

haven

this is our world. we can make a difference.



Our mission at **haven is to provide housing, food, education, medical care and nurturing for 500 orphans at a children's village in Liberia. UNDP reports that due to the 14 year civil war, Liberia has the highest percentage of orphans in the world (10% of its population of 3 million) and there are well over 100,000 orphans in its capital, Monrovia. As most of you know, the mission officially got started on March 5th in Liberia. Thank you for your continued support. This is my diary of the month I spent at home:**

I arrived in Monrovia and realized pretty early on that the 'changes' made were simply superficial. Our so-called international airport, Roberts International Airport (RIA), seemed like a makeshift airport that's bustling by some fluke. Bribery was as usual the first thing on every employee's mind. Not that I blame them: having to survive on less than a dollar a day has got to take a toll on a person's dignity.

I got home to my mom's and was ready to start the mission the very next day. After a fortnight of waiting for the incorporation certificate for haven missions, without which I couldn't even open a bank account or buy the 4 acres of land I'd found, I called an old friend of mine and started touring the country. I have to say that I'm ever so grateful for that trip. It opened my eyes to Liberia's problems.

Sitting in Monrovia amidst its filth, noise, pollution, politics, humidity and beggars, its easy to want to pack up and leave as the average person's greed and lack of respect gives you a reason not to want to help them.

The government institutions are rife with bribery and misguided information therefore small NGO's aren't appreciated, nor are they trusted as there are so



The usual scene of garbage in downtown Monrovia, adjacent to a market.

many bogus NGOs operating in the country. While out of Monrovia, I actually got to see the problems that I'd been reading about and got to interact on a real level with orphans and kids just wanting to have an opportunity to learn. I saw how *haven* could really make an impact in Liberia. I've pinpointed Liberia's major problems: **Lack of sanitation, lack of safe drinking water and most importantly, lack of education!**



Women and children doing laundry under Toe bridge. Nimba County, 8 hours out of Monrovia.

After a month of living alongside rats and cockroaches (they're everywhere!) I'm even more resolved to continue my mission. All over the country there are vital billboards meant to educate the people that rape is a crime, about proper hygiene and how to make drinking water safe by boiling it and treating it with chlorine. Yet these signs are a cruel joke because the average Liberian can't read nor can they comprehend properly. My friend's 50 something Mandingo driver asked me if rape was having sex with a virgin! This is a



man that lives in Monrovia! I had read about cases of girls as young as 5 years old being raped but we found cases of 2 year old babies being raped in Monrovia and subsequently bleeding to death. Only 2% of rape is reported in Liberia. I met young boys and girls in their late teens who have no idea how old they are nor how to get chlorine to purify their drinking water.

I met 14 year old first graders and the sad part is that they are the lucky ones because they are in school, but when I asked them to spell the name of the county they lived in, they couldn't, nor could they multiply!

While in the town of Zwedru, a 10 hour drive from Monrovia, I visited schools and nurseries that were understaffed and overcrowded. Their daily meal (provided by GTZ, an international

NGO) consists of bulgur wheat and spilt peas, a disgusting concoction that causes chronic diarrhea!

One example: Suah Memorial Institute, a public elementary school with 970 students, has 18 teachers, 4 cooks, 2 female dish washers and 2 male janitors, all of whom work for food. There were no chairs, benches or educational materials (notebooks, pens, books, pencils, etc.) in the overcrowded classrooms and the kids had to stand during their lessons, yet their thirst for knowledge was infectious.

I got back to Monrovia and visited the Child Development Academy, a school that maintains international standards, where in addition to the basic subjects, the students have extra curriculum activities such as ballet, art, music, etc. I was elated to see such a school in Monrovia only to



Inside Doe Community Nursery, a free nursery ran by volunteers. this is the classroom the child is looking in on.



A 12 year old boy, who has never been to school because he needs to work, looks in longingly at his friends in nursery

learn that the tuition was over USD 1500 yearly, an exorbitant amount even for a middle class family in Monrovia. CDA caters solely to the elite. The need for proper education that doesn't cost more than the average Liberian can make in six and a half years isn't a want but an absolute necessity!

Instead of buying land and building a new children's village, I've found that it is more productive to take over an existing orphanage that would be closed if not for our intervention and make improvements to the existing facilities.

To this end, *haven* has acquired Agnes and Alfred Memorial Orphanage Mission. At the moment we have 74 orphans and they range from 4 to 18 years old. We will continue to gradually bring in orphans until we're at maximum capacity. However, this process will take over a year as we expand the facilities to include a clinic, more schoolrooms, and bigger dormitories. Also, we want to keep the family feel that exists at the orphanage, by not introducing too many new children at once.



The lucky kids: Agnes and Alfred Memorial kindergarten honor students.

The AAMOM orphans are very bright, independent and industrious. They built their computer lab and planted their farm. The boys take care of the animals and the girls take turns in cooking. It is such an honor to work with these honest and ambitious orphans. *haven* will not only renew their childhood but give them a brighter future! At the moment they're separated in each room by age so their peers are their roommates.



The unlucky kids that aren't in school: they have to sell cold water in the market to feed their family.

I've acquired 6 acres for building the mission, as well as 25 acres for a cash-crop farm and the next phase is to acquire 1,000 acres to plant a rubber farm to make haven self-supporting in 7 years.

I'm back in NYC for a month to raise funds and do a few drives:

clothes drive: *the orphans live in tattered used clothes. a lot of them live in old t-shirts. They need the basics from underwear, shirts, trousers, skirts, dresses to socks.*



The nursery class at Alfred and Agnes Memorial Elementary School.



At the boys dorm learning chess on a chess board these two 8 year olds made!

shoes drive: *more often than not they're barefoot as they have nothing to wear; they need shoes, sandals, flip flops and sneakers.*

computer drive: *we're in desperate need of computers for our newly built computer laboratory. Printers, scanners and inks would be greatly appreciated!*

books & stationery drive: *the kids are avid readers and have read their meagre books to pieces. At **haven** we believe in expanding their world through literature. They also need the basic stationery supplies: pens, pencils, notebooks, paper, rulers coloring pencils, coloring books, etc. Your help in making the drive happen in a month would be an absolute blessing to these kids!*



Evita, the girls matron. At 23, she took over as matron after her grandmother, Agnes Penderson died in the last crisis in 2003. She's now 28 and attends AME University studying arts and social welfare.

*Have a blessed day!
sincerely,*

nb.
haven missions founder.
www.havenmissions.org