

the **CARIBBEAN**  
*Connection*



THE WEST INDIES MISSION COUPLES' NEWSLETTER

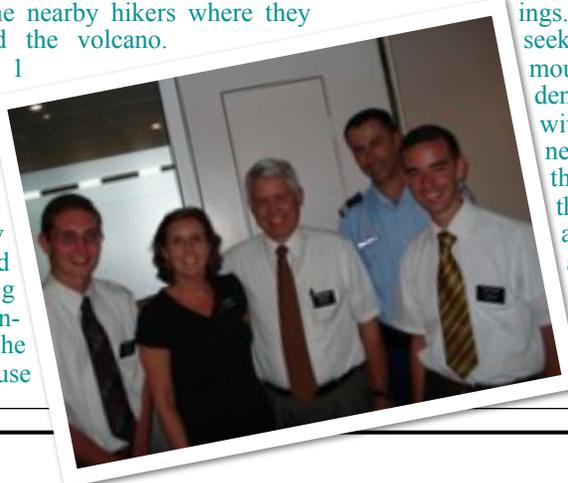
**Good News of the Month--and of the Year:  
Martinique Elders Found Safe!**

**THE STORY:** On Sunday night, December 2, 2007 Elder Thomas Swain and Elder Tyson Gray decided to take a preparation day hike to the top of Mont Pelee. Their zone leader was unable to go because of a sore back and did caution them that transportation back might pose a problem. He hung up the phone not knowing for sure that the two elders would try to hike Mont Pelee.

Elder Swain and Elder Gray left their apartment in Trinitie, Martinique about 6:30 a.m. on Monday, December 3<sup>rd</sup>, and, after taking multiple public taxis and getting a lift from tourists, reached a snack shop at the base of Mont Pelee by 11:30 a.m.. The woman behind the counter remembered selling the elders a Bounty Bar and a bottle of water, but initially told the police she thought she saw them much later in the day.

When the elders made it to the top of Mont Pelee, they were disappointed because they did not see a crater so they asked some nearby hikers where they could find the volcano.

At about 1 p.m. and after hiking for a while, they started paying close attention to the time because



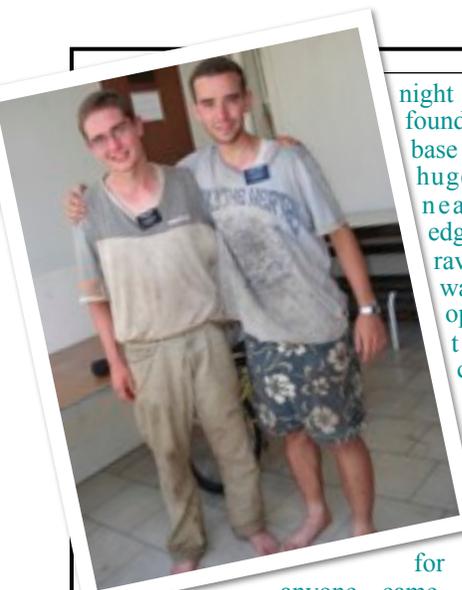
they knew they had to be home to begin proselyting at 6:00 p.m. As they looked down the side of the volcano, they noted a good size town on the seashore and identified it as the village of Precheur. They felt that if they got to this town they could catch local transportation and make it back to their apartment across the island in time.

Elder Swain was particularly enthusiastic about the plan because the slope of the mountain reminded him of the rolling hills of England. He thought they would have no problem leaving the trail and heading straight down the mountainside to Precheur.

At first the descent seemed pleasant but walking became more difficult as they descended. After walking for an hour, they ran into a sheer drop that was impassable and had to turn back. They backtracked a little while and tried to make it down another way, only to reach another cliff. At this point they realized that help was needed so they knelt in prayer and gave one another blessings. They continued to seek a way down the mountain hiking through dense areas of vegetation with ferns up to their necks. They couldn't see their feet and found themselves stumbling and falling over cracks and boulders. This process continued until near dark when they realized they had to stop for the

**THE MIRACLES:**

- The missing elders were able to find food and water. A funny side note to this is that a very professional and serious reporter interviewed the elders after their rescue and burst into giggles when she heard about the refrigerator full of rum and coke on the side of the mountain.
- There was almost no rain during the three days but it rained hard every day after the missionaries were rescued.
- Elder Gray just happened to be in the right place at the right time to see the men who came to repair the water pipe.
- President Robison asked the missionaries who were searching to pray every few minutes and let the spirit choose their direction. At the time of the rescue, in a 200 square foot island, the two cars full of missionaries were within a minutes of the exact place the elders were found. They were able to be at the base of the mountain waiting to hug their brothers as they were brought down.
- A group of young Special Forces trainees from France arrived three days before the elders were lost. They were training for mountain rescue so they were able to assist in the search and gain valuable experience.
- The missionaries from Guadeloupe were unable to get reservations to take the van on the ferry but at the last minute a spot opened up for them both coming and going.
- A young man, hiking in the same area five years before, disappeared and was never found.



night so they found at the base of a huge tree near the edge of a ravine. It was in the open so they could signal with their camera flash

for help if anyone came to find them during the night.

