

HAITI EMBARGOED

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In 1993, the United Nations, including the USA, imposed a trade embargo on Haiti. Most goods were prohibited from entering or leaving the Haitian half of the island of Hispaniola. The announced purpose was to persuade the military dictatorship to reinstate the elected president, Jean-Bertrand Aristide, who had been deposed by a coup in 1991.

As with most embargos, the poor people, most of the people in Haiti, suffered much more than the rich.

The author of these notes was no stranger to Haiti. In March and April 1994, he returned to work there for a month. He could not help but observe the effects of the embargo and record his impressions.

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1. VIP Treatment

My introduction to the Haiti of 1994 began at the airport in Port-au-Prince. As incoming passengers passed a small band playing lively music, I saw a familiar face and was ushered into the VIP lounge. It held an interesting collection of people, none very interested in talking unless he was meeting an acquaintance. A self-confident looking white man with a two-way radio walked in and out of a small door, as a Haitian brought small cups of strong black coffee. Soon, my passport and my suitcase appeared as if by magic, and I walked through the same small door, beautifully hand-carved, into the main terminal and out to the street. As I walked, I wondered, “What is different now?” “How are political stalemate and the economic embargo affecting this small, poor country?”

2. In from the Airport

Not as much traffic as usual but still some congestion. Not as many people in the market as usual but still a lot of merchandise. Not much action around the Visa Lodge hotel, but I hear it is still open. It used to serve businessmen visiting and working in the industrial park but now survives by renting rooms for any length of stay, from an hour up. No apparent improvement in sanitation in this part of town, but no apparent degradation either. “What really has changed,” I thought. I would soon start finding answers.

3. Expensive Gasoline

Gasoline is embargoed. It can't be shipped to Haiti. As a result, filling stations are closed, and most gasoline is brought informally from the Dominican Republic. You can tell it's from the D.R. because it looks red in the plastic bottles. The price is about \$8,00 a gallon. Most vehicles on the streets are either public conveyances or expensive cars. Middle class peoples' cars stay home. One American is doing a good business converting gasoline engines so they will run on propane gas. Propane is used for cooking, so it is not embargoed, and its price is reasonable. Is there any advantage to all this? Well, maybe faster commutes and less air pollution. However,

there have been at least three explosions of bootleg gasoline, with people killed. This would not have happened if there were no embargo. Who, then, is responsible for the explosions and the deaths?

4. Bread for the People

Bread is in short supply now, not because ingredients are scarce but because electricity is needed to run the mixing machines. The power is off nearly all the time, and no one knows when it will be on. The Seventh Day Adventists have a bakery outside of Port-au-Prince and have rigged up a bell, so it rings when the electricity goes on. When the bell rings, even in the middle of the night, bakery employees run to the plant and mix dough frantically. They bake it in ovens heated by propane gas, and it sells like hot cakes. A hundred loaves are delivered to a foreign organization that has a connection with the Adventists' feeding program, and the small staff buys every loaf in minutes.

5. On Stores and Customers

Port-au-Prince does not have many "real" stores. Most goods are sold in open air markets. Many of the stores that do exist are closed because of the embargo, not for lack of merchandise but for lack of customers. Merchandise gets through the leaky embargo but, with factories shuttered and tourism gone, there is little buying power. Having no customers means no sales and no income for the middle class of merchants and service providers.

I have heard that the Haitian Army is earning \$200,000 per day by allowing people to flaunt the embargo on imports. Is this the army the international community is trying to punish? Some punishment!

6. The Pool at the Kinam

The Kinam is one of the nicest hotels in the Port-au-Prince area, well-liked by both Haitians and foreigners. It is a beautiful old gingerbread house on the *Place de Petionville*. Its swimming pool is filled with water but, because of electrical outages, the water is circulated for just a few hours

a day. Even though chemical treatments are applied, when the pump is not running the water is a murky green. When the pump starts to run, a white foam like soap suds spreads until it covers the entire pool. Then, the murky green cannot be seen, but the water is no more inviting than before.

7. Dark Houses on the Hill

The hill above the Kinam Hotel, in Petionville, is dotted with fine houses. By day, they can be seen clearly, stark evidence of the contrast between the haves and the have-nots. By night; however, only a few are lighted. Have their residents left the country to avoid inconvenience? Do they not have generators - or gas to run them? Do they not want to draw attention to their wealth in this time of uncertainty? Here and there, one sees a house with a just a small light, as from a candle or lantern. Are these of people who have decided to attract just a **little** attention and to live just a **little** as they normally would at night?

8. Incessant Noise

It is dinner time in the Kinam. The old man is playing mightily on the old piano as old trucks roar up the hill past the *Place de Petionville*. Voices of Haitian and foreign diners mix with the roar of the generator as the pump shoots water into the frothy pool. The noise will abate a half hour after midnight when the generator is shut off and most other noises have ceased. It will begin at 5:00 a.m. when a church bell signals the rooster to begin its morning song. Then the trucks will start up, and the generator, and the pool pump, and hotel guests will invade the terrace to see what the chef has found to fix for breakfast.

9. Starry Skies Above

Yes, one can really see stars here. Petionville is closer to them than Port-au-Prince, and there aren't many lights now to hide the heavenly bodies. They shine gaily on a city, in a country, where no one knows what the future holds. This situation cannot go on forever, or maybe it can, depending partly on policies of the so-called "developed world."

10. And the Rumors Fly

Yes, rumors abound. A hotel guest says there will be a new totalitarian government within 60 days. Voice of America Radio tells of more supporters of Aristide being killed in *Cité Soleil*. Another radio station says fears of a U.S. invasion have increased. Yet another reports that Aristide has made his sharpest criticism yet of U.S. policy. What he says about U.S. policy may not matter, however. The U.S. will do what it wants to, but the many actors there rarely agree on the best course of action. In the meanwhile, life in Haiti limps on.

