the hospital and now back at the compound waiting on the ride, our friends' friends. We took a walk and exchanged Clif and Balance Bars for candy and a sharpening of our knives. No luck with the mangos though, and I've got to pick up money from Western Union. Sitting by a mango tree barefoot.

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JANUARY 22

We didn't find anyone yesterday. We met with Sammy's friends'

friends and they didn't want to kill a bunch of gas going to unknown addresses, and after that only a failed attempt at getting cash at Western Union. They were nice kids though. Two Things:

1. A different reality of how little (any?) infrastructure there is here is sinking in. Knowing that there's no real government or system is one thing, but it's something else to understand the effects and results of it. No land phone lines, which means no banks or credit cards or ATMs, which means no money unless you're pulling from under the mattress. (The friends' friends said that people don't trust the banks, so the mattresses actually sit pretty high.) No electricity without paying for the generator and its gas. No sense of laws except what foreign military is enforcing on the ground and what societal/human rules stand through the disorder. Humans fuck a lot of things up but luckily we can muster up quite a bit of humanity, too; that shows in a patient's gratitude the same way it's shipped in on all the boxes sitting at the airport...

2. It kinda sucks to pass a day – too hard to write once the bus starts, TBC...

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JANUARY 23

2. It kinda sucks to pass a day without doing anything, or anything "productive", when you know there's so much to be done; or when you've seen the situation and what's needed and the day ends and you haven't been there, at the hospital. Today, though, went to the hospital, did a little work, and then got picked up by Victor's cousin Patricia and her friend, Something, and she drove us to the addresses we'd writ-

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## Unit 669: Israeli Medical Detachment

**DALIA COHEN EMT**

Unit 669 is Israel's Airborne Rescue and Evacuation Unit ("Yechidat Hilu'z Vehapinu'i Behethes"), which is the name of the Israeli Air Force elite heliborne medevac extraction unit which operates behind enemy lines under fire to perform civilian and military medical rescue.

Unit 669 was initiated in 1974, following the 1973 Yom Kippur War, when an ad-hoc medevac battalion made some 5000 extractions from various fronts of the conflict. Its initial functionality was to provide medical treatment to downed pilots beyond enemy lines. Overtime the unit developed to also participate in the extraction of soldiers of other arms of the Israeli Defense Forces, trapped and injured beyond enemy lines as well as seamen in distress.

The Unit's symbol is a green-eyed cat. The Unit's warriors are subsequently sometimes referred to as "Cats".

Due to the possibility of having to fight their way to casualties beyond enemy lines, unit paramedics are highly trained in special forces tactics and become highly efficient ground soldiers in addition to their high level of medical training. Typically, their training and selection lasts 18 months and includes training in parachuting, scuba diving, rescue under harsh conditions. Upon completion of their training, unit soldiers are expected to sign on for an extra 16 months of service following their three-year mandatory service.

In peacetime Unit 669 serves as civilian medevac for hikers who have gotten lost or stuck and need extraction from Israel's deserts or canyons. These civilian operations, while expensive, help train the unit fighters for their wartime roles. There is an ongoing debate whether extracted hikers should be forced to pay at least part of the extraction cost, especially in cases of hiker negligence or improper call for extraction.

An administrative error recently led to the first-ever female Muslim Israeli-Arab soldier joining Unit 669. She had just graduated from her IDF paramedic training course with top

Unit 669's main function is to rescue and extricate wounded soldiers from combat zones

honors, and was immediately placed with Unit 669. Subsequent investigation later revealed that an administrative error had been made. Due to her exceptional skills, her commanding officer decided to allow her to remain despite the breach of IDF regulations. Due to the sensitivity of the unit, Muslims and Arabs are prevented by the IDF from enlisting in Unit 669, as it fears a conflict of loyalties should Israeli-Arabs serve in Palestinian areas or have to fight Muslim states.

At least in the realm of EMS there has been some breakthrough in the Arab-Israeli conflict. The Israel Air Force has recently permitted a female paramedic of Palestinian Arab descent to join an elite MedEvac formation within the Israeli Air Force (IAF). This Arab soldier had enlisted in the the IAF's elite Air-

borne Combat Search and Rescue Unit 669, the first Palestinian to do so in this illustrious unit's history. The soldier currently serves as a medic with the unit, and is also expected to soon receive training to become an airborne medic.

Unit 669 is considered one of the IDF's premier elite units. Its main function is to rescue and extricate wounded soldiers from combat zones, under heavy enemy fire in most cases. The unit also often helps rescue civilians injured during various catastrophic incidents. Seeing as the unit is typically involved in sensitive, and highly classified, IDF operations, soldiers serving in this unit require an extremely high security classification.

A Muslim soldier has consequently never served in this unit in either an administrative or combat capacity, which is until the aforementioned Muslim medic managed to circum-

vent this barrier as well. The female soldier in question, a resident of an Arab village in northern Israel, volunteered to serve in the IDF, though not obligated to do so. She completed her medic training course with top honors, and was immediately placed with unit 669. The unit was stunned to learn of her Muslim origins, and an investigation later revealed that an error was made concerning her security classification.

