

Mon, 14 Jan 91

Dear Family,

I'm sorry I missed last week. I guess this is the first letter I've sent home this year (Thus the scribbled-out "90".)

I suppose you've all been worried about me. I'm sure the local news has picked up on the chapel they déchouk'd [totally destroyed] in Martissant -- you probably heard about it before I did. Lafontant, a presidential candidate who was eliminated early because of supposed ties to the Macoutes, took over the National Palace one morning this week, and was ousted before afternoon. Over-zealous supporters of Aristide responded for the next few days by levelling to the ground any buildings which they supposed to be vaguely anti-Aristide, including several businesses, a shopping market and gas station, the largest Catholic cathedral, and the chapel in Martissant. Only the concrete walls remain. Of course, they looted everything that was inside. Those chairs are probably being put to more use now than they were before.

This was all in Port-au-Prince, of course. We haven't seen much of anything in St. Marc. The morning of the brief coup d'état, they burned tires in two or three intersections, but they went out by midday, and there's been nothing at all since. There've been a couple of days they've told us to stay in, and yesterday they told us not even to go to church right across the street, but the city has remained perfectly calm.

We don't get much news of what's happening in the mission here. We have to go to a neighbor's or to the telephone company to make a call, and the zone leaders have only been by once since I've been here. This morning we learned after the fact that all 14 sister missionaries left had been sent either home or to another mission. It was inevitable, I suppose -- none of them had more than six months left -- but it was a shock not to learn of it until they were already gone. (Maybe I'm too used to being in the office, where I would have been responsible for booking the flights). Anyway, we're now down to only 80 missionaries. It was almost double that when I came in.

I suppose I should have mentioned that no missionaries have been harmed. The destruction of the chapel was not part of any concerted effort to drive the Church out of Haiti, at least not in my eyes. It's just the type of thing that happens when a whole bunch of angry and confused people get together.

I really like St. Marc. It's small and flat, and we're on bicycles, so we can get anywhere in town pretty quickly. The branch is well organized, and has several dedicated and active members who form a stable core. I mentioned in my fax the problems they'd been having with theft in the house. Well, since that time, several members of the St. Marc branch have been staying regularly overnight in a shack behind the house, and there haven't been any problems since.

St. Marc is located right on the edge of a small bay, and in a few months the sun should be setting right into the sea. And the sky is absolutely amazing. I've been both blessed and cursed in my eyes. I keep getting more and more near-sighted, but when it's corrected, I have 20/15 vision. I tried wearing both my old and new pairs of glasses together, and they were too strong to be worn for a long time, but made things crisper than with just one pair -- especially at night. Anyway, to get to the point, I went up on the roof with them one moonless night, and saw more stars than I had ever seen in my life. I had trouble making out constellations because there were so many unfamiliar ones. I carefully

counted all of the stars that I could at least catch a glimpse of in the quadrangle formed by the knees and shoulders of Orion. Counting those four, I was able to make out a total of 42. (One of which isn't a star of course [sketch showing the Orion Nebula]. Mars was right near what I think were the Pleiades.

My camera was stolen last week. I'd planned on that when I bought the cheapest one available, but I'd taken some good photos on that roll. That very morning, I'd gotten some good shots of burning tires. We took our bikes to a nearby beach (this is P-day, one week ago) and we left my camera on top of my back pack after taking a corny picture with it. We walked a short ways along the beach, turned our backs for a moment, came back and it was gone. I suppose I should be glad they/he/she/it didn't take the backpack too. I like my companion: Elder Lynn Bernhard. He's from Orem, and went to Mountain View. (That makes my second companion who's a Bruin!) Before coming on his mission, he joined the Utah National Guard, and spent a month of his training in Thailand. He's the second of a family of 12. (Did I ever mention that Elder Johanson comes from a family of the same size?)

The work has been kind of slow so far, but we have a few investigators that do show promise. I think my favorites right now are Marc & Camelia. They are literally dirt poor. But she seems to have some education: she can read French. They seem to understand what we've taught so far, and readily accept it. The only problem we might have is that they aren't yet married, although they have three children. Hopefully something cheap and legal, but nice, can be arranged.

We have a shortwave radio in the house, and have been tuning in to the Voice of America and the BBC to keep track of the news in the Persian Gulf. The 15th is tomorrow, and more and more, we seem to be on the eve of war. I hope a solution is reached with a minimum of bloodshed, and that the other Arab states aren't implicated against Israel -- not yet. As we see the world ripening in iniquity, the time is now more than ever to reap the grain from among the tares. I heard from somewhere that 2% of the American troops are members of the Church. Maybe their influence will help to introduce the Gospel to the Islamic nations.

The world has certainly changed since October 11th 1989. I'd come back like Rip Van Winkle if I were truly isolated. But I never have been truly isolated, in any sense. I love you all,

(Elder) Tracy Hall