11. Sunday Morning

It is 6:40 A.M. ON Sunday. I sleep later than usual and awake to the sound of the generator. All at once, I want to listen to the short-wave radio, go down for breakfast, and study French, but I choose to write where there is electricity. I take my computer from the suitcase, in which I, unnecessarily, keep it out of sight and locked. I write with the sounds of many birds, competing in vain with the trucks and the roar of the generator.

12. It Goes “Bang” in the Dark

I heard it last night – “bang” – three times. Were they shots or firecrackers? I haven’t heard of shooting in this part of town, but there few reasons to celebrate, and I don’t think Haitians celebrate with fireworks. Perhaps there will be rumors to tell me, perhaps there won’t be, and perhaps there will be contradictory rumors that leave me none the wiser.

13. And It Goes Ting-a-Ling

Yes, I heard it – the sound of a telephone ringing. I realized it was the first time I had heard that sound in a couple of days. It was faint, but I walked closer to the phone in my room to see if it was for me. It wasn’t, but it was good to rear the ringing, anyway. It reminded me that such a modern convenience existed and that sometimes it worked, in Haiti.

14. Take-it-with-you Telephones

It looks like important people here no carry telephones with them. I guess they want to keep in touch, be able to communicate, be accessible without depending on the public system. One sees phones on most tables at the better restaurant. One wonders if this will be another way of separating society – portable phones for the upper class and public phones for the others. Then, one remembers that many Haitians, probably a majority, have never made a phone call and never heard a ring. There are surely people in the countryside who have never seen a telephone and would have trouble understanding what it was for.

15. Hard Pillows

The pillow in the Kinam is several inches thick and gives little under the weight of a head. Perhaps some people can sleep with such thick pillows, but I can't imagine how. One's head is significantly above one's shoulders. I look for something to use as a pillow and find only a topcoat and a bathrobe. A topcoat? It must have been cold when I left D.C. I merge the coat with the robe and put them in the pillow's place. There is not much softness, but the thickness is about right. I sleep well, knowing that I have found a solution to my small, uncomfortable situation.

16. Sunday Morning Walk

In the Place de Petionville, little girls in their Sunday best play on the statue of the man for whom the area was named. On the benches that are not broken, people are sitting, and thinking, as many do every day of the week. Perhaps they are some of the many who cannot find jobs. The bells of the Catholic church on one corner and the Episcopal church on another, give a bit of joy to this holy morning in one of the most prosperous parts of Haiti.

17. Into the Churches

A lady in a Mercedes Benz drives to the Catholic church and ignores the young man selling cartons of American cigarettes. She walks past the "Bizarre Bazar" store and across the street to the church. At the door, old women, one of them smoking a pipe, hold out their hands for money. Inside, there is a metal box with a strong padlock and a sign that says it is to collect money for a

new stairway. The worshippers are quiet and reverent, waiting patiently, as Haitians have learned to do. The service begins and, for several minutes, everyone there is reverent and equal.

Diagonally across the plaza, the Episcopal church is bright and airy. A handful of congregants are seated on three sides along white walls, while their leaders occupy the fourth side. A sermon is in progress, and the words echo off the walls so that one has trouble knowing if they are in French or in Creole. In Haiti, as in many other countries, Catholic churches fill on Sundays while other churches compete with the Catholics and with each other.

Do these churchgoers also attend voodoo ceremonies? It is certain that some do.

18. Legend on the Coins

The shiny coin says clearly: “Liberte, Egalité, Fraternité. Well, there is a lot of liberty, if one does not speak in favor of Aristide. Equality is more distant, however. I am told, for example, that peasants have trouble buying in stores because of the social distance between themselves and storekeepers. Brotherhood is perhaps a still more distant concept. One might feel brotherhood with his family and close friends but probably not with other people with whom cooperation would improve his conditions. But then, is that so different than in the USA and most other countries?

19. A Youth Concert

It was a hot Sunday afternoon in Haiti when two of us took the *camionette* downtown, for U.S. \$0.35. We left it at *Saint Trinité* Episcopal Church, a large building that housed a handicraft display center and an auditorium for music. The auditorium was equipped for air conditioning but, with the fuel shortage, it wouldn't be working. Inside, we met an old friend, a tall Haitian girl whose smile could light an entire room. We saw and heard the young people's band, orchestra, and chorus and marveled at its members formal behavior. We were saddened to learn that opportunities to practice music were very limited in Haiti. There was a lot of interest but not nearly enough instruments, teachers, or classes. Talent was being wasted! A **lot** of it.

20. Out for a Jog

Out of the hotel and across the top of *Place de Petionville*. Then, up a long hill toward a house where I once enjoyed a party. Jogging on the left side to face oncoming traffic, I didn't count on cars from behind me using both lanes of the two-way street. Well, that one missed me. Blank stares from many Haitians, as if they've never seen a person jogging and I'm invading their territory. A car stalling as it goes up the hill – probably out of gas. At US\$8.00 a gallon, it's a rare driver who can fill his tank. Back through the plaza, avoiding the police station because the police grabbed a friend's camera that morning and took the film from it. He was taking a picture of our hotel. Perhaps it was considered a sensitive installation.

21. Living in Many Languages

The official languages of Haiti are French and Creole, a sort of mélange of French and native languages. Most people I deal with speak fluent French and good English. Some speak Spanish also because of contact with the Dominican Republic. Most can speak Creole, the language of all Haitians except a few of the educated elite. Language differences contribute to social distance; those who speak French seeming to be more important than those who do not speak it. It does not have to be this way. Who is to say that French is “better” than Creole or French speakers “better” than Creole speakers?