In spite of this error, the unit's commander insisted that the medic remain with the unit because of her truly exceptional skills. The soldier will even attend training to become an airborne medic this July. She could very well make history by becoming the first Muslim airborne medic in IDF history.

# Keeping Beards in the Workplace

## Staying healthy while maintaining tradition

ELI DINNERNAN ASSIST.

Many EMS departments get a few employees that say because of their religion they cannot shave their beards (Like Muslims as well the Jews). Private companies have their employees sign a waiver/refusal form, removing responsibility from the company. Same thing with Voluntary sector. However, when it comes to municipal EMS, the beards must come off, and they'd take dread locks too if they get um'.

But as has been said, "Jah will neva give deh powa to a ball hed". In other words, what the hell do beards and dread locks have to do with performing our duties. Let's discuss.

In NYC, the Police Department lost in court to have everyone clean shaven. Officers can now have a beard in uniform if it's required by their religion. Most Fire Suppression companies don't have bearded members, largely because of the risk of their beards catching on fire. (Also the need to constantly wear a Scott Pack). However recent studies have shown that the Fire Department of Pakistan has shown tremendous zeal in battling recent fires even with some of the most excellent beards the world has ever seen.

Monsey Volunteer FD however does. In DC a Federal Court ruled that the FD must allow their members to have a beard, and it would be unconstitutional otherwise, because it was proven in court that there is a mask that can adequately protect the face

of the firefighter from smoke and other toxic fumes even with a beard. That my friend, is called a reasonable accommodation.

Recently three Orthodox Jews who work as volunteer rescuers in suburban Baltimore were claiming discrimination in being barred from working because of their beards.

Matthias Goldstein, who holds a doctorate in health sciences and is chief of preventive medicine and wellness at Good Samaritan Hospital, and two other men claim the Pikesville Volunteer Fire Company is unfairly refusing them the right to serve, because their beards might interfere with rescue breathing masks. Goldstein told The Baltimore Sun the three have filed complaints with the Maryland commission on Human Relations and

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### In DC a Federal Court ruled that the FD must allow their members to have a beard

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the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

Rob Gould, spokesman for the volunteer group, denied there was any religious or political motivation involved. "The bottom line is this is a safety-related matter and nothing more," Gould told the Sun. "Pikesville Volunteer Fire Company strongly denies any suggestion by any individual or group that it discriminates on the basis of religion. And so does the FDNY.

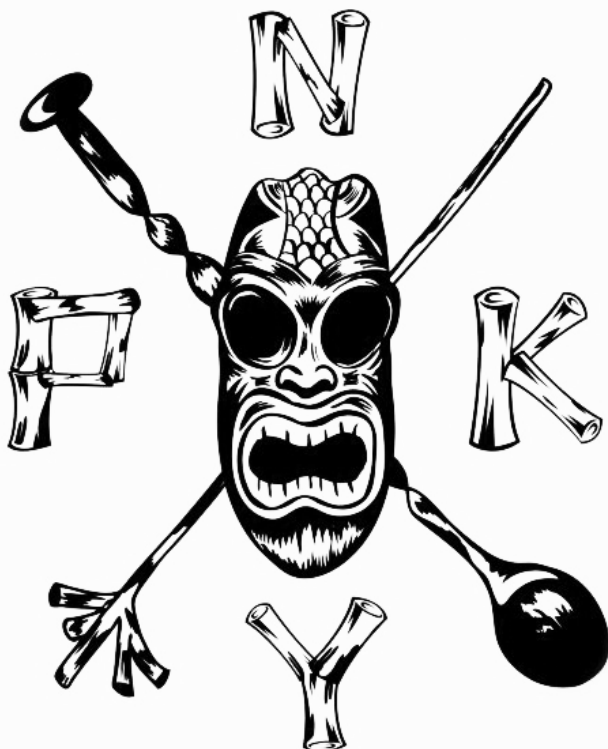
"The newspaper said precedent is on the Jews' side, citing a 2008 case where a Federal

Appeals Court struck down a rule and ordered the District of Columbia Fire Department to accommodate Muslim firefighters." Perhaps a good idea would be to look at other places where companies do allow beards, like world's only Jewish Theocracy and other Muslim Fundamentalist Countries like Afghanistan and Iran. Take a look at these Muslim countries, and look at Israel; there you have uniformed officers, firefighters and medics. How do they do it?

Well bluntly speaking, if it's a nuclear terrorist attacks you're worried about, then 10 out of 10 times, its been found that even with a good mask seal, you're shit out of luck. The APR and Scott Packs (for Hazmat) issued to us in the wake of 911, which are obviously a needed daily utilized piece of equipment won't save you if your body has been irradiated by the blast or fall out. However when it comes to airborne diseases, there exist masks that seal the face even with a beard.

Since 99.993% of our calls do not involve nuclear holocaust, the plague or contagious airborne pathogens (that the N95 doesn't protect against), there exists no serious justification why the 1.4 % of Orthodox Jews and Muslim religious observers that apply to the FDNY every 6 years cannot be issued an APR that allows them to keep safe while their face remains warm and Kosher/Halal.

