



A Promise in Haiti: A Reporter's Notes on Families and Daily Lives

Mark Curnutte

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When a devastating earthquake struck near Port-au-Prince, Haiti, on January 12, 2010, the world reacted with a collective, yet distant, horror. For *Cincinnati Enquirer* reporter Mark Curnutte, hearing the news provoked a far more visceral response. Curnutte had grown to love Haiti and its people as only someone who had lived with Haiti's families could.

A Promise in Haiti is Curnutte's story of his time, spanning the last decade, living among several families in Gonaives, a city of 200,000 people a hundred kilometers north of Port-au-Prince. He began traveling to Haiti as a volunteer with the aid organization Hands Together, eventually building trust and credibility with many Haitians. Curnutte introduces the reader to the Cenecharles family, strained by entrenched unemployment and the need to continually travel for work. He is invited into the home of the Henrisma family, and is forced to reconcile journalistic detachment with basic compassion as he contributes financially to help them. The reader is confronted with a complicated, conflicted written and photographic record of a worldview that evolves right on the page. As a reporter, Curnutte found parallels between the lives he encountered in Gonaives and the world of the Great Depression recounted in James Agee and Walker Evans's *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*. Agee and Evans loom large as a challenge and inspiration to Curnutte.

The result is equal parts homage to that historic chronicle, on-the-ground reporting, and introspective narrative on the lessons Gonaives taught Curnutte about his own life and family. In late February 2010, Curnutte went back to Haiti on assignment, but conditions made it impossible for him to return to Gonaives. The resulting frustration provoked a meditation on the monumental challenges that face Haiti -- and on the destructive cycle of international attention that constantly moves on to "The Next Big Story."

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