

The Hands that Helped Haiti

Dr. Ian and the Haitian children whose hearts he won

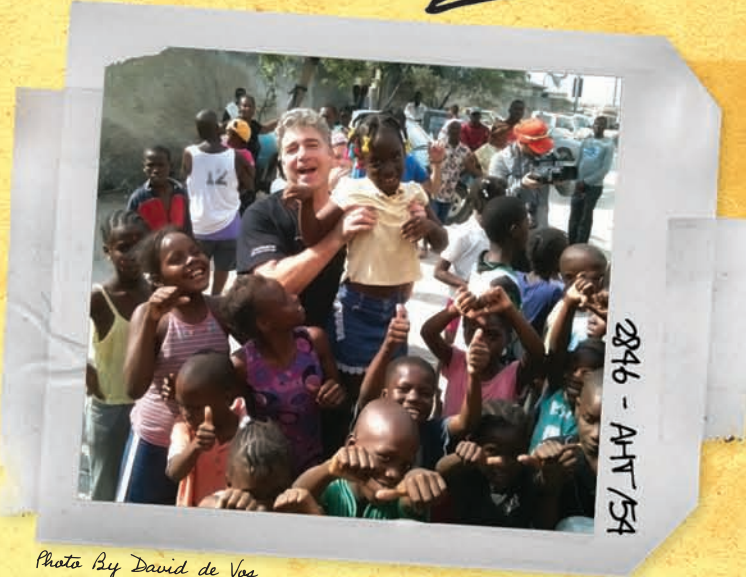


Photo by David de Vos

Dr. Ian Armstrong Joins Forces with Transformational Development Agency (TDA)

ON TUESDAY, JANUARY 12, 2010, a 7.0 magnitude earthquake struck off the Haitian coast and decimated the Caribbean island of Haiti. Witnesses who survived the earthquake say that they held on while being bounced across walls. The sky turned gray almost immediately as plumes of dust rose from the collapsed buildings. The death toll: 212,000 people - but that figure may well be higher. It's hard to imagine the scale of destruction unless you see it. Its effects were shattering beyond imagination.

ON SATURDAY, JANUARY 23RD, 2010, our Medical Editor and Board Member, Dr. Ian Armstrong - a highly-respected Spinal Neurosurgeon and Trauma Neurosurgeon - was procuring supplies from hospitals for a friend who was going across to help in Haiti.

The TDA team at LAX with Rikki Alakija center



Photo by Cathy Arkle

Photography by Scott Mortensen

THE ALAKIJAS' LEADERSHIP AND TRANSFORMATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AGENCY (TDA)

Coincidentally, we were interviewing Dr. Ayoade Alakija for this upcoming issue when Dr. Ian spoke with her. The Alakijas' Transformational Development Agency (TDA) were working with Calvary Community Church in Westlake Village - who had jumped in to help with resounding compassion and

Dr. Armstrong tends to an injured Haitian baby



Haitian orphan



DR. IAN ARMSTRONG'S EXPERIENCE OF THE POST-EARTHQUAKE DEVASTATION

THESE WERE DR. IAN'S FIRST IMPRESSIONS WHEN HE LANDED IN PORT-AU-PRINCE:

"I expected there to be chaos and I expected the shanty towns to be leveled. There were military planes flying in and out and ambulances and medical transport trucks were heavily prevalent. But nobody could have prepared me for the deeper impact: The heat and humidity were laden with the smell of death. It was

generosity. Medical professionals were rallied and much-needed supplies for the Haitians were collected - in time for TDA's departure from LAX in two chartered airplanes. TDA's COO, Rikki Alakija, led the group of humanitarians.

With Haiti heavily on his heart, Dr. Ian made the immediate decision to board a plane and join TDA as fast as possible. He says, "Trauma is my background. I've worked in Houston's busiest E.R. Center and that experience most certainly equipped me to handle the Haitian emergency. There was no question about it; I had to go." Dr. Ian goes on to explain: "Not only did I really want to help, but I also wanted to be an example for my children. It's one thing to be good people. It's quite another to demonstrate it through actions." When the magazine team learned that Dr. Ian had left that day for Haiti, the response was, "Of course Dr. Ian would go. He's the physician with the huge heart."