Now if the companies involved are concerned about being uniform in grooming standards, then I know a store on Kingston Ave where you can buy a nice wax that will put a professional sheen on your beard.



# PAINKILLER BAR

49 Essex Street  
NY, NY

*EMS:  
We know you're  
hurting*

# Dispatch from General Hospital

PHOEBE RUSCH VOLUNTEER

"Everything is meaningless." The quote on my friend Cassidy Vail's Facebook page seems unfitting. I mean, here is a guy, an American guy, who lives in a tent on a golf course turned refugee camp in Haiti. He spends his days caring for people who have nothing. Such a life choice—a long-term life choice—indicates faith in something, not necessarily in a higher power but in the power of kindness, humanism, progress.

Since returning from Haiti, I've teetered between a sense of greater purpose and a gnawing depression. Most of the friends I made in Port-au-Prince were EMTs working for the Bedford-Stuyvesant Volunteer Ambulance Co. I have no medical background; I'm a writer. My writing is driven by the same faith I see in Cassidy, the same faith I saw in so many extraordinary doctors, nurses and occupational therapists who came to Haiti after the earthquake on their own initiative with their own money.

That faith has now been tested. Maybe that's something I shouldn't say in a piece aimed at encouraging medical personnel to volunteer in Haiti. I might feel differently if I had something measurable to give, if I could say, "yes, this child may still live under a bed sheet with no access to food, water or proper sanitation, and I can't change his situation, but because of my work and the work of my colleagues he will not die of diarrhea this month." But I think the scale of the problem would still oppress me.

If you go, the tent cities may not be better for it. But you will be better for it. This is not to undercut the importance of the good work being done, just to say that the fate of the so-called "Republic of NGOs" is not really in our hands at all, not really in any relief agency's hands, and the best reason to go, or rather the sanest, is also the simplest: we all would want someone to do the same for us.

Dr. Paul Farmer, who built a world-class hospital in the middle of rural Haiti, did so out of his belief in a preferential option for the poor; his belief that the poor deserve better than "bet-

tent with twenty other expectant mothers, vaginas exposed, swatting away flies drawn by the blood, while a nurse checked your vital signs every few hours and no one held your hand.

If your son or daughter was dying, you would find it hard to accept that life-saving supplies were stuck at the airport because of blocked roads and poor coordination. "In disaster, caution means death," says Sean Penn, who is managing the camp of over 50,000 people in which my friend Cassidy lives and works.

If your son or daughter was dying, you would not be able to accept that hospitals all over Port-au-Prince are closing while international organizations negotiate over their funding.

The EMT administering the Tylenol and the nurse checking vitals put themselves behind making General Hospital more acceptable, more humanly acceptable, with few resources at their disposal other than the love which brought them there in the first place, the love which says such suffering is unacceptable anywhere.

That love is the only meaning or religion I've found, the significance

behind acts as small as sorting pills into Ziplocs or as extreme as permanently relocating to a refugee camp to provide quality care. No matter the size or ultimate impact of your sacrifice, no matter whether you donate a tent or move into one, you say something some thing very important with your actions: that the extreme poverty in which many Haitians live, and most of the world lives, is not acceptable, before or after earthquakes.

If your son was dying, you wouldn't accept that hospitals are closing while international organizations negotiate funding

ter than nothing." The living conditions in Haiti before the earthquake were not ones you would find acceptable for yourself or your children.

And having briefly volunteered at General Hospital in Port-au-Prince (mostly putting Ibuprofen in plastic baggies), I can safely say you would not want to be a patient there. If your mother's leg was severed by a giant slab of concrete, giving her an Ibuprofen for the pain would not be acceptable. If you were going into labor, you would find it unacceptable to be in a



## HORUS HOOKAH CAFE

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Hookah, drinks, and  
Middle Eastern cuisine



## TECHNICIAN ADLER SINGS THE BLUES

### WALTER ADLER EMT

They say there's no rest for the wicked, but I haven't done anything that truly bad in quite some years. These streets will run you ragged. Bleed you dry if you're inclined to let the reaper take you.

But on a long enough time line everyone is going to die. Oh, Technician Adon sing the blues:

Our mission, in so far as our misnamed, disheveled, brow beaten lot; can call the nature of our trade a profession with a mission; is that when you die you may do so in warm bed, surrounded by Jewish doctors, West Indian nurses, attentive and curious, cute, young internists, and of course your family, all around you pouring out that thing called love before your long kiss good night.

It has been said that on a long enough timeline our kind will loose all ability to feel. That one of our number might stand above a mass of splashed and splattered organs, avulsed intestines scattered across a black tarmac in the glow of streets cast upon our troop; to then light a cigarette, make a stupid fucking joke; and then take a camera phone picture of you son's dismembered corpse. There are rules against such conduct, but not a one in our number would

turn away. If your son's body lay splayed across the freeway, before that thing called god one at least or more would say a silent prayer, reach down their blue gloved hands and wrap a hospital sheet shroud over the body, close his eyes. And perhaps the one of us with the camera phone might say something crude or racist, normally to cop doing crowd containment, to show our compatriots he or she felt nothing. But when your son or daughter fell, ingloriously in a bloody heap it was us who carried their bodies off that street, it was us who had gang rushed, blaring in that dead of night racing brave to save them. And we'd do anything in our means to bring them back to you for just one moment more.

