

Nipawin couple returns home from Haiti

BY JEANETTE STEWART, SASKATCHEWAN NEWS NETWORK; CANWEST NEWS SERVICE JANUARY 19, 2010



Melvin and Melanie Brundage greet their six-year-old son Ritchy at the Saskatoon International Airport Sunday, after arriving home safely from Haiti. The couple from Nipawin were in Haiti to meet a second son they are in the process of adopting when the earthquake occurred.

Photograph by: Gord Walder, StarPhoenix

It was an emotional homecoming Sunday for a Saskatchewan couple in Haiti during last week's devastating earthquake.

Though Melvin and Melanie Brundage arrived safe in Saskatoon Sunday morning, they were forced to leave one adopted son behind in Haiti in order to return home to another.

"We didn't know if we'd ever come back," said Melvin. They flew out of Haiti Saturday in a military cargo plane along with some 200 other Canadians.

While the couple is spared the aftermath of the largest earthquake to hit Haiti in 200 years, the story doesn't end with their arrival.

The family is now waiting to find out whether 21/2-year-old Mike will be granted a humanitarian visa to come to Canada. The Brundages adopted six-year-old Ritchy from Haiti three years ago and have been waiting to bring their second son home for more than two years.

Families must visit Haiti twice for the adoption, once to sign papers in front of a judge -- which is why the Brundages were in Haiti last week -- and a second time to bring the child home when all of the Haitian paperwork is complete.

"We decided it was best to come back to Canada and see what we could do from this end," said a tearful Melvin. "It was a very hard decision to make."

Ritchy waved excitedly at his parents as they descended the escalator into the arrival area of the

Saskatoon airport Sunday. As soon as they were through the gate he was in their arms, surrounded by a protective circle of family and friends there to greet the Nipawin couple.

They arrived in Haiti last Tuesday and went to the God's Littlest Angels Orphanage outside Port-au-Prince to sign adoption papers. They were on a balcony with Mike and the twin sons of friends Laurier and Lisa Poirier of Regina when the earthquake began.

They heard what sounded like a big truck going by. The noise got more intense and everything began to shake. They all fell to the floor.

"It was terrifying," said Melvin.

Eventually the shaking stopped and they ran outside and stayed outside the compound. They slept outside for a few nights because of the aftershocks but the building remained intact.

"For us it seemed horrible at the time but it's really nothing," said Melanie. "We have everything. We didn't lose our home, we didn't lose our family members, so (our) experience was really nothing compared to most people."

The couple describe conditions in the country as desperate.

"People are going through the rubble, trying to find anything they can salvage," said Melvin. He described piles of concrete everywhere, with people congregating in parks and open areas "just trying to live."

"So many people had nothing to begin with. Now everything is lost," said Melanie.

As supplies run out, things will get much worse. Though there have been widespread reports of violence and looting, the Brundages said initially they saw people banding together for survival.

Through tears they appealed to the public to send help to the orphanage, which was already operating at double capacity and is quickly running out of supplies. Food rations are cut in half, and they only have enough water to last three more days.

They, along with the Poiriers, hope they will be able to lobby the Canadian government to bring their children to Canada, freeing up space for children orphaned in the disaster.

"If we can bring them home fast it will make room for other children who need help immediately," said Lisa Poirier, who was at the airport Sunday to greet the Brundages.

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