22. Evening at the Kinam

Cocktail time and dinner time are happy in the Kinam Hotel. Jolly songs on a keyboard accompany *Prestige* beer, pumpkin soup, and other delicacies. On this evening, a Korean American who is finishing work in Haiti tells about a Seoul taxi driver who took a road test in the United States. He showed the examiner how well he could drive, zooming in and out of traffic, turning two lane roads into three lanes, etc. He couldn't understand why the examiner failed him. The storyteller finishes the evening by buying a round of delicious rum punch; then we head for our rooms a minute before the rain eats down on the roof of the Kinam.

23. The Hotel “El Rancho”

The *El Rancho* is a nice hotel, right by the Villa Creole, off of *Rue Panamericane*. Its rates are reasonable, yet no one I know of has talked of it or recommended it. The lobby is spacious, the lights are bright, the pool looks clean, and there is a night club and casino. It doesn't add up. After inquiring here and there, I am told that it was built several years ago during a hotel boom in Haiti. Later, it was bought by foreign interests, some of whose friends were not exactly law-abiding citizens. Drug traffickers, perhaps? Trafficking is reportedly way up since Aristede left the country. I decide to have lunch at El Rancho someday but not to lodge there.

24. A Wood Carving

It was a drummer, probably a voodoo drummer - large, heavy, and typically Haitian. The young man selling it followed me and a friend from the *Chauffer Guides* restaurant and seemed ready to tail us to the end of the earth. “No, no, no” did no good whatsoever. He wanted only US\$60. In desperation, I offered 60 Haitian dollars, about US\$22 and, to my surprise, he accepted. He gave me the carving and then asked, in vain, for more money. Haitian friends said the price I paid was too high, but not by much. Anyway, I contribute to the economy. Now, how to get this monster home and where on earth to put it.

25. The Short-wave Radio

Only \$50 at Radio Shack, and it works well. Awake at 2:00 a.m. in Haiti? It's 7:00 a.m. in London, and the BBC comes in clearly. Later, Monitor Radio, the same one I listen to at home sometimes. Still later, traffic noises and the generator drown out short wave. The Zenith radio-TV in my room jolts to life but with few stations or channels. Some broadcasting companies are of the air because they don't have electricity. Most of what I hear is religious programming in Creole or music in Spanish from the Dominican Republic. It seems the embargo affects even the air waves.

26. Café des Artes and Bolero

Café des Artes is a combination café, bar, gym, aerobics studio and art gallery - five business in one. The café was very popular once, but now most customers come for the nightly aerobics lessons. A generator runs powerful speakers for the fast-paced music. The art gallery is well stocked, with paintings selling for up to \$8,000. The American owner says she is surviving but counting the days until the nightmare embargo is over.

A few blocks away, Bolero had become an “in” bar and restaurant. I am told that, on Friday evenings, there isn’t even standing room. Whether by skill or by happenstance, some businesses prosper, no matter the situation.

27. The Hotel Surcharge

An energy surcharge? Yes, an energy surcharge. Each guest pays a little extra for fuel for the generator, and no one complains. If there were no surcharge, there might be no electricity, and we would be living in the dark ages.

28. Advertising Signs and Banners

With little coverage by print or broadcast media, a main form of advertising here is painted signs at major intersections. Some announce private schools and businesses, while others tell their viewers of coming events. Then can be hard for a newcomer to understand. “Garage” turned out to be a nightclub and “Sweet Mickey” a popular band. These signs are a way of adapting to current and ongoing conditions.

29. Haitian Newspapers

There are just a few newspapers here, and they thin and expensive. Most are written in French, some published in Haiti and some in the USA. There do not seem to be tight restrictions as to what can be printed. The reason is clear – most people can’t afford them and/or do not know how to read. With poverty and illiteracy, even the daily paper is out of reach of the masses.

One of the “daily” papers is now printed just every second day. The reason: The embargo has made newsprint scarce and more expensive.

30. Calling Home

The MCI and AT&T access numbers aren't working. AT&T Direct doesn't work at the Kinam, but I'm told it does in some places. The hotel receptionist assures me that he will be able to get a call through around 11:00 p.m. I retire to my room and, sure enough, my phone rings on schedule. The connection is crystal clear.

It occurs to me that communication is the life blood of modern society. If the communications infrastructure breaks down entirely, people will live in isolated pockets and only get news from rumors.

31. The Inverter

I had been hearing about inverters and, finally, was able to see one. They are marvelous electrical devices that take current from city power or a generator, change it to direct current, reduce its voltage and store it in batteries. Later, when the power is off, the inverter changes power from the batteries back to alternating current and increases the voltage to run small appliances and lights. I understand one can be bought in Miami for \$700 or in Port-au-Prince for \$4,000. People who can get visas and buy plane tickets can save a pile of money, but this would not be necessary at all if basic services were working as they should be.

32. Selling Sandals

The salesman had a small stock of sandals, and I was his only customer. He put a piece of white paper on the ground, so I could try them on without getting them dirty. After I had gone through his stock without buying, he ran to bring others for me to try. When that failed also, he crossed the street to another stall and called for me to follow. Again, I did not find just the right pair. I paid a bit for his trouble and walked purposefully away. He was probably glad for the small handout but would have preferred to make a sale.

33. The Currency System

This is the craziest thing I've ever seen. Some years ago, the Haitian currency, the Gourde, was fixed at five to a U.S. dollar. A five gourde note became known as "a dollar" and remains so to this day. The problem is that the currency has devalued so it takes about 14 Gourdes to buy a U.S. dollar. Thus, there are two dollars, one Haitian and one U.S. When a price is quoted in gourdes, one must divide by 14 to get the equivalent in U.S. dollars. Currency exchange rates; however, are quoted as the ratio of Haitian to U.S. dollars, now about 2.8 to 1. A quotation in Haitian dollars can be multiplied by 5 to get gourdes and divided by 14 for the U.S. dollar equivalent. So, when someone asks for a dollar, is it 5 gourdes, or 14?

