

# THE EXPONENT



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Campus Editor

Sue Alexander, a local Red Cross volunteer nurse and parishioner of St. Thomas Aquinas, was about to sit down and read a book on the second floor of a home in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, when the ground began shaking.

Alexander had flown into Port-au-Prince just a few hours before the magnitude 7.0 earthquake ravaged the country's capital.

"I was talking to some little Haitian girls. I think I threw myself on the floor; I can't really remember, but (the girls) had enough sense to run out of the house," she said. "Someone called my name and helped me down the stairs probably less than a minute later."

When the quake struck, she said the ground was shaking so much she couldn't stand up.

"I dropped to the floor, and I looked up and saw a big boulder coming ... I wasn't able to walk; I was so unsteady," she said.

Her friend helped her to the street, where they stayed for several consecutive days.

"I never left the street until I went to the U.S. Embassy. We went up to higher ground away from any buildings that were taller than we were," Alexander said.

When she was able to get to higher ground she said she could see out over Port-au-Prince.

"I could see the whole city was like a collapsed mushroom."

Alexander said she and numerous Haitians found ways to find shelter during the long, hot days and places to sleep at night.

"At night, we slept in a small area with the old junk cars. We used the cars to put our suitcases in and we had cardboard boxes we tore up to sleep on," she said. "During the day, we tried to get under some banana trees because the sun's hot during the day, and I knew that I hadn't been in the sun for a while so I needed to take care of myself and not get dehydrated."

Sue said she had things like dressing for wounds, peanut butter and antibiotics with her.

"They found some bread; I don't know if it was stale or how old it was - it didn't matter, and I always go to Haiti with lots of peanut butter; it's a staple and they love it," she said. "(So when I left,) I left my peanut butter and all my clothes and my suitcase; my only regret is that I left my camera."

She said she ultimately left because she ran out of supplies and felt she was no longer helpful.

"The only reason I left was I had no supplies; I was taking up space and drinking their water and eating their food and I knew that I needed to come home," she said.

"Being a solo person there, you really need to be connected with an organization, (but) I was looking for a new mission, so I was really on my own."

She said after getting to the embassy she began the long process of trying to get out of the country. All of those who were leaving were required to have an American passport.

"I left at 7 a.m. Friday morning and got through the gate at noon," Alexander said. "We had to go through a lot of paperwork to get out ... one was a promissory note to pay the government back for me being flown from Port-au-Prince to Miami. If I don't pay the bill I lose my passport; everyone that got out -- that was the understanding, that you were paying your own way."

She wasn't able to contact her family before she got back into the United States, so no one knew she was coming.

"We arrived in Homestead, Fla., at one in the morning on Saturday morning," Sue said. "I got to Miami at 4 o'clock in the morning and I hadn't had any personal hygiene since when I left so I just decided I would go get a motel and get a shower and freshen up and we got some food and I slept for about two hours and then went to the airport."

"I really felt a sigh of relief when I got to Homestead (Fla.) where I could speak English and be understood."

Holly Alexander, her daughter and Purdue parking facilities manager, said her family tried to contact several government agencies and other organizations to find out if her mother had been accounted for.

"We tried the number that was on T.V. for the state department -- pretty much all of us were trying to call that number. We also contacted the Red Cross since she's a Red Cross volunteer," she said.

They tried several other Haitian Web sites and even a CNN page that allowed those searching for missing loved ones to upload pictures of the lost.

Holly said she felt her mother was probably all right because of her training as a nurse and the supplies that she usually carries with her.

"I knew she was in the Port-au-Prince area because she was going to meet with two of her friends later that night," she said. "I felt pretty confident that she was OK because she's better equipped than most of the people in that country."

Holly said while some of her relatives might not be fond of her mother returning to Haiti, she thinks that she will probably return sometime.

"I wouldn't try to talk her out of it because I know she loves to do it," Holly said.

Alexander has vowed to help those in America know the heartbreak of what is going on in Haiti and will begin fundraising for a family she knows whose home was destroyed, as well as the relief efforts in general.

"There's plenty to do -- here and there," Alexander said. "... They didn't have anything to begin with, now how can you have less? I don't know how to do the math on that."