I don't want you to try and call us heroes. We just want you to know that we have given everything to our trade, every drop of our sweat, every ounce of our blood drained; to our or third or second marriages, to our child support bills, to our black lungs and swollen livers, before we find pension we've poured out upon these streets our humanity for you in the 25 years of servitude to our city of many, many lights.

We don't want a Daily News two page Spread on the four through six; and I don't think you'd buy a calendar of me topless in my PPE out-city, 'heat resistant' post-911 fireman pants to raise money for our fallen soldiers. We don't need their medal ceremonies, their cheap

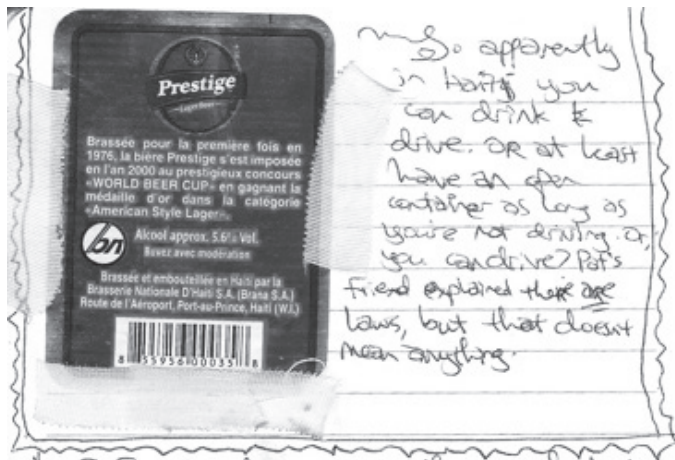
metal bars to pin about our blue collared breasts. I just want the public to know we exist, and that we're coming as fast as we can, and that we've sacrificed ourselves completely, become a people changed trying to help, and remember; they called us.

A lot of misfortune and bad press has come this year. The pedestrian struck in Coney, vote down of a Transcare union, the debacle with the dispatchers, more and more demoralization. But we have to hang together more than ever, do the right thing by our patients and stick it to the company when we get exploited. I believe four issues of Banshee in we haven't seen any change, but it's a long haul struggle. I know this paper rubs quite a few people the wrong way. But some really unorthodox means are going to have to be employed to better our lot and that means everyone is gonna have to bite the bullet, tighten the belt and soldier on.

In the end it isn't going to be union negotiations, industrial action or higher wages, or 'more respect' that saves EMS; it's gonna be when in solidarity we can hold together as a united force as brothers and sisters in trade. Its gonna be when this job gives a person not just crumbs and security, but nobility, dignity and self respect.

## CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

ten down. Before leaving the hospital I finally coordinated to get Kitty's homeless uncle to meet me at the front gates. I packed a box with a few MRE's and some water and it's all I could really do then but it's something I guess, and it feels good to help someone you'd been talking about helping for a while. Sammy and I went with Patricia and Something to Sammy's first address and found Colonel Jean Claude Delbeau. He's in an intact house next to a completely fucked up and crumbled college building. He talked a lot, in French, and corrected Patricia on her accent. Changed his shirt halfway through the visit. Then we tried to find the address Pascale gave me; drove for an hour or two and through some shitty areas (Cité Soleil, apparently one of the worst though I don't think we were in a part that'll stick you up for looking out the window) and some rich areas ("if they live here they're definitely all OK") and then they got tired of driving so we went to Patricia's house. On the way stopped by a market, with AC, with cold drinks and alcohol and all types of food and Sammy couldn't stop laughing. He's leaving tomorrow, we got a



few Prestige beers

and then we drank in the car while looking out on more destruction and dust and then sat in the kitchen while Patricia cooked, and then ate better than all week, did some dishes and then headed back to the hospital.

"I am to work / an overnight shift." Hella different than all night with Transcare, though. There was going to be virtually no one staying overnight – the night before a plane left so no one stayed and this was going to be the second night in a row – it's hundreds of motherfucking patients, most of them under tents outside, and no one except maybe two sleeping nurses to look after people. So we stayed: I wasn't planning on it and kinda tired as usual but so were Walter, Cassidy, Monique, Dr. Jean-Baptiste, Rocco (FDNY medic for 25 years who misconnected with BSVAC and took a plane to Santo Domingo and then a couple hundred \$\$\$ taxi ride to Port-Au-Prince and had just showed up in time for the night shift. Ooooh boy.), two scientists (one a dentist who's "more of a listener" and one nurse EMT who at first seemed not too oriented but turned out to have been coordinating shit in hella disasters (911, a million hurricanes, etc., so he said), and yep, that was our force for then. Halfway through the night everyone started acting kinda...erratic, the situation got erratic, you could say, had an hour long meeting where the scientist nurse set down his expertise pretty hard and then a bunch of petty and some substantiated attacks, things a mess, I told everyone the problem is we're all there to be active and do things but establishing in a way our own authority, via justification/validity from some "higher" organization – scientist/AMHE/Yele/BSVAC/etc – and didn't have an overarching structure or organization to set things straight. People got offended; I think they took it as me saying that their desire to help out wasn't pure, or something. I didn't get much attention and then they started arguing again, starting off with a debate about whether or not scientists can wear their bright yellow shirts around the hospital.