34. Rain on a Very Black Night

When it rains at night in Haiti, water falls in dense sheets. With the stars covered by clouds and electricity out, one can see nothing from a window. One can hear only the beating of raindrops on tin roofs, drowning out all other sounds and changing the world into rain, rain, nothing at all except hard, driving rain.

35. Driving on a Very Dark Night

Driving has always been tricky in this country, but, without streetlights and traffic lights, it is even trickier. Drivers are more careful, of course, but I don't know how they can avoid accidents. One would not expect people to be waking in the streets on dark nights but, if they did not walk, they could not go anywhere. Total darkness, cars, and people. It is a dangerous combination, but, somehow, both drivers and pedestrians survive and go about their business.

36. Diarrhea Medicine and Malaria Pills

I have a whole new box of Imodium, which I haven't opened yet. My theory is that with sanitary conditions as bad as they are, places that serve food take precautions so that eating out is safer than in many other countries. I am taking the malaria suppressant pills, but it hardly seems necessary. I've seen just a few mosquitoes. Still, one should take precautions. If conditions **look**

bad, they must **be** bad, or is that illogical? Can appearance be deceiving in a country, like in a person? Can looks be deceiving in something like an embargo?

37. Water

Haiti is an irregularly shaped third of an island, so water mostly surrounds it. In the hills, clear water runs across roads and down gullies, taking topsoil away. Much of the northern part of the country is now desert. Water near cities is horribly polluted, with people bathing and washing clothes downstream from hundreds of others doing likewise. City water is said to be treated, but hotels and restaurants treat it again before serving it to their guests. Bottled water is sold in all food stores. Water – a resource essential to life. Haiti must preserve its remaining water for life here to be possible.

38. Potholes in the Roads

What do Haiti and New York City have in common? You know, potholes. Neither place has enough in its budget to keep the roads repaired. Potholes take a huge toll on passenger and drive up repair costs. Also, trips take longer than they should because drivers must go slowly to avoid the potholes. Are they a sign of a decaying society? I think not. They are only a sign of a decaying infrastructure, but that they do hurt the society as a whole.

39. Air Conditioning

In this climate, air condition is essential. Yet, almost no one can use it now because of the shortage of electricity and the high cost of fuel for generators. Most people don't use it in their cars, either. With gasoline at \$8.00 a gallon, one must conserve. So, we sweat a little more and work a little more slowly. Then, we remember that we are on a tropical island that is being driven slowly back to the dark ages.

40. Razor Blades and Dental Picks

I don't carry shaving cream on trips. It's too heavy and bulky. Any soap works fine, but it clogs the Trac II razor blades. No matter. Each night's interdental pick cleans the blade the next morning. Little problems lend themselves to easy solutions. Big problems, unfortunately, are much more difficult to deal with.

41. An Emaciated Dog

One sees many dogs in Haiti but few of the vicious dogs one sees in other countries. Most are docile and friendly, like most of the people here. Today I saw a very emaciated dog, so weak that it surely could not hang on much longer. Was that dog a symbol of the country slowly being starved to death? Starvation can happen to a dog, a person or a nation.

42. The Mango Letter

Someone showed me a letter written to a U.S. government agency about a local mango farm. It said that a U\$2 million investment by an American firm was going down the drain. It was legal to ship its beautiful fruits to the United States, but the company could not get boxes, could not get electricity to run its hot water dip plant, and could not find transportation for its produce. Hundreds of workers had been laid off. Since each worker in Haiti supports twelve or more people, thousands were presumably going hungry. "There has to be a better way," I thought. "There simply **has** to be."

43. Roosters

Roosters. They crow around the clock. I think they've decided to work in shifts. People carry them on the street and in buses, and some of the oldest, toughest ones have ended up on my plate. I guess they have markets because chicken from the U.S. has been cut off by the embargo.

Outside the cities, some of roosters are fighting cocks. I'm told the best of these beautiful birds can be sold for high prices. Haitian people bear some similarity to the roosters and fighting cocks. Most can be found working, nearly any time of the day or night. Others have it relatively easy until there is a life-or-death situation, and then, they come out fighting.

44. My Friend, Pierre

We met one night at the Kinam. Pierre had built a profitable business contracting for production of handicrafts and exporting them to the USA. Unfortunately, customers were afraid to deal with him because of the embargo. He had nearly stopped ordering merchandise, leaving his skilled crafts people with no source of income. Also, the price of old barrels for making metal sculptures had gone way up because gasoline smugglers needed them. He maintained an outward air of confidence while grasping at any feasible idea. Pierre is a true entrepreneur, but starting a business is hard in the best of conditions. If he can survive, here and now, he can survive anywhere and anytime.

45 My Night Table

One evening, I took inventory of the items on my night table. There were a glass of water and a bottle of vitamins, a watch with an alarm, a candle and a box of matches, a flashlight, a pad of paper and a pen, and my short-wave radio. Each had its place on the table, and each had a purpose. If course, this was a night table in a Haiti, under embargo. The collection would have been quite different in the USA.

46. Do We have Gasoline?

We have gasoline. I was right in the back of our van – two 24-gallon cans of it. At \$8 per gallon, we had about \$400 in fuel, plus a full tank. “We’d better guard this car at night,” I thought. I haven’t heard of anyone stealing gasoline, but, at these prices, it would be logical to do so. Of course, it was necessary to carry that much on a trip to the countryside. In much of the country, gasoline was not available, at any price.

47. One Street Light

We were traveling through a small town at dusk. Nearly everything was dark except for one streetlight, which glowed brightly to make itself as visible as possible. I wondered what its

power source was but had no way of finding out. Perhaps it simply had that indomitable spirit that holds this country together in spite of everything.

48. Tombs in the Yards

Driving through the southern part of Haiti, we found that most families had private cemeteries. The tombs are usually in the front yards and are sometimes more elaborate than the houses behind them. Some single, some multiple, they are the final houses of their occupants. This makes some sense. Why should the living and the dead be separate when we will all be both, eventually? The tombs don't use much land, and they are functional. Farmers plant crops on all sides of them, housewives spread newly washed clothes on them to dry, and children scamper merrily across them.

