Last week for my vacation, I took a trip to Haiti. Stayed in an all-inclusive without air conditioning in a room with 7 other guys and no hot water. Worst travel agent ever, right? Actually, I would suggest exactly the opposite.

Don't get me wrong – Haiti is, end to end, the worst third world craphole on the planet. This is not hyperbole – this is an objective evaluation of the situation down there. It's the poorest country in this hemisphere, owns the third most dangerous slum (Cite Solel) in the world, and has no functioning government to speak of. But unlike a normal vacation, where you go somewhere nice, live above your means for a while, and come back depressed about your mundane existence, Haiti makes you appreciate literally everything about your life. Simple things like being able to drink the water, safely walk the streets not lined with mountains of garbage and rubble, air that doesn't smell of feces and death, the ability to go to a market and get food, hot running water, paved roads, having walls in your home made of, well, wall stuff, instead of canvas, plastic, or scrap metal, healthcare (government mandated or otherwise), and not needing an armed guard to protect your possessions.

One lady I met in Haiti, named Miriam, provided me some real inspiration. She was a wealthy medical professional who visited Haiti 30 years ago on a church mission. She thought she was going to read people some nice stories for a week and come home feeling good about herself. She was greeted en route to her Haitian destination by a woman who had fallen into a fire some time ago. This woman's arm was covered in a disgusting array of untreated and infected burns, as there was (and is) no healthcare system in Haiti. Miriam treated her, and then proceeded to the home. The next morning she awoke to a lawn full of hundreds of people with injuries and illness ranging from the unfortunate to the grotesque. There were to be no stories this trip, her mission was clear: provide relief to these suffering people.

Miriam returned to the US, but instead of just putting that one trip behind her and taking the easy way out, she kept coming back to Haiti. She could have just “went to South Beach” and had an easy life, but her heartstrings were yanked by the desperation of the Haitian people. Eventually, she would up starting an orphanage for the most desperate kids of Haiti: those plagued by malnutrition, cholera, and other diseases, and those with special needs. She only takes the most desperate cases, and has lost her share of the battles, but today she provides hope for 100 kids in an idyllic and peaceful setting she has fought hard to carve out of the horror of the Haitian landscape. She has been evicted from her orphanage by armed gunmen, set on a boat by the thugs of Aristide and told not to return, but persevered and today is providing a seed of hope in a nation perilously devoid of such.

We stayed on her property, and got to see her kids face to face. One such kid was Louvins, a kid she recently rescued from malnutrition. Louvins was found in filthy conditions – she at first thought he was a dog in the corner – and at 5 years of age is barely able to walk, and weighed only 14 pounds. He is barely starting to trust the world that has delivered nothing but pain to him, and still may not survive, but at least he now has a chance – 99 of his brothers and sisters are testament to that. Sadly, Louvins is one of the lucky kids on the island.

One less fortunate is my new best friend, 8 year old Schneider. Schneider lives in a tent city of about 300 people sitting a couple of blocks from Miram’s property, situated on about 2 acres of land. The first day we went to visit them, he and some other kids came to greet us in a purely friendly way. As a 6’ 6” human jungle gym, I quickly learned the Creloe terms for “pick me up” and “put me on your shoulders”. With Scheider safely riding my shoulders, we went to the tent city and were struck with the normalcy of it all. There was a mayor, one tent was a bar, one was a kitchen, and there were three tents used as schools. The kids even came in uniform to the schools. Each day we would provide the children some sort of gift, whether it be a simple snack, or cheap flip flops, and each item was more prized than the last. On the last day, we were walking back to the compound, and I saw Schneider running to our group looking desperately for me. He wanted to say goodbye, but more importantly, wanted to share his bag of animal crackers with me, his friend. Schneider has nothing, was given a small snack to alleviate his starvation, and yet he felt it was important to share it with me. An 8 year old in that moment taught me a lesson in courage and character that most adults wouldn’t understand.