That was the hardest night so far – apart from the seemingly endless attention the endless patients need, running to save a man's life, and carrying a woman to the morgue after being called by one of the sleeping nurses to declare her dead; leaving her on the floor right by the entrance and still having to deal with drama between the people you're working with. Before Walter and I started carrying her, the sleeping nurse asked if we wanted a cigarette. Things are a different color in the night, and the Army presence is odd somehow too; Army rolls deep now at the hospital, hummers and trucks with big ass wheels came through the other day like 200 deep, 82nd Airborne. The American Army that under the helmets and bullets is more than anything Hispanic or Southern boys, boys thrown into Haiti "for...the foreseeable future"; they were good guys even though some of them got bored and a bored soldier can be an annoying soldier. Not to undermine the strange and quiet satisfaction that is to speak in their accent and welcome at least the feeling of security, welcome familiarity. There's more to tell about that night, but for now look at this: Rocco, that medic with solid skills and a very thriving heart, who made a whole experience of just getting to Haiti, took the next morning's plane back home.

JANUARY 24

The next day most people from AMHE and everyone from BSVAC (except for me, Cassidy, and Walter, and Raeburn who coordinated things) left Haiti. Walter was really excited about changing things and then we got to too much talking and it happened that, surrounded by the ideas everywhere and in the wake of last night and still tired, all the commotion started feeling too separate from the reality of things, the cloud kept floating higher and higher; suddenly, for the first time, I got a loud twang of I want to go home, and I felt it. But at night the new crew rolled in fresh from New York – the three of us had got back to planning the things to get done with the hospital and we were then the veterans, and the fact that it was us getting things together got me away from the other shit in my head, and slowly I stopped feeling like I needed someone to touch me back to reality; that purpose, again, sets your mind and time and energy in motion. Like I said the new BSVAC people showed up – the "next wave deployed" – and the three of us from before were the ones with information and plans, no matter the BSVAC chain of command and saluting and all that shit. A group of them were Jersey (I believe) Search and Rescue, and they brought a rescue dog, and these kids' chests out and ready, and it's kinda nice cause in general we didn't see egos flaring the way we'd been warned they might, and they were serious, very serious about getting shit done.

The next day after that, today, we organized people and it looks like there will be MORE people on the night shift, holy shit, the new group has like 16 people doing overnight too so when I go back tonight it'll be a real different story, hurrah. Been trying to talk anpil kreyol with Stephanie and her kid, they hang out at the house and 5 (?) yr old Adriano is a bad lil fucker but a lot of fun. Sometimes these days it's hard to describe how good it is to divert your energy towards running around with a 'lil kid and charading Creole to a girl that laughs a whole lot. Mesi anpil, mwen vole pale kreyol. I mean, mwen vle pale kreyol. She's been trying to get on flights to the US – she showed me pics of her blanc husband and his family and all the men rock mustaches. Has passports, but I guess it's still not easy to get out. Let's make some lists:

## RELIGIONS I'VE ENCOUNTERED IN THE PAST FEW DAYS

- voodoo
- church of latter day saints
- judaism
- scientology

## BEERS I'VE DRANK

- prestige

## A FEW MESSED UP INJURIES

- degloved leg & hand, missing ½ nose and large abrasion on buttocks and back, laceration on back of head; raging sepsis
- cut from right below hip to right above ankle, about 6 in. wide at

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE

## HAITI DIARY

widest point and like a dissection in biology class  
 → majority of lower leg gangrene, fractures and really needing an amputation  
 → nearly dead from dehydration and multiple fractures and lying under a collapsed house for over a week, maggots in vagina  
 → 5 X 2.5 X 2 in. laceration in head and dislocated jaw and eyes swollen  
 → tibia and fibula compounded fracture with bone out on ant. and post. side of leg, infected

## BANKS OPEN

→

## THINGS THAT CAME IN THE FOOD SHIPMENT ON THUR NIGHT THAT MADE ME WANT TO CRY

→ peanut butter  
 → canned sardines in tomato sauce  
 → canned tuna in aceite  
 → milk  
 → chocolate milk  
 → bread, mini croissants  
 → salami  
 → napkins and paper towels  
 → vienna sausages

## JANUARY 26, and beyond

I'm on a Manhattan-bound A train, Tuesday morning. Was hoping to get on a plane Tuesday night but Phil and his one kidney got dehydrated and they needed someone to go with him to the airport and on the plane. Cassidy and Walter came with me, and Walter said, "We're a unit and we have to stick together," and we did until I left. After the overnight shift of Jan 25 (more on that later) and chilling at home we went to the scientologists' camp which is in the big area of foreign camps by the airport; more military and tent living and lock

and load whether you're securing gate security or lifting Phil's stretcher at the University of Miami field hospital there or carrying a box of water bottles, same all-from-everywhere international feeling, and fuck it people helping. We finally got on one of the government planes – a coast guard cargo-type plane with canvas seats for about 30 people and propellers as big as God's teeth. I hadn't slept the night before (more on that later, still) and was hella tired and transporting someone, transporting Phil, not easy to deal with when you're hella tired, but he was sick with something, maybe even altered mental status. Flew to Homestead, FL, got the immigrant/refugee type welcome treatment: they gave us coffee or hot chocolate or both and a bunch of snacks to choose from, and cots and blankets and went through each of our bags and then there was a shuttle to Miami airport, and I took it and then a Delta flight to JFK. I'm still hella tired, and still absorbing the reality of this reality.

