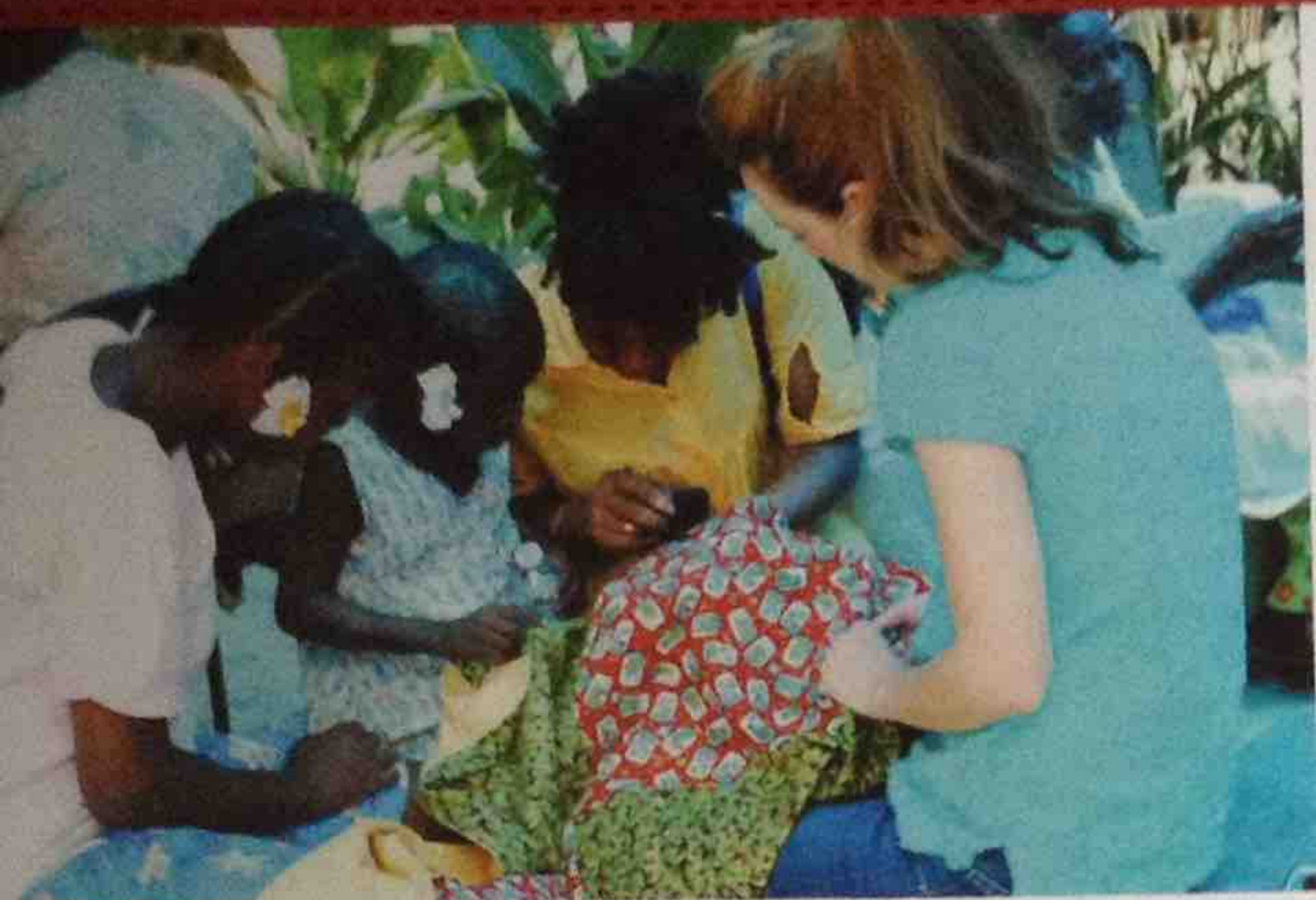


PLAY DATE for HAITI

by Susan Semeczko
photography by Bev Anderson



Children at the hospital with their new quilts

On a beautiful crisp, clear day in March, members of the Oakville, Ontario, Quilters' Guild gathered together at The Oakville Museum for a workshop to make quilts for the children of Grace Children's Hospital in Haiti. The hospital is supported by a local family practitioner, Dr. John Yates, who has been working in Haiti for decades.

