

2017 September 27 (finished on September 28!) Busy and safe

Last week at this time there was a lot of praying for those in the path of Hurricane Maria. Some places, such as Dominica, had come through Hurricane Irma with moderate damage, but everything could be handled. Other areas, such as Antigua-Barbuda and Puerto Rico were already suffering major damage when they found themselves directly in the path of Maria. By this time a week ago, some of that damage was known, but much remained unclear because of destroyed communications. In northern Haiti, we had wind and rain, but had already learned that the path of the storm was headed away from us and toward the Turks and Caicos Islands. A sigh of relief almost seemed selfish, knowing what so many were enduring. We had major rains two days after Hurricane Irma, more rain than we received when Irma passed, so things were pretty soggy.

The surprise to me was that the biggest effects of Maria in our area came on Thursday from the back side of the hurricane. The amounts of rainfall were impressive, and we were only on the edge of the storm. I had friends and fellow missionaries who were in Dominica and Puerto Rico through these storms, and it is hard to imagine the effects of a category 5 storm after dealing with only a couple of days of wind and rain in our part of Haiti. We did have rivers overflow their banks, people who lost some or all of their recent plantings, and trees down because of wind and saturated soil. One tree at a major crossroads at the bottom of the mountain fell on a pick-up truck and killed several people. Thursday afternoon in St. Raphael, there was a rock-and-mud-slide near town, and water and mud destroyed possessions and even some houses. I saw patients on Friday who came wearing the only dry clothing they owned, and reported losing personal belongings and household goods. One woman said that all the school supplies she had just bought for her child were gone. There was one young lady who was disappointed because she had just bought a nice new purse the day before, and it was gone. Some people lost everything since there was only time to escape out the door, and even then, they were up to their waists or chests in water and mud. The attitude generally expressed was gratitude that they had been spared, even if they had lost their belongings. Being in a poor rural area where public electricity is irregular at best, people do not have the same sense of loss as those who live in affluent societies. Internet connections were fairly regular during the storm, but poor to non-existent on Sunday and Monday.

Our last day of clinic was September 22. There was barely time to get all the paperwork for the clinic, meetings with workers and final jobs done before leaving on Tuesday morning, September 26. One challenge was that the computer and printer were not in agreement, which was a problem for all the scanning that needed to be done. I thanked and blessed God that there was final brief communication between these two pieces of equipment at 1:30 on Tuesday morning, just enough to finish the work and get the computer backed up. There were some odd lights on the screen when I turned the printer off that made me think briefly of Frankenstein (funny thoughts happen when one is tired), so I think that equipment will have to be replaced.

We made it down the mountain without problems. It was sad to see how much the road had been damaged by the heavy rainfalls, but it was still possible to get through. We did see the fallen tree at the crossroads, already being cut up to be burned. The rest of the trip to the airport went well, as did the trip to the US.

Fort Pierce, Florida, received 15-20 inches of rain from Hurricane Irma. Two weeks later, there was not much sign of all the problems except occasional brush by the road. I picked up the rental car that had been reserved, and was advised that the key was a bit sticky. There was some concern when I could not turn the car off at the first try when I stopped for fuel in Georgia around 11 pm, but then the key turned and I wondered if the problem was that I was tired. I arrived in Greenville, South Carolina, around 6:30 am. Later on, I unloaded the car and then got ready to re-fuel it before turning it in—and the key would not go into the ignition. How about the door? No, not there either. I called for help, but was not surprised when the man was able to insert the key right away and start the car. Without much delay, I put gas in the car and took it to the airport and turned it in. All the time, I was praising God for His protection, and His kindness in letting this happen at my destination rather than someplace on I-95 during the night.

Now, it's time to recover before going back to work. Thanks for praying! Dr. Anne