It's harder than I thought it'd be, even though I haven't (much) questioned my decision to come back now. I don't know what it is that I can't shake, but I think it's less of what you might expect off the top of the dome – I don't feel appalled by the return to excess that is American living juxtaposed with living in and by a situation of such deep scarcity. Nor is it really a comparison of all that suffering in Haiti to all this comfort and self-centeredness in the US. Though, I was pretty fucking annoyed at JFK waiting for my bags by CNN on over the luggage carousel, with breaking news of a car chase in Las Vegas, no reports yet on who is being chased or why he or she's being chased, stay tuned for updates, and Quest's Travel Clinic, germs are everywhere and you should wipe everything down with wipes after someone touches it, wipe your passport and wipe your hand and wipe your cock, and let's follow Quest to the store and buy this and this and this

and this – "Spend money now, stay healthy later" – then why we should invest in gold or buy an LG TV, and in world news John Travolta arrives in Haiti, carrying a team of doctors and nurses and Scientologist Volunteer Ministers. So let's say the frivolity and dumbassness of our mainstream culture can be bothering but that's nothing new, though I guess it is much harder to put up with after something like the experience of Port-Au-Prince. But, as I was saying, it's also moving away from a direct and irrefutable importance (if you want to see it that way), a feeling of doing something and doing something good that people really, really need, and then walking away from that importance and that need and not sure if you're turning your back on someone or on yourself or it's just hard to get back to stability when part of your mind has switched to Survive Within the Instability mode. I don't want to talk too much to (most) people about so much I've seen in so little time (where the fuck do you begin? How will they ever care the same way you do) but for now at least it's always there.

It's like being in love: it haunts you the same way and your eyes move to its pulse the same way, and here I am needing sleep, and still actually in love, and plus the in love of leaving Haiti, and already thinking of how and when to get back. Like Victor said, though: gotta be sure to give your mind a break and if you go back, go back strong. I know, and that's part of why I left, but like in love, reason is hard to digest sometimes. It is what it is, as Walter once said.

Back to that second overnight I did, with the new BSVAC people there and actual higher medical staffing there all night. Holy shit. The "second in command" at the hospital had mentioned how this was only the second night to have an all-night crew. No, I said, we've been running it – barely – for a week. But, in the end there're much higher powers at play and I think our overnight traumas will be left entirely to us to remember. And so it goes; and again we saw first something that needed to be changed but they waited to think of it themselves before changing anything. But fuck it at least there was a change, and anyway things change from one day to the next anyway in that world so it's not like we had to wait much. The hospital I left was a different place from the one I came into, so think of that map I drew way back on Jan 21 as only a part of the picture. By now (and for how long?) most patients are in tents outside the buildings – maybe 15 tents in total? Most of them big tents, housing maybe 40 or so patients – apart from the group of people still swamping all open space in the park area in the middle. That last night I was there, there were even two tents set up for the triage area we'd established outdoors 2 nights earlier, with were of pretty crucial importance 'cause of the heat at around one pm and the implications of working or be treated without shade. The triage was open all night though, which means patients coming in all night, though number-wise it was nothing compared to patient arrival during the day.

I don't want to turn the night into a narrative but I'll say that despite the comparatively huge staff (half of which worked the whole day prior) we were still running around a lot and getting in trauma patients and people dying: a 30-something year old, and a 2 year old, and I think two babies born but not survived. I saw a kid born 2 months premature – didn't even have O→2 for the 'lil one but the nurse said he'd hang on. Strong from before they're fully developed babies, these Haitians, 'til they watch American EMTs slip their 30-something year old boyfriend into a body bag, 'til when they're in their 80's and have spent 10 days under a broken building and still, somehow, still pushing blood through the arteries. (I'll mention here that when I talked to Mami and Papi on the phone one night and told them about an 84-year-old woman that came in after more than a week under a building, they said they'd heard about it in the news. Apparently she did make quite some headlines; I looked her up getting back, her name is Marie Carida Romain. Not only is it interesting to see a story like that when you were one of the people working on her, but at one point we all decided actually we should let her die. There were barely any signs of life, she was stiffening up even, and given not only how starving we still were for medical supplies but also how many people with a better chance of survival desperately needed those supplies we figured it'd be best to give her a heavy dose of morphine and let her pass in peace. I stepped away from the table and then a news crew rolled in and filmed her, and then I got back to the table and then the doctor said we were going to do what we could to keep her alive as long as possible. I don't mean

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to imply something cynical here, and I'm very glad the doctor gave us that order, but it's funny to see a different side of things. Anyway.)