49. Food and Job Creation

I've heard the USA is feeding nearly a million people in Haiti, mostly up north where agriculture has been devastated by erosion. We have a much smaller program to create jobs doing useful but low paid work, because there are few jobs available. Thus the U.S. is helping a large percent of the population. There is, of course, a risk of creating dependency. The help won't go on forever, however. When it ends, will the people be prepared to get along without it? Will Haitian farmers and employers fill the gap that Uncle Sam will leave them?

50. The One-legged Sawhorse

I saw it in front of a woodworker's shack as we drove by. It had both legs on one end, but the other end had no legs and was resting on a porch railing. "Can it do its job," I wonder. The answer is "yes," if it is well supported. Can a similarly handicapped human do his or her job? Yes, many jobs, if she or he is given enough support.

51. On to Camp Perrin

Our vehicle bounced into Camp Perrin, a small town in the southwestern part of Haiti, and we found a decent hotel. Rocking chairs on the common porch looked out on towering coconut palms. The small swimming pool was decorated with a large plastic float with the word, “Duracell.” The meal was late but very large – fried chicken with all the trimmings, Haitian style. Later, I practiced my technique of taking a cold shower, getting wet a little at a time, turning the water off to soap up, and rinsing very fast. We slept well in Camp Perrin before heading out on a “national highway,” a horrible stretch of rocky road that was the only way to our destination.

52. Jogging at Camp Perrin

Before leaving Camp Perrin, I went for a run along a beautiful freshwater canal. Some people were already up and around, sweeping their front porches. Others were heading for work, walking on the road carrying hoes and machetes. They could buy breakfast from country street vendors, already at their posts at 6:00 a.m. Unfortunately, it is not always true that “early to bed, early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise” The “wealthy part, at least, can be illusive.

53, The Guest House in Beaumont

It was a plain house but one of the best in the town of Beaumont. Three of us slept in a small room, three I another and two in the living/dining room. The bathroom was through the small kitchen and out the back door. There was one kerosene lantern for the two bedrooms. The porch provided a perfect and unforgettable view of an ever-changing Haitian street. Across the street was a long-abandoned coffee washing station, testimony to a declining economy. One way, the street led to small farm and fields; the other way, it passed houses *en route* to a jumble of stores and street vendors. Farming and retailing – two ways to try to make a living where it is very hard to make a living.

54. Along a Country Road

Trees planted on hillsides to hold the soil and protect the roads – rock roads, very rough rock roads. A gentle rain makes the rocks and the mud between them slippery. Skeletons of bulldozers appear sporadically, testimony to a culture of dependency. Repairing a broken “dozer” would cost money, while a new one could be gotten free from a friendly foreign donor. “Will Haiti ever have good roads,” I wonder. Without efficient transportation, how much progress is possible? In all these years, why hasn’t the government made these roads at least acceptable?

55. Stuck on a Hill

The rain had been just enough to turn the road into glass, albeit rough glass. The four-wheel drive pickup ahead of us couldn’t make the hill. After several tries and many suggestions, a member of our group persuaded the driver to try his plan. “There’s not enough weight,” he said, so we all piled into the pickup. With weight on its back wheels, it bolted up the hill, leaving the rest of us to contemplate whether our own solutions would or would not have done the job as well

56. People and Things on the Roadside

Head loading is common here. People carry amazing things on their heads. Often, I saw someone carrying a chair, upside down, with goods of all kinds piled on its bottom (temporarily, the top). This takes teamwork because one could surely not load or unload the chair alone. At roadside stands, spaghetti was sold in single-serving packages. Spaghetti was often served for breakfast. Huge bread baskets, more than a yard in diameter, overflowed on all sides from rickety wheelbarrows. In truth, we are not all the same. Cultures and customs differ in many and beautiful ways.

57. Sanitation in the Mountains:

In this mountainous country, my group was given the best of hospitality. In places not accessible by road, we were served delicious meals on small tables covered by tablecloths. Sometimes basins of water with soap and towels were passed around before the food was served. The

somewhat stale French bread was covered with cloths, and the pitchers of water were covered as well. After I dived head-first into a delicious mango, that would sell for more than a dollar in a U.S. Supermarket, I was again offered water to wash away the remnants. I don't know how sanitation became widespread in the hills of Haiti, but it is much better than in many other countries.

58. Painted Houses

In the hills, the houses are simple and made of wood, cement, or straw. Many are painted elaborately. They are in pastel colors with stripes and polka dots. In a government office, I saw a collection of photographs entitled, "Country Houses." Perhaps people compensate for not having modern dwellings by making the ones they have quaint and attractive. They are a joy to see as one bounces along the ribbons of rock called "roads."

Some houses are set where they have commanding views of hills and valleys below. Little houses with big views. Can one improve one's perspective by being able to see a long distance?

59. Ways of Making Lumber

First, I saw the most primitive method – sawing logs into boards entirely by hand. What a laborious process! The boards were abysmal in quality, but houses made of them looked quite good.

Then, I saw a more modern technique. A hand-powered crank turned a circular saw blade mounted in a wooden platform. This method took two operators but was several times faster and produced better boards. It seemed an appropriate level of technology for an embargoed country – the most efficient method that required no fuel – only manpower.

60. The Lotto Sellers

They are everywhere. In the cities, they work in shacks called “banks,” although other terms are used also. On country roads, they might be little stands, like fruit stands, and in the hills they are simply people with briefcases and pads of paper.

I’m told, though, that in these modest parlors one can play the numbers in Haiti, Santo Domingo or New York. I’m told also that the system is extremely efficient and honest. Like lotteries everywhere, the chance of winning is small, but he who buys a ticket buys hope also. Perhaps, today he will win a prize and eat better for a while.

