

'All Haiti'

Sally Haas, class of '72, gave up a successful estate planning business to serve the people of Haiti. Her company focused on helping wealthy families, especially seniors and divorced or widowed women, manage their finances and investments. Now her charitable organization is making sure severely malnourished children in remote Haitian villages live past toddlerhood.

Malnutrition afflicts 50 percent of the country's children; half of them will die before age 5. Haas introduced the Plumpy'Nut peanut paste product to many of Haiti's villages. The astonishing results are documented in children's before and after pictures. She first heard of Plumpy'Nut on "60 Minutes." The shelf-stable, ready-to-use peanut paste does in six weeks what used to take six months with a powered milk formula: return a severely malnourished baby with protruding ribs back to health. Every week, mothers walk for hours with their babies to attend nutrition clinics, evaluate the child's progress and receive a week's supply of Plumpy'nut packets, bringing back the empty ones to prove they didn't sell them. Haas buys the Plumpy'Nut direct from the manufacturer and delivers it to the clinics. She insists on knowing exactly where the money is going, how it's being used, and what record keeping is in place.

If a child makes it to age 3 healthy and well nourished, Haas' next objective is to enroll the child in school. For years, she has funded tuition for 65 children at St. Alban school in the mountain village of Crochu. An education is a child's only hope for a future better than their parents, who struggle daily just to feed their family. This Caribbean nation is the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere yet only 2 hours from Miami. The degree and vastness of poverty is so overwhelming it must be seen in person. Clean water is scarce in Haiti so Cholera claims many lives. A third of a woman's and child's day is spent carrying water in buckets on their heads. In 2012 Haas distributed FilterPure ceramic water filters to 200 Haitian homes which included training on the care and use of the filter. Many more are needed. They cost \$47 and last a family 5 years.

Haas' church funded the construction of a kitchen at the St. Simeon School in Croix-des-Bouquets that feeds a hot lunch of rice and beans to 200 children each day. Lack of protein in the Haitian diet causes serious medical problems especially for the children. Haas started a goat farm in Titanyen, near the capital Port-au-Prince. She will be adding a chicken coop in 2013 which will provide both eggs and meat.

Haas' next project will be to drill a well and actually provide a source for water. Most Haitians have to walk miles for a single bucket while we waste gallons just brushing our teeth.

Haas established the Haiti Mission in 2002 to receive donations for her work on nutrition, health care, education, and clean water. She directs all projects and fundraising. Partnering with the umbrella non-profit Mission for Biblical Literacy, Haas can offer supporters tax deductible status for their donations. After 18 trips, the Haitians call her "Mamá Sallé." Haas is single and says "she has no children in the US but hundreds in Haiti."

Comment [j1]: Based on Google search. Not sure how to properly express the name of the town. Mombin Crochu, Mombin-Crochu or just Crochu?

The moment she went “all Haiti” probably happened in 2002 on the plane home after her first trip, but her story was years in the making.

Climbing the ladder

Sweet Briar was all study and no play, she recalls.

Even before she arrived, Haas had to negotiate a deal with Dean Catherine Sims. Dean Sims strongly recommended Haas forget all the years she studied French in high school and even in France and, instead, sign up for Spanish which Sims insinuated would be an easier road to success. Haas persisted to the point where Sims agreed, but insisted Haas pass a test when she arrived at Sweet Briar before being allowed into the French course. After high school graduation Haas spent all summer with a French lady who refused to speak English. Haas passed Sim’s test, entered French class only to discover it was not a normal French class but a literature course, i.e., read French books, do reports in French, and then discuss in French. Haas cringed as test scores came back with her first C ever. She endured frequent summonses to see the dean, depleting her Kleenex supply each time, but refused to give up. Haas ultimately made an A in French and Sims admitted “I wouldn’t have given you a nickels’ chance in French.” Haas went on to earn her B.A. in math. She stayed in touch with Dean Sims for years afterward. She only regrets not sending that last letter to Sims to let her know after 35 years Haas finally realized why she just had to take French. French is the formal language in Haiti.

After graduating, Haas began her career in real estate though she chose not to work for her family’s well-established firm, Haas & Dodd Realty. Next, Haas managed a new hotel’s restaurant before becoming the hotel’s sales manager. Although proud of what she’d accomplished, restlessness pushed her to apply at Hewlett-Packard.