I took the 30 year old to the morgue (actually inside this time) and what me and the other kid pushing the stretcher saw was like a horror movie; not that bodies were piled up everywhere – there were only a few that we saw – but in the physical feel and dirtiness and stains of the place. Maybe it's the TV we grow up with or maybe all the preparatory thinking I did to brace up for a night like this or maybe instinct removing you from the emotion but the death I saw didn't feel like it hit me, or not sharply. For one thing I'll say right now that I didn't work specifically on keeping alive any of dead I saw; in other words by the time

I got to them they had passed, and I think it's a whole other story when all of you goes into saving someone and you don't. The person I put the most work (emotionally) into

saving in this way was a lady who came into the hospital in the back of a truck, dusty and completely limp from the "coma" the people bringing her described. This was the morning after that first long overnight shift. They ran to me, "Doctor! Doctor!" and like I said she was already completely out, and I said I'm not a doctor but I couldn't find anyone to help me so I asked one of the people with her to help me put her on and carry a stretcher, the ones you lift. On the way to a tent I found Rocco and she started vomiting something clear Rocco immediately turned her on her side, we put her on the ground between tents because we couldn't find a bed at first. Rocco worked hard on putting in a line, I couldn't even find a radial pulse and this man looking for a vein to prick and his sweat coming down heavy like tears; I'll say again how long of a night it had been and Rocco after putting so much of himself into the work had little energy and sympathy left, he'd burned it all in the dark a few hours earlier. But he got the line somehow – I've never seen someone as good as him with a needle – and the family said she hadn't eaten in like 5

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In the wake of last night and  
still tired, I got a loud twang  
of 'I want to go home'

.....

days so we put dextrose through her veins and she was still out, completely, throwing up still sometimes but skin cold and I kept thinking goddamn this girl is more dead than alive; the small oxygen tank I found was the only air around and it ended soon too. But, after like twenty minutes or maybe even less something about her changed and her eyes started moving – "Bonjour!" I said, and they moved over to me and then she actually said, "Bonjour" back, and motherfucker I couldn't believe it, I would've married her if I'd have thought of it. Turns out her mom was diabetic so probably her too and probably she was just hella hypoglycemic after 5 days of no eating and I ain't no doctor so coming that close to what felt like death on someone I'd been trying to keep life for showed me how there's a huge difference between one exposure to death and another. So when I'm carrying the body bag and feel strangely numb I need to remember that, no matter what separation from the situation I have, before a body it was a person with life. It's a thin line to walk between

keeping a real sense of humanity even in someone's passing and risking it hitting you heavy, on the one hand, and on the other keeping yourself safe away from emotions...but also risking losing touch with the wonder of life, and the wonder of death, and the very real respect to be kept for both.

The first day back to work with Delta during briefing there's debate over when to waive baggage fees, and when to remember that it's a business and even High Value Customers in this newly begun Year of the Customer have to pay sometimes when the mistakes are theirs. "Atlanta prints a list of which employees waive the most bag fees, as a percentage of total bags checked, and it's very disturbing to see that some employees waive 100% of the bags they check." Apart from the hella things to think initially, and I'm at briefing still short on sleep, but nonetheless: at some point in the discussion I'm happy to see these cocksuckers arguing over checked luggage; a lot of them I'm sure are tired of Haiti in the news and most of them, I'm glad, don't know or really care that I went and, in many ways, am still more there than at JFK. "There ain't no reason things are this way," goes one song, and the other, "Maybe this is how it's supposed to be." Yea – and like the kids last night in my apartment joking about rotting corpses, we're nothing but I don't know how many trillion separate worlds jostling together, sometimes really making our way into one another, but mostly removed and living in the flash of time we're given and in the end – as far out from everything as you can get – there's no one to blame for nothing.

My own sphere's been changed deep and permanent and I'll keep it that way, just like I'll keep somewhere with me that first text from Vic about going to Haiti, the next few days of rushing to prepare, a couple hundred dollars here and there and then waiting waiting waiting like it might not even happen; the text on Saturday morning and me telling Al, "I'm going, hommes!" – airports and heavy bags and standing in line forever, the plane over-pumped and missing the landing slot and another fucking night to wait in Miami; getting to know Sammy and kickin' it with the team and 'window seat, please' and landing at last and inside the plane throwing boxes of water bottles out and sweating, hours on the tarmac and leaving and that's slowly how we started seeing Port-Au-Prince: one small section at a time, hours there and then bused somewhere else and hours there; at the first compound sleeping by makeshift gym equipment and using the benchpress mats for sleeping, the tent as a mat, the people posting up on the roof next to us and making everyone a little nervous; the boxes of Balance Bars and similar and three people guarding the distribution of water; Cliff Bars and Vic's huge bag of things to eat, the dogs roaming the compound and eating our scraps, somehow; the bright yellow shirts of the scientologists and what the fuck are they all doing here anyway, though they did help us a lot, and watching them heal via touch assist and maybe I should grant them the same respect I grant all religions in general despite my