61. A Word on Penises

That’s right, penises. One sees them dangling everywhere on little boys in the countryside. Boys are allowed to go without clothing much longer than little girls are. No girl here will grow up not knowing what a penis looks like. Big boys, too, are sometimes seen taking showers at night in the open. Well, why not? Is there anything wrong with showing a part of one body? Many people in the developed world pay good money to spend time on nude beaches.

62. Up the Hill on Horseback

Horses, or mules? We had a few of each. They wore rustic saddles and carried us steadily up the mountain. I was glad for the riding lessons in Ethiopia several years ago. Past little villages with people working and playing, some running barefoot on the rocky terrain. Way up, a Haitian farmer wearing a shirt with a seal that said, “Contractor, Cablevision.” Then a man with a small flute playing a few songs over and over. One of them was Auld Lang Syne, a fitting tune for visitors who would probably never go that way again.

63. Lunch on the Mountain

Lunch was served by people in a little farming community – fried chicken and goat, fried bananas, rice and beans, and cooked mixed vegetable. Everything was delicious. This was probably a chemical-free meal – organic agriculture – because the farmers can’t afford chemical products or don’t know about them. Among the people who ate after my group were two albinos,

nearly white-skinned in a dark-skinned country. They didn't act differently than anyone else, and no one acted differently toward them. Diversity, it seems, was readily accepted.

64. Friday Night Party

Back in Beaumont, after dinner, our driver took out his guitar and began to play. Soon, another guitarist appeared, and then a singer and many onlookers. One person beat the rhythm with a pocketknife on a soda bottle, and I found that an empty plastic five-gallon bottle made a good drum. A bottle of rum was emptied and then a gallon of the local cane liquor. Adults and children blended happily together until, a bit after 10:00 p.m., the host said to sing "Au Revoir" and to be on our way. Five minutes later, this wonderfully boisterous evening gave way to the quiet of a starry Haitian night.

65. Voodoo Priests' Homes

Voodoo is never far from the lives of most Haitians. Even upper-class practicing Catholics, I am told, visit a voodoo priest when there is trouble in their lives. Black magic is the aspect of voodoo that receives the most attention, but it is a small part of this religion. Some of the most attractive buildings seen on the trip were homes of voodoo priests, where they receive the faithful. One such building had a sort of garage, well stocked with bottles of soda. What better way to attract follower on a hot day in Haiti?

66. The Hotel Jacmelienne

This is a lovely hotel. It suffers from the lack of tourists and of electricity, but the owner does her best to maintain high standards. The bushes are trimmed, the rooms are clean, and the food is delicious. At night, one sits beneath flickering bulbs and looks beyond coconut palms to the pounding surf of the eternal sea. Those waves stay the same as they beat on the shores of an ever-changing Haiti. "What have they seen in the past," I wondered, "and what will they see in the future?"

67. News on the Radio

Sunday, March 7th, 1994. The New York Times reportedly said the U.S. was going to tighten the embargo on Haiti. It will be hard to get it much tighter unless the entire border with the Dominican Republic is sealed, including the ocean on both sides. An ex-president of Bolivia has been implicated in cocaine trafficking, and someone has accused President Clinton of sexual harassment. There are problems also in Israel, South Africa, and more, but all this seems unimportant here in Jacmel, Haiti, except the news that the embargo might be tightened.

68. The Rah Rahs

About this time, we began seeing and hearing “rah rahs.” They are motley groups of people who go about towns and the countryside making music, singing, and dancing. The leaders of some groups have whips, perhaps reminiscent of the days of slavery. Onlookers are asked to contribute money to them. At night, they carry lamps or lanterns, and some of the best have uniforms of sorts. In the days preceding Easter, rah rahs were a common site and a unique cultural experience. For the participants, they must have meaning but, for the foreign observer, they only provide a bit of entertainment.

69. Along the Seashore

We were driving on a rocky road north from Jacmel. The seaside was heavily populated, though we saw few cars and, surprisingly, not many boats. Modern houses were scattered among dozens of other houses. There were few good beaches, but the ocean shore was magnificent. There is tourist potential here, great tourist potential. Tourism used to bring quite a bit of income to Haiti. “How long will it take,” I wonder, “for tourists to come back when this craziness is over?”

70. Tee Shirts in the Countryside

It seemed that everyone was wearing a tee shirt with a saying from the USA. “Michigan,” said one. Another read, “You are so important.” I liked the little boy whose shirt read, “I’m a Toys R Us Kid.” The persons wearing those shirts clearly did not buy them in the United States. I suspect they are products of the used clothing business. The clothes we give to Goodwill and

other organizations are often sold in countries like Haiti. This helps people stay clothed but wreaks havoc on the local manufacturing industry.

71. A Coconut Water Break

We were hot and dry and, in the hills of Haiti, beer and soda are hard to come by. No matter. We stopped at a shack where a man with a machete expertly sliced into coconuts. I never knew how much water one of those could hold. When we had drunk our fill, the machete split the coconuts so we could eat the fleshy interior. All ingredients ere natural, and the packaging grew with the product. With our thirst quenched and hunger abated, we went happily on our way.

72. Jogging in Jacmel

I knew it was perfectly safe. Still, I put the hotel's card in the pocket of my shorts, left a note on the bed that said I was out jogging, and make sure the desk clerk saw me leave. The paved streets near the hotel were nearly empty at that hour, but the center of town was bustline. I jogged passed the *Alliance Francais*, quaint houses, and finally the Port of Jacmel. As I returned to the hotel, I saw young men playing soccer in the street. They invited me to join them, and I had to admit, ashamedly, that I had never learned to play it. When I grew up, in a small Missouri town, the world's most popular sport was neither seen nor heard of.