The next day, Tuesday, the elders prayed for guidance and decided to hike towards a road they had identified on their map. Along the way they came upon a clearing that had evidence of people. It had discarded rum bottles and a large metal pot filled with brownish water. By this point they were very thirsty because they been unable to find water so Elder Swain tried filtering the water with part of his clothes and then with part of their map. They drank and began to look around for fruit. They were able to find a few orange trees and, to their surprise, laying against the mountain was an old discarded refrigerator that contained empty bottles, silverware, a half-filled bottle of flat coca cola, a bottle of rum and a jar of fruit soaking in rum. They drank some of the coke and used a bit of rum to clean their scrapes. They heard helicopters in the distance so they trampled down some ferns in the clearing to become more visible. Keeping track of their path, so they could return, the elders hiked further up the mountain in hopes of finding a way to some houses they had seen in the distance the night before. Along the way, they found an irrigation pipe that they disconnected and used to replenish their water supply. They considered leaving it disconnected but decided they didn't want to cause problems for anyone's water supply. They were not making progress towards the houses so they prayed to know what to do and decided to return to the clearing. Using their scout skills they created a soft place to sleep and enhanced their signal areas in the clearing by adding bits of metal and plastic bags they had found in the refrigerator. They slept comfortably their second night on the mountain on a bed of ferns under the stars.

The following day, Wednesday, was spent on additional activities to attract attention of an overhead helicopter. They tried unsuccessfully to make a fire using Elder Gray's glasses, a stick and bow creation, their camera batteries and a fork to generate sparks, and even some of the rum. They were unsuccessful. They organized a routine where one elder always stayed in the clearing to signal if a helicopter came and the other forayed into the forest to search, always staying in voice contact. During one of those searches Elder Gray found another irrigation pipe and this time he disconnected it permanently, hoping someone would notice and come up the mountain to repair the pipe. They made a shelter for the night out of corrugated metal sheets and kept their spirits up by singing "Count Your Many Blessings," "Put Your Shoulder to the Wheel," and "Poor Wayfaring Man of Grief" to buoy up their spirits.

Thursday morning the elders woke up cold and hungry but at exactly 7:00 AM (Elder Swain checked his watch) they saw a helicopter in the distance. It was not flying towards them but they prayed and prayed for it to turn. It did and began to fly directly at them. They ran into the clearing, took off their shirts, and waved them in the air only to see the helicopter pass right over them and then fly away. Their disappointment was intense. After a while Elder Gray went off to find more metal to create signals. Elder Swain stayed in the clearing and said a prayer. After his prayer he looked up and saw a huge rainbow in the sky. He knew at that moment that they would be found. Elder Gray returned for a few moments with some leaves he thought might be useful for fire and then went back into the forest. At about 8:30 AM he spotted two men who had come up from a farm below. They had just finished repairing the irrigation line and were ready to leave. He called to them and they recognized Elder Gray as one of the missing missionaries they had seen on the front page of their newspaper that morning. Elder Swain heard the shouting and at first thought his friend needed help. When he realized they had been found, he ran to the farmer, who was holding a cutlass and a shotgun, and gave him a big hug. The men immediately called the police on a cell phone, who called Captain Lehaire, who just happened to be meeting with President and Sister Robison. Using a cutlass, the farmers cut through the brush and followed an overgrown path down the mountain to safety and to their wel-

coming party of elders, members and mission president couple who had been fasting, praying, and searching for them.

This search party consisted of two elders serving in French Guiana, Elders Jest and Garotta. These elders had been trainers to the two missing missionaries and had served in Martinique and know it well. They called the president when they knew their friends were missing and asked to fly to Martinique at their own expense to search. President Robison made arrangements for the mission to fly them out. In addition, a group of missionaries came over from Guadeloupe: Elders Hooson, Bezzant, Hansen, and Dombia, brought the van over on a ferry. Members also were critical participants in the search. President Gamiette, President Amousouga, President Mondong and Brother Bonbon flew from Guadeloupe to join in the search with the members of the Fort de France and Trinitie branches. President and Sister Robison flew in as early as they could on Tuesday to coordinate and direct the search efforts. They had frequent meetings with the members and briefings by the police and in turn briefed the Area Presidency every two hours.

*President and Sister Robison*

#### **THE LESSONS:**

- Perhaps some future elder's life will be saved because of the high profile nature of this experience. Elders will stay on paths. Elders will never go on excursions without four elders. Elders will always have cell phones on their outings.
- The hurricane did not get the attention of the people of Martinique. Neither did the earthquake. But the high profile nature of this experience will lead families to discover the gospel.
- Member and missionary testimonies were strengthened. Teamwork prevailed and brought the group together as a family.
- It is very important that young men have ample scouting training prior to coming on a mission. These elders were well prepared for their misadventure.
- The power of prayer and fasting is very real.
- It takes a united effort between missionaries, members, and our Heavenly Father to save people both physically and spiritually.