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# HAITI DIARY



**You have beautiful eyes, that are also equal, round, reactive and responsive to light.**

*-Tu tienes lindos ojos que son reactivos, responsable y reflejante a luz.*

**Ma'am, your lung sounds are perfect.**

*-Señorita, tu pulmones escuchan perfecto.*

**Hi, I'm Mr. Right. Someone said you were looking for me.**

*-Hola, soy el Señor Derecho. Alguien ha dicho que estaba buscando para mí.*

**What does it feel like to be the most beautiful girl in this room?**

*-¿Cómo se siente al ser la más bella muchacha en esta sala?*

**Are you lost? Because heaven's a long way from here.**

*-¿Estás perdido? Porque el cielo es un largo camino desde aquí.*

# Learn... EMS Español!

**Hello, I'm a thief, and I'm here to steal your heart.**

*-Hola, soy un ladrón, y estoy aquí para robar tu corazón.*

**Hey I just realized this, but you look a lot like my next girlfriend.**

*-Hola acabo de esta realidad, pero usted busca mucho al igual que mi próxima novia.*

**Did you hurt yourself when you fell from heaven?**

*-¿Te has hecho daño cuando cayó del cielo?*

*(teh ahs EH-choh DAH-nyho CWAHN-doh cah-YOH dehl see-EH-yoh)*

**Can I buy you a drink?**

*-¿Puedo comprarte una bebida? (PWEH-doh coh-m-PRAHR-teh OO-nah be-BEE-dah)*

**This is a great song. Would you like to dance?**

*-Esta es una canción excelente. ¿Quieres bailar conmigo?*

*(EH-stah ehs OO-nah cah-n-see-OHN ehk-sah-LEHN-teh. kee-YEHR-ehs bah-ee-LAHR coh-m-MEE-goh)*

**You have a beautiful smile.**

*-Tienes una sonrisa muy bonita. (tee-YEHN-ehs OO-nah sohn-REE-sah moy boh-NEE-tah)*

**So many curves and me without any brakes!**

*-¡Tanta curvas y yo sin frenos!*

**-Elvin Mera EMT**

# HAITIAN DIARY

general apathy, or maybe it makes complete sense to be bothered with the healing by touch when real medicine is such a scarce and desperate com-

mod-ity right now; the first trip to the hospital and setting

up the first ER, getting blood on your gloves and IV lines, the media everywhere, the abandoned rooms full of absolutely necessary supplies and organizing them and running around looking for more and the first night's ride back looking out the tap tap at the phantom world around us; the buildings destroyed but not the people and not their movement and the big aftershock and the lady jumping off the balcony and people not wanting to go back inside and what it means to sleep outside on your sleeping bag on concrete with Orion's Belt and the Big Dipper and Polaris and all the rest of the order up there steady and constant above you while your shoes are your pillow; more days

at the hospital and nights at the hospital and fighting to keep your head level, your senses clear, alert; to need sleep but go on without it because people need so much more and always something to do if you want to keep moving badly enough; the media spotlight if you want it and a little disgust at the camera-chasers whether you want it or not; getting

to know people brought up in Port-Au-Prince and stories and seeing the maddening beauty of some Haitian women, and the almost-mad way some Haitian men offered and asked for blood-backed loyalty; talking one friend out of

.....  
**Days and nights at the hospital fighting to keep your head clear**  
.....

suicide over that loyalty and talking another into getting the fuck out of Haiti, despite that loyalty; still needing more people and more supplies in a place already so congested; meeting cousins of friends and cousins of friends of friends and looking for family members out of touch and looking at the endlessly heavy piles of rock and steel and wondering always how many bodies still down there, how many people still alive? The life of the island itself, separate from the people: dogs and chicks and hens and the mountains, distant but surely alive, barefoot again in the grass and with this same pen in hand, climbing the mango tree and carving into it, the way the sun came steadily no matter what had transpired during the night, the wind and the ocean in the distance, all of it a reminder of how small our presence is compared to the permanence of the land; the smell of bodies and it wasn't everywhere like the news said but when it was there you knew it and it felt like the smell knew you, somehow - writing shit down as if trying for poetry has absolutely anything to do with it, but my pen handy still....the new wave of BSVAC and to be a leader and to see how little you can affect anything on a large scale, and praying it doesn't become funny and still coming up with plans and ideas; the camps by the airport and the UM field hospital feeling better than the General Hospital, even at night AC, and feeling somehow rogue everywhere thanks to the guns and the disorder and they say it's a good idea to stay with your group but you can do whatever

the hell you like, ultimately, except get on a plane to the US without an American passport; flashing my passport and waiting for the plane, waiting and finally a Coast Guard plane opens up and it's strange to fly and not have a window to look out of, the movement keeps you guessing at everything but when you land you know for sure; the flight back to NYC and the haze that is lack of sleep, not sure of what you're doing and still in love with something horrible and beautiful - I'll keep it somewhere with me and I don't know when I'll go back. It's with me, even though each day back is a little more grounding, and even though the boots I wore jumping into planes and lifting people and moving me through the blood and earth of Port-Au-Prince, Haiti, are now being flushed with New York City smog and snow.



