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Dr. Frank Lattarulo Armonk

By Martin Wilbur

Less than three months ago, millions watched on television the death and destruction caused by the devastating earthquake in Haiti.

Since that mid-January catastrophe, Dr. Frank Lattarulo was one of the thousands of physicians and other health-care professionals who temporarily left their practices and their families and interrupted their lives to take off to help the people of the ravaged nation.

The scene that he saw was one that he'll never forget. The streets of Port-Au-Prince were blocked with debris, buildings toppled and thousands upon thousands of homeless.

"If you didn't cry in Haiti, you have no soul," said Lattarulo.

A 14-year Armonk resident, Lattarulo is a wound care specialist at Phelps Memorial Hospital's Wound Healing Institute. He also has a private practice in Elmsford. During his career he has seen plenty of gory sites, especially when he worked at St. Barnabus Hospital in the Bronx, but little prepared him for the conditions that he would experience and have to work under.

For a week in early March, Lattarulo tended to an estimated 250 to 300 patients, mostly children. After treating the injured, he would head over to the operating room in the makeshift hospitals to help any patients who needed amputations or stump revisions because of infections.

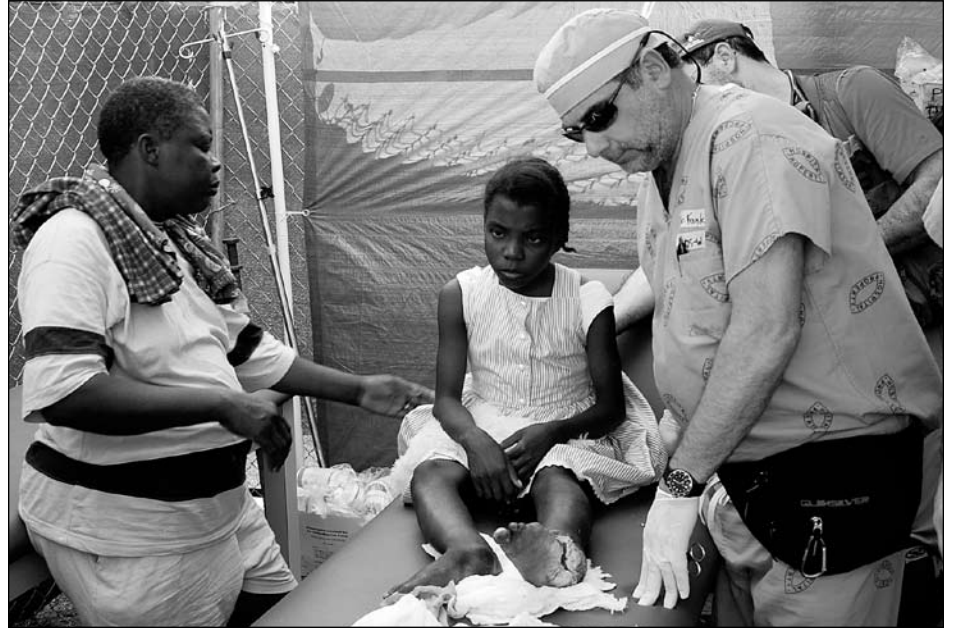
The hospital tents, which could treat hundreds of patients in a day, had wooden slabs that served as floors, surrounded by mud, not to mention the heat and the staggering number of people in need of medical care, all of which made it the most difficult situation to work under.

But Lattarulo also saw something that was truly uplifting. Despite the thousands of orphans and families that have been devastated and probably decades of rebuilding ahead for one of the poorest nations in the hemisphere, he saw the gratitude of the young patients he was treating.

"The real heroes here are the nurses who worked 12-hour shifts and the children of Haiti," he said. "They had smiles on their faces and were so grateful for the care and help we were able to provide. There are in excess of 50,000 orphans there. I wish I could have brought some of the kids back home with me."

During the winter, Lattarulo, 52, told his wife, Lori, that he felt he needed to volunteer in Haiti. He credited her for supporting his decision, even though he would be leaving the family for a week. The couple has two teenage boys at home who attend H. C. Crittenden Middle School and Byram Hills High School.

Through his affiliation with the Wounded Healing Society, Lattarulo traveled to Haiti with Phelps colleague Dr. Owen O'Neil through Project Medishare for Haiti, Inc.



DR. OWEN O'NEIL PHOTO

Dr. Frank Lattarulo assists a wounded Haitian child at the Medishare hospital in Haiti.

The 16-year-old organization was created by a University of Miami doctor whose mission is to bring quality health care to the impoverished nation.

If this had occurred about 10 years ago Lattarulo never would have been involved. He grew up in White Plains and graduated from Archbishop Stepinac High School before heading off to Manhattan College. Lattarulo then followed in his father's footsteps to become a podiatrist by enrolling and completing his studies at the New York College of Podiatric Medicine in 1983.

Although it seems like a completely different field to the layman, Lattarulo made the switch to wound care and became certified in that area of medicine a decade ago. He said it was a logical progression for him because he had plenty of experience in his podiatric practice with diabetic patients who needed wounds treated in their lower extremities.

"I have been treating diabetics for a long time and it was just a natural for me to try

this," said Lattarulo who has been active with the Armonk Baseball League.

Lattarulo's trip home from Haiti was more eventful than he would have preferred. Scheduled to return on March 13, he couldn't fly into New York until Sunday, March 14. Once he did arrive back in Armonk, he discovered his house was without power. Roughly half the town lost electricity after that weekend's rainstorm.

But the hiccup didn't bother him. It just made him appreciate his home more, not to mention the top-flight medical facilities and health care in the United States that he had grown accustomed.

After nearly a month since his return, the experience changed Lattarulo. His thoughts are with the people of Haiti, most of whom had no homes to return to.

"The Haitian people will survive this, but it will be a lifetime before they rebuild," he said. "Their lives will forever be changed. They are the toughest and most resilient people I have met in my life."



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