"I am a patient of Dr. Yates and I have taken my inspiration and guidance from him about what we could do to improve the lives of these poor, vulnerable people. He was delighted to have such a practical gift offered to him," says Bev Andersen, Workshop Coordinator.

The Grace Children's Hospital in Port-Au-Prince treats children who suffer from tuberculosis and HIV, both terrible

diseases, even in ideal conditions. Seventy percent of the hospital was destroyed by the earthquake in January and the children have been receiving treatment in tents ever since.

"A lot of the children of Haiti have nothing and we wanted to give as many children as possible the gift of a hug from Oakville, because that's what a quilt is really, something that lets you know someone cares," says Co-Workshop Coordinator, Charleen Doan. "This is our way of making a small difference to the lives of these children."

Everyone involved donated their time and supplies, and the Oakville Museum generously donated the rooms for the guild members to sew in. The members made very simple quilts, so that everyone, including new quilters, could participate.

The Guild regularly supports local charities but this was even more urgent. "Quilters are very kind and generous people and their response to this tragedy has been overwhelming. Our goal for



Dr. Yates presenting at the Guild meeting

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this workshop was to make 70 quilts to give to the hospital. We have made close to 175. To say that I am delighted is a real understatement," says Susan Semeczko, President of the Oakville Quilters' Guild. "I am so proud of our members for embracing such a worthy cause."

The Oakville Quilters' Guild is a small Guild of about 100 members, and three quarters of them participated in the event. It even became a family affair for one of the members, Margaret Langlois, who encouraged her 10 and 13 year-old granddaughters to get involved. The two young girls made five quilts in a day, using their grandmother's fabric. This next generation of quilters was so proud to be able to help children who are less fortunate than themselves. Margaret Burnett, a new member of the Guild, made 17 quilts, and was apologetic that she didn't have time to make more. Guild members who didn't attend the workshop brought completed quilts to the Guild meetings. The Guild also donated the proceeds from its monthly 50/50 draw to the hospital.

The Oakville Guild quilts are light enough for children to use in the tropical summer, as they have been made without batting, but will provide some protection from the elements.

"The quilters all chose very bright and colourful cotton fabrics so the children can't help but be cheered when they see them," Bev believes. "Unlike most of us in Canada, these children are used to very strong sunlight, so there was no such thing as being too bright. It was a great chance for us to use up some of our stash on such a worthy cause."

At the Guild's May meeting, Dr. Yates was invited to speak to the membership about his work in Haiti. He told the women about the devastation caused by the earthquake and how much the quilts were needed for the hundreds of children he treats on a regular basis at Grace Children's Hospital. "We are one of the few facilities which treat children with both tuberculosis and HIV," he said. "Tuberculosis is almost unheard of in Canada these days, but it is still quite common in Haiti."



Haiti-bound quilts

Dr. Yates had no idea what a quilt Guild did. "I didn't know it was a world wide phenomenon and I am overwhelmed by the generosity and talent of quilters. People like you keep us going."

The Guild raised an additional \$700 for the hospital by auctioning off 11 baskets of books, fabrics, patterns and notions, generously donated by Guild member Dawne Rudman. Each basket had a particular theme, including Children, Cottage Life, Winter, Animals, Wildflowers, Architecture, Quilting 101 and Quilting 401. Because the money was going to such a good cause, a bidding frenzy occurred. It was a fun night for everyone.



Some of the members of the Oakville Quilters' Guild

"The members really opened their hearts and their wallets and for that I'll be forever grateful," says Bev. "Seeing a child in Haiti with a quilt from our Guild and seeing their beautiful smiles just made my heart sing. We all feel so connected to these children now in a way that just sending money could never have done. The quilts all have love sewn into them." ☺