She thrived at the computer company, claiming the No. 1 technical sales spot and the only female in the 17 southern states in her second year. Her rapid ascension to district and regional sales management landed her in Woman and Glamour magazines in 1983 and 1984. Sweet Briar’s magazine published a story about her in 1989.

In 1993, after 15 years, Haas left Hewlett-Packard to start her estate planning firm, Haas & Associates, Inc. Business was growing rapidly in late 2001 when a little girl came bounding into her life and changed its course.

‘A huge reversal’

Making a conscience effort to volunteer, Haas worked in a children’s hospital where she saw many America mothers with foreign children who had major medical needs. Haas inquired and was invited to a coffee given by Childspring International, a non-profit. As she sat by a pool waiting for the event to begin, suddenly an eighteen-month-old Haitian toddler, Linose, can running out and leapt into her lap.

"I was a goner," Haas says.

Linose was in the US by herself to have a large tumor growing on her eye lid removed. She ended up staying with Haas after her surgery. Six months later Childspring called and said "we're going to Haiti and you're coming with us." They elaborated by explaining the last leg of the trip would be in a single prop plane and we would land on the beach of a little island in the bay of Haiti. "I thought, 'I don't think so. Let me just write you a check,'" she recalls.

She went anyway, despite numerous fears, and saw the one-room mud hut where Linose, her twin sister, parents, and grandmother lived with no electricity, no running water, and no sewer system.

"I cried all the way home," she said, her voice breaking again with the memory. "I never experienced such a huge reversal in my life as I did after coming back from Haiti." Haas couldn't go to a restaurant for two years. "Spending twenty, thirty dollars or, heaven forbid, more on food just for me made me ill, knowing I could save a child's life in Haiti with that money," she said.

On that first trip, Haas met Carmel and Father Fritz Valdema, a nurse and Episcopal priest. They were responsible for six villages, each with a church, a school and a nutrition clinic. They told her Haiti needed doctors, medicine, milk and vitamins for the women and children who were dying every day.

"And bring friends so they can see our needs," Carmel Valdema told her.

For two years, Haas returned every three months with OB/GYN's and conducted women's clinics. These clinics continue today. Haas moved on to establish The Haiti Mission and has focused her efforts on introducing new ideas and products for children to remote villages on the mainland of Haiti alongside the Valdemas.

Finding your purpose

Visiting Haiti changed the way Haas thinks about everything. "It's not that Haiti has less than we have or that their children have less than our children," she says. "Haiti has nothing. Friends had to tell me often that I was 'all Haiti' and needed to get back to a somewhat more normal life. I do dine out now but there isn't a day that goes by that I don't think about how incredibly fortunate we are."

She has hosted many Haitian children in Atlanta. She never tires of seeing them flush a toilet for the first time, switch the lights on and off over and over again, or hearing their squeals as she tries to put them in the shower or tub.

A year ago, a Sweet Briar classmate called for the Annual Fund. Haas was honest: Remembering the privilege they enjoyed, she simply couldn't give money that could otherwise go to Haiti.

She was so surprised and deeply touched when a wonderful note arrived along with a donation from this woman Haas had not talked to in 41 years. "What a show of confidence this classmate placed in me after all this time" Haas explains. "I can't possibly let her down." Other neighbors, tennis, golf, swimming, church friends, and even strangers have rallied to help Haiti. "None of these programs would be possible without this support. I simply provide the method by which people can help."

No one was more surprised than Haas to find herself in a mud hut on a mountain top in Haiti. "I didn't find Haiti, Haiti(Linose)found me."

It took a leap of faith to say "yes, I'll go to Haiti, but the payoff has been remarkable " says Haas, who was recognized last year with a humanitarian award for her work.

"I climbed the corporate ladder but something was still missing," she says. "It feels really good to do something that fulfills you, and this has been it for me.

"It is more rewarding than any job I've ever been paid to do."

Haas has always been driven by the following anonymous statement:

One hundred years from now...it will not matter what my bank account was, the sort of house I lived in, or the kind of car I drove, but the world may be different because I was important in the life of a child.

For years she anguished over how to accomplish this when she had no children. Certainly she is making progress toward this goal.

If you would like to help or request more information, Sally would welcome your interest.

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