Dr. Ian praying before heading out to help





Dr. Dave Perlmutter and Dr. Ian: humanitarian brothers

El Specialist Dr. Golie Pfahler and Dr. Ian tend to a man with a compound femur fracture

that pungent smell that washed into the streets. There were screams, smiles, tears, warmth and love. I can honestly say that this was the most moving week of my life. The devastation was so complete and the medical injuries so vast that it was overwhelming. I traveled to northern Yugoslavia during the war in the early '90s; to eastern Europe just after the Berlin wall came down, and a number of third world countries. But none of those experiences could have prepared me for Haiti. The devastation was complete. There was nothing left.

THERE WERE TWO WORK STATIONS WHEREIN WE ACCOMPLISHED OUR TASKS:

1) Right at the airport there was the University of Miami MediShare Hospital, which was a Neuro Intensive Care Unit. It was there that we developed a Neuro Care unit for patients with broken necks, backs and head injuries. That's where the critical injuries were being taken care of. But the beds were so full with the con-

stant flow of people, bodies and injuries that we needed to move patients out of there as rapidly as possible.

2) We established a 'hospital' warehouse at the nearby 'New Life Orphanage'. It had a damaged roof and no running water but in those circumstances you make the most of what you have. We converted the warehouse into a functional medical unit where extended bed care could be administered. If you don't give people a clean place wherein to heal, all sorts of post-operative infections and complications can set in. It's imperative that you keep their bandages clean and stave off septicemia.

On some days we would drive out for three or four hours in trucks to find these make-shift 'camps' that people had erected to escape the city and the flattened buildings. These people were living off the land and we were able to bring a couple of seriously injured patients to the hospital.

Our goal is to go back to Haiti and to further equip the warehouse at the orphanage so that it can become a

blueprint model for more than one site. The devastation is not going to go away in a few weeks. These people need rehabilitation. There are amputees, quadriplegics and paraplegics whom we cannot abandon now. They need long-term medical care and supplies. Their rehabilitation will take years. That's why it's critical that we set up a model for functional medical units that can administer extended care to the victims of this earthquake tragedy.

On that subject, I cannot praise highly enough TDA's leader, Rikki Alakija. I call him my 'Commander in Chief', because that's exactly the respect this man earned from me. His outstanding leadership as a true CEO gave us - the medical professionals - the structure that we needed to save lives. Rikki mobilized trucks, planes and vital resources. He raised the effectiveness of our group to a sky-high level. Many well-intentioned people who were in Haiti to help didn't have the advantages of a strategic thinker like Rikki to help lead them.

What moved me so much about this first post-earthquake trip to Haiti was the strength and resilience of the Haitian people. I saw abundant warmth and love and smiles on the faces of these devastated people - even though they had lost loved ones and their bodies were in casts.

And though I don't want to do the clichéd waving of the red and blue, I have to comment on how proud I was of being an American. I would say that the vast majority of the aid pouring in to Haiti was American.

Everywhere you looked there were US planes, choppers, ships, uniformed American soldiers.....the harbors were full of American vessels. At every check point there were Americans giving their hearts and their resources to Haitian people. They were the best ambassadors that our country could wish for."

It goes without saying that we at Westlake Malibu Lifestyle are exceptionally proud to be associated with Dr. Ian Armstrong. We're also so fortunate to have met the Alakijas - who do such life-changing work with their Transformation Development Agency (TDA). We're also very proud to call ourselves Americans and to be a part of this human family - for whom there are no borders.

For ongoing coverage of the life-saving work that is being done in Haiti, or if you wish to help in any way, go to www.tdaafrica.com



Dr. Ian Armstrong is the Founder and Medical Director of Southern California Spine Institute in Westlake Village, Los Angeles and Bakersfield. He was the Medical Director of Neurosurgical Trauma at Century City Hospital for over 10 years. As well as being Director of Neurosurgical Trauma at Midway Hospital in Los Angeles, he was also a Staff Trauma Neurosurgeon at Cedars-Sinai Hospital - where he was involved with teaching the Surgical Residents. He has written on the topic of head and neck injury as well as lectured coaches, athletes and parents on the topic of sports-related head injuries. Additionally, he's been an on-site Neurosurgical Trauma Specialist for multiple professional and amateur athletic organizations.

The TDA team heads out in truck to find the injured