73. Frightened Animals

That day, my group drove into the hills again. Animals tethered at the roadside became frightened as we passed. Goats, cows, mules, and horses pulled at their tethers to get out of our way. We were, of course, invading their territory. We were in a strange machine where such things were not seen often. When I audibly apologized to a horse as we rumbled past, our Haitian friends must have thought that was strange behavior, indeed.

74. The Would-be Schoolboy

In a mountain town, a polite young man began talking with me in French and a little English. As our jeep had a flat tire, which refused to budge from the rim, there was time for small talk. He had been attending high school in Port-au-Prince because there was no high school in his village. He had come home for vacation and lacked the money to return because bus fares had increased so much. He had free lodging in Port-au-Prince, he said, and needed just a few dollars for transportation. He seemed sincere, but how can one know. Anyway, I gave him two-thirds of what he wanted – about US\$3.50. Perhaps, I thought, that would encourage him to find the remainder.

Somewhere in our conversation, I learned that he was out of touch with the world. He relied on a portable radio for news, and the price of batteries had gone beyond his budget.

75. The Meeting in La Montagne

Our last meeting in the Jacmel area was high on a hill near La Montagne. We drove up, with incredible views of Jacmel, past a modern house with solar panels and a satellite dish antenna. At our destination, 50 or 60 people crowded into a clearing in front of a small house. Do you know how five people can sit on two chairs? No problem. Put them a few feet apart and lay a strong board across them.

Everyone spoke Creole, and most appeared to understand French. English was out of the question. Everyone was attentive to everything said in a language that he or she understood. A visit by foreigners was not common there, so it was a major event.

76. Port-au-Prince and the Villa Creole

Back in Port-au-Prince, we checked in at the Villa Creole Hotel. This is more comfortable and has a clean pool and electricity all the time, but it doesn't have the wonderful charm of the Kinam. Indeed, it is a bit of America in Haiti. The next morning, I was startled to see fresh fruit being served by a young lady in a starched white uniform. She wore a badge with her name and

the words, *Ecole Hoteliere*. Obviously, there was a hotel school, and it continued to function. “These people don’t give up,” I thought. “They’ll do whatever they can to live normal lives.

77. Some Strange Americans

There are strange Americans in this hotel, maybe a dozen of them. They are mostly middle-aged, keep together, and do not talk about their work. Where two or three are gathered, there is usually a two-way radio. Something about them says, “U.S. military,” but what would military advisors or trainers be doing in a country in which the U.S. is seeking to overthrow a military government? Someone says they are communications specialists working at the U.S. Embassy, but so many? A second person says they are volunteers from the Immigration and Naturalization Service, interviewing Haitian applicants for visas to the U.S. We do not accept “boat people,” he says, but those with well-founded fears of persecution have a chance of going legally. Suddenly, these Americans don’t seem so strange; they look more like knights in shining armor.

78. A Walk to the Montana

I remembered the Hotel Montana from a previous trip and wanted to visit it. Through the Villa Creole, past the tennis courts, and to the *Rue Panamericaine*. Down past a few small stores, several houses, and a couple of exciting *rah rahs*. Then, up the long driveway to the Montana. I walked in as if I were staying there and then out to the restaurant, an open-air pavilion from which there is a magnificent view of Port-au-Prince. Everything looked clean and quiet from that distance. I understood a group of human rights observers was staying there but didn’t meet any. I did meet a religious musical group from the U.S. The young people were traveling the world and spending Easter playing and singing in Haiti.

Walking back from the Montana, I enjoyed colorful kites frolicking in the sky. I passed a wire, electric or phone, that was hanging to the group. “Whichever it is doesn’t matter, I thought.” There is probably nothing running through it.

79. Some Religious Groups

There are many U.S. religious groups that work in Haiti, some temporarily and others long-term. The Baptist mission above Petionville is well known as a place to buy handicrafts. A small group passing through the Villa Creole was stationed in a seaside town into which traders brought embargoed gasoline. The U.S. religious folks were transporting it to their staff in Port-au-Prince. Thus, U.S. missionaries were helping defeat the U.S.-led embargo. Should we call them criminals, or heroes, or just people doing whatever is needed to accomplish their work.

The staff of the Missionary Air Service must be more honest, or less enterprising. I was to fly with them, but they did not have fuel for the plane.

80. Easter Sunday Morning

I awoke to find time advanced one hour, like in the USA. This country really is U.S.-oriented. Later, a stroll. I left the hotel through the back to avoid young men who ask visitors for money and took a *camionette* to the *Place de Petionville*. There, mass was in session. Everyone looked lovely in his or her Easter Sunday best. I saw neckties and a few sport coats. A one-legged man stood by the door of the church, and a lady with a snakeskin purse quickened her pace as she passed him.

Meandering back to the Villa Creole, I stopped for a shoeshine in the blazing sun. Then, I entered a barber shop on Rue Clerveau, open for business on a Sunday morning. The price was just over US\$2 – high I thought, but I agreed to it. A battery-operated radio blared music as the barber turned on a battery-powered clipper. Then, scissor and, *voilà*, a perfect haircut.

As I approached the Villa Creole, a man was stationed in the road and asked for money. I quickly surrendered a Haitian dollar and scampered to the hotel.

81. Did the Time Really Change?

Monday morning, 7:00 a.m. It is darker than at 7:00 a.m. last week, and the streets are less crowded. “What’s the matter with these people,” I thought. “Don’t they know the time changed?” “Maybe not,” said a co-worker. Some might not have clocks or watches or might have them but

ignore them. The sun is a better indicator that it's time to go into the streets or to go home at night. What does a time change mean to someone who works from sunup to sundown in order to survive?

82. An Abundance of Art

This is an incredibly artistic people. There are not many places to study Haitian art and music, so they learn by doing. Their art is for self-expression and economic survival. Haitian paintings are for sale throughout Port-au-Prince, and many are bought by fellow Haitians. There are about 50 artists who are well-known and countless others, and they continue working, although they have fewer customers than before the embargo, and their supplies are more expensive. Haitian paintings and crafts are for sale throughout the Caribbean. Some of the artists and crafts people sell in Miami, and a few have moved there, so the work of talented Haitians is being seen in the USA. Some of the pieces are undisguised cries for a better life.

