

THE ASPEN TIMES

Susie Krabacher - Angel of mercy in Haiti

By Scott Condon
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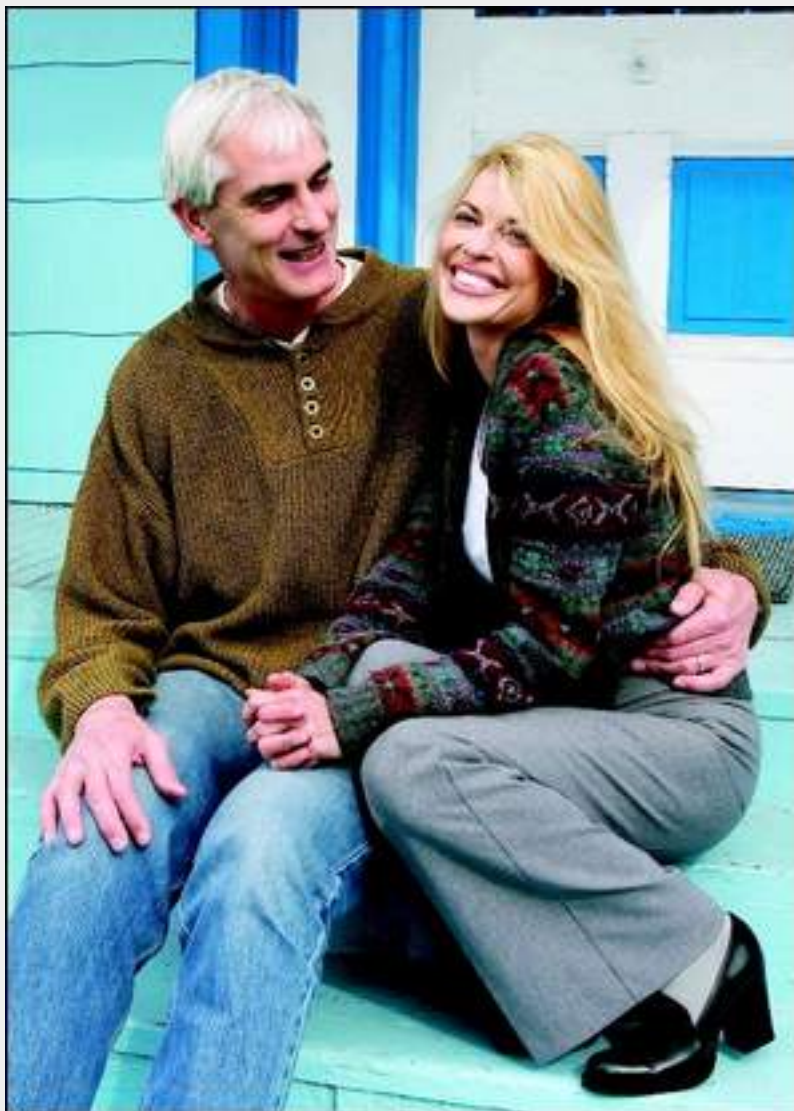
In her efforts to care for underprivileged children in the poorest country in the Western Hemisphere, Susie Krabacher experienced the kind of year that would make most people quit.

Her Mercy and Sharing Foundation, which provides food, shelter and medical care to orphans in Haiti, lost tens of thousands of dollars in medical supplies and food to looters when violence broke out between foes and supporters of then-President Jean-Bertrand Aristide in February. The foundation, run by Susie and her husband, Aspen attorney Joe Krabacher, struggled to provide food for the children at its six schools and three orphanages in the Haitian slums.

Even though her life was at risk, Krabacher didn't think twice about visiting the country when "her kids" and staff were in their greatest hours of need. Her life, as well as those of some of her helpers, were threatened when they passed through a checkpoint manned by thugs loyal to Aristide.

Krabacher said she personally negotiated with gang members to ensure the safety of her kids in the foundation's schools and orphanages.

Just when conditions stabilized somewhat last summer, due to the presence of United Nations peacekeepers, natural calamity struck. Flooding killed thousands of people in some parts of the country and left many more children orphaned and homeless.



Susie Krabacher and her husband, Joe, run the Mercy and Sharing Foundation. Aspen Times photo.

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Although she wasn't constantly in the local news, we felt she should be acknowledged as a top newsmaker for 2004 for her perseverance in helping people in need. Though she lives in the sheltered confines of Aspen, Krabacher has accepted incredible challenges to create a better life for thousands of children in Haiti.

We also felt Krabacher is a great example of taking charitable work to heart. She doesn't throw money at the problem. She gives comfort to terminally ill babies, often personally, and provides hope to children who were discarded.

Krabacher said her foundation has taken over the care of 300 children who were orphaned in a flood-ravaged area near St. Mark, the third-largest city in the country. Many of those children despaired as they realized that no adult family members were coming to claim them, she said.

Despite the struggles, 2004 is closing on a high note for the foundation. A new clinic that will promote healthy prenatal and infant care should have equipment installed by early January to serve one of the poorest areas of Port-au-Prince, the Haitian capital.

Krabacher also said her fund-raising pitches, along with national, regional and local publicity, are paying dividends. "We're getting a lot of help from Aspen for the first time ever," she said.

But Krabacher's real inspiration comes when she travels to Haiti, about once every six weeks. She told a story of a 3-year-old boy who was so ill and physically underdeveloped when he was brought to an orphanage that he was thought to be retarded. That boy, now 6, is a "holy terror," she said. He is a bright, energetic child who won't leave her side when she visits his country.

"That sort of thing makes me want to go on forever," Krabacher said of her work.

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[BACK](#) 