Farewell, President and Sister Dunn

Their mission ended December 5, when they departed for their Idaho home. They are sorely missed. We wish them well as they go back to life among family, friends, and loved ones.



Welcome to our new couples:

- ELDER RONALD & SISTER LINDA LARSEN arrive in Guyana mid-December to serve in Canje. Ronald and Earl are brothers.
- ELDER MAX & SISTER SAPANIA MERTOPWIRO live at home in Suriname where they will be serving.

The next edition of The Caribbean Connection will feature these couples with pictures and more information about each of them.

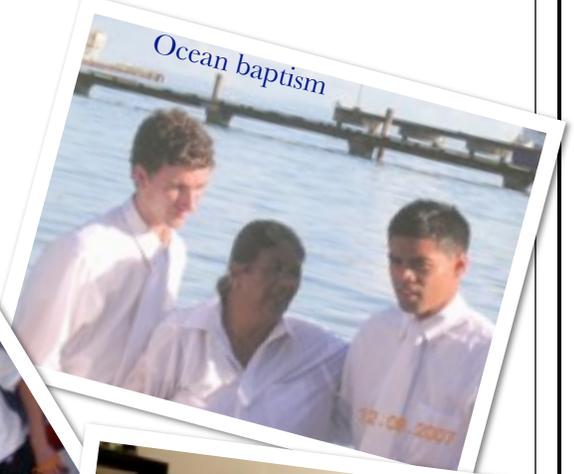


We currently have 22 couples serving in the West Indies Mission:

Trinidad 7	Guyana 6	Guadeloupe 1
Suriname 2	St. Lucia 2	Martinique 1



Replacing President Dunn as First Counselor in the Mission Presidency is President Lockhart, shown here doing what he does, among many other things, counting money.



Brother Richard Romney, Managing Editor of The New Era magazine, visited several countries in the Caribbean including Trinidad, Guyana, Suriname, and Guadeloupe. Here we see him overlooking Port-of-Spain. Watch for his articles in The New Era in late 2008.



## He Will Direct Thy Paths

by Dustin Johnson

In my life as an active member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, there is at least one thing I have learned with certainty: the Lord knows each one of us and His hand is intricately involved in our lives. This principle has been made very clear through my knowledge of, and experience with, an extraordinary senior couple, Elder Rex and Sister Colette Wood from my home town of Calgary, Alberta, Canada.

The story begins in 2001 when I was serving as a full-time missionary in the Salt Lake City South Mission. At that time, the Indonesia Jakarta Mission was being opened to foreign missionaries for the first time in about 20 years. Eight missionaries (including myself) who were already serving in six different missions in the United States were reassigned to serve in Indonesia. We all returned to the Missionary Training Center (MTC) in Provo to learn Indonesian before heading to the island. Elder Rex and Sister Wood, who had previously completed a full time mission in Australia, were also then called to serve in Indonesia, being one of the first proselyting couples to learn of their call, I took great comfort in the prospect of serving in Indonesia with fellow



The Johnsons and baby, Grenada Branch members, with the Woods.

Our paths almost crossed at the MTC. Tragically, in first day at the MTC, Elder Wood suffered a major heart attack. After being rushed to a nearby hospital, it was determined that he needed emergency heart surgery in order to survive. During Elder Wood's miraculous recovery he and Sister Wood were not released as missionaries. President Hinckley specifically asked Sister Wood to wear her Indonesian missionary name tag at the hospital. She talks gratefully about the incredible missionary experiences this small act of obedience provided during that difficult time. After Elder Wood made a full recovery, the Woods were reassigned to complete their second full time mission in New Zealand.

Unfortunately, I was not blessed to serve with Elder and Sister Wood during my full time mission, but the Lord has a way of ensuring we get the experiences we need and that we meet the people who are meant to shape our lives.

Early in 2007 my wife, Sara, and I made the decision to attend medical school at St. George's University on the island of Grenada, West Indies. Sara and I quickly discovered, both being from Calgary, that the same Elder and Sister Wood had recently embarked on their third full time mission, this time to the West Indies Mission, and were assigned to the island of Grenada.

Coincidence? I think not. Even though we were not able to serve together in Indonesia the Lord knew I needed the experience firsthand of building the kingdom with Elder and Sister Wood. It is incredible to me to see how the Lord orchestrated our lives enabling my young family to spend two years on Grenada at the exact same time as the Woods. Since being here I have seen the great influence for good one couple can have on a small branch of the Church. All of the members here greatly appreciate their love and selfless service.

*Proverbs 3:5-6 Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.*