83. The Dance Society

It was Friday night, and there was Latin swing in El Rancho Hotel. The parking lot was full, and there was excellent ballroom dancing on the terrace. As the rhythms changed, the dancing continued – exhibition quality. An international ballroom dance society in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. This is, indeed, a complex and intriguing society.

84. The Dress Store

People laughed, Tete said, when she opened her store selling dresses made in Haiti. "We all go to Miami to buy clothes," the ladies said. Well, because of the embargo, they can't go to Miami as easily, and some are buying in Tete's shop. Miami's loss is her gain. I'm glad **some** good is coming from the embargo.

85. Eating Out Up Here

Le Voil, Les Cascades, Chez Gerard – Petionville has very good eating places, and most are managing to open for business at least two nights a week. At dinner in Gregoire, we hear of the Mayor of Petionville, a capable and dedicated man, elected with Aristede, who still serves his people. The Army hassles him but has not arrested him. We also hear about a Lebanese merchant whose body we had seen on the road one morning. We are told the Police planned to eliminate a person who had cheated them in a deal of some kind but, unfortunately, got the wrong man. Mistaken identity can be fatal in Haiti.

86. Dominican Chicken

It isn't much of a restaurant, but the lay who runs it is definitely from the D.R. The chicken is tough, but the boiled bananas and stewed onions are out of this world. The music and the generator are both at peak volume. I've heard there about a million Haitians in the Dominican Republic; a current presidential candidate was born there of Haitian parents. There are a few thousand Dominicans in Haiti, often working, I am told, as mechanics, beauticians and prostitutes. Not much vocational training is available here, so some skills are always needed. It is good that the two countries can share workers, but it would be better if Haitians could learn trades and not have to cross the border and break their backs cutting cane.

87. The President's House

The president's house is attractive – a large white building in the center of town. Through the gate, I can see that the grass is cut, and the front door is open. "Open, yes, but for whom," I wonder. Actually, the house is vacant because the President is in exile. "Will he ever return," I wonder, "and, if he doesn't, who will live in this house, and when?"

88. Foreign Embassies

Most of the embassies in Haiti are closed or are working with skeleton staffs. I am told the diplomats left because of insecurity in Haiti, but the country does not seem insecure at present.

It's as if they are saying, "We're leaving, guys," "We don't like what's happening here, and we want no part of it."

89. What Kind of Government

By most accounts, most people were optimistic when Aristide was President, but the wealthy people and the army were against him. Some people say he can't come back because it would be too dangerous; however, when there is another election, will not a populist win again? Most of the people are downtrodden and will vote for a friend of the masses. If an elected president cannot be accepted by people with money and guns, how can there be a Democracy?

90. A Friend who is Leaving

Seven years, he has been here, but now he is leaving. It isn't because of insecurity or that life is difficult; he can deal with these things. No, it's because the country cannot progress with the political situation and the embargo. He can't justify trying to do development work in a country that can't be developed. Therefore, he is leaving a place that he loves, and Haiti is losing a talented resident.

91. What is the Solution?

A solution for Haiti? Nobody has one, but everyone has suggestions to make, including me. What about just ending the embargo? Leave the Army intact. Let Aristide return under UN protection, sharing power with the Army. Put OAS advisors/observers in major government offices to attend Army/government meetings and coordinate with each other. Would this get the country through until the next election. No matter. It will never be done because somebody would object.

92. What Haiti Needs is Development

Some people say Democracy can't succeed when most people are uneducated. In case this is true, why don't international donors focus on education for the next several years. Get all the

kids through primary school and then through high school. If everyone were educated, no one would be jealous of those who are. If everyone were educated, population growth would decrease, and the country could attract more investment. More natural resources would be preserved. Political candidates could appeal to logic as well as emotion. As a result, the country could finally start to develop.

93. The Last of the “Maquilas”

The twin plant, or assembly industry, employed 80,000 people in the industrial part until a few years ago. Most have now closed because of political uncertainty and the embargo. A few remain, run by dedicated American businesspeople who don't want to abandon Haiti. I hear their license to trade with the U.S. have been renewed but for only 60 more days. That will let them fill orders they have in hand, but buyers will not give them new ones. In 60 days or less, another 12,000 people will be out of work, and the park will be shuttered. For another 100,000 people or more, the struggle for survival will be harder. “No,” I cry. “This can't be happening.” but that is the way I heard it.

94. April 14, 1994

I am home from Haiti. Home to my neat, orderly world. Home to a beautiful spring in the U.S. capitol, but there is no spring in Haiti. There is only hot, hot winter.

Epilogue Written April 16, 1994:

The headline in The Washington Post reads, *Macabre Terrorism Targets Haitians – Aristide Backers Become Mutilated Corpses, Rights Workers Say*. It might be an exaggeration to blame this terrorism on the embargo, but I think the embargo adds to the siege mentality that makes terrorism more acceptable. This embargo will not accomplish its purpose, and it hurts the people we most want to help. Let us end it, now!

Epilogue Written August 4th, 2021

In May 1994, the United Nations imposed a nearly total trade embargo on Haiti. In September of that year, with U.S. armed forces on the ground, the military government agreed to relinquish power. Aristide returned to the presidency in October and served until February 1996. He served again from February 2001 until February 2004, when he was again removed in a *coup d'état*. He blamed the U.S. Government, which denied involvement.

Haitian economic statistics are different depending on whose numbers one looks at. By one chart, per capita income in Haiti, measured at Purchasing Power Parity, was \$970 in 1994. It rose more-or-less steadily to \$3,000 in 2018 and then began to slide back. In the USA, the comparable figure was about \$64,000.