Sadly, Schneider will probably live his life in those tents unless something drastic and unforeseen happens from the outside. He will have no education (he was not in the school, which apparently you must pay to attend), he will have no marketable skills, and he will only learn the laws of the street, which are harsh and not conducive to bettering oneself. Hope is at a premium in Haiti, and as rare as clean water or proper food.

Pastor Vincent was one of Miram's kids. He received a formal education, learned English, and learned a trade from her, and at some point had taken his talents to South Beach, quite literally. But Vincent wasn't satisfied with a posh life, he understood the grim reality of life in Cite Solel having been rescued from its streets., and felt drawn to do something about it. Vincent went back to Haiti, leaving a family in Miami, and started an orphanage right in the heart of the worst place on earth. Today, he's universally respected and loved on its crime-riddled and cruel streets, and is providing 20 kids of his own hope.

We helped Vincent distribute food. He had obtained $1000, which he used to provide a couple of cans of rice, a small scoop of beans, a small can of fish, and a bottle of oil to about 100 people. This pittance of food feeds a family of 7 for a week. In exchange for the food, the residents were to bring him their "mud cookies" (pictured) – cookies literally made in a factory from the feces-strewn mud of Haiti in that people eat just so they have the sensation of food in their stomach. That is the extent of the desperation – industry exists to mitigate the pains of hunger. We also gave Vincent numerous gifts while we were down there for his orphans, one of which was cheese. His kids had never had it before, and he had been praying to get it for them.

So what did I learn? In a worldly sense, I am the 1%. Seeing how much I really do have makes the pursuit of "more" seem as pointless as it actually is. I have a car, I have a house, I have food – why should I give a shit about the proverbial Joneses? Our entire nation is Joneses. Spending a week fully able to appreciate it all has filled me with an awesome level of content, even if it is built on a mountain of sadness. Why should I consider trashing all I have and my important relationships with my family and friends to, analogously, "go to South Beach" in the pursuit of pointless glory? Such a Quixodian quest only serves to make me the fool, and lose focus on the whole point of life.

In other news, apparently the NBA title was decided when I was in Haiti. Good for whomever won it.

Anyway, off to the questions.

I just read the PD interview with Mark Shapiro. Now I'm trying to figure out what planet he lives on and what the color of the sky is in his freakish little world where trading two Cy Young Award winners in consecutive years is not considered "Financial," and that's just the tip of the bullshit iceberg in that softball article.

Is the appropriate response Torches and Pitchforks, or just attaching his picture to a heavy bag and repeatedly punching the crap out of it? –justmebd

The *Plain Dealer* has become the *Pravda* of Cleveland sports reporting. For all intents and purposes, it is the official censored mouthpiece of the pathetically managed and gutless Cleveland sports franchises.

The Browns showed the Indians and the Cavs how easy it was to bully the PD, and the other franchises learned quickly the tricks of the trade. The Browns removed beat reporter after beat reporter, disallowing access to anyone who accurately reported on the decrepit state of the franchise, until they finally got the PD to assign the banal Mary Kay Cabot to cover the Browns. Now the PD Browns reporting from Cabot is a warmed over regurgitation of the official "truth", similar to the meal a baby bird receives from its mother. What the actual truth may or may not be is irrelevant to the PD. Journalism in 2012 people!

This pile of hogwash off Shapiro's forked tongue is just more of the same pandering sort of journalism we have come to expect from the PD. Yeah, we traded Lee and Sabathia at the peaks of their careers for steaming piles of Matt LaPorta-brand magic beans for non-financial reasons. I mean, no franchise has ever won a World Series with two aces and a bunch of pieces (Arizona Diamondbacks), have they? That's no way to long term success to be sure. No, risky prospects are much more of a sure thing than sure things.

What is really troubling is how stupid the Indians, Browns, and Cavs, and ultimately their Stockholm Syndrome victim the PD, think we all are. The nonsensical lines of crap that represent the official party position ("they do love Colt McCoy people!") demean the entire city when they are printed in black and white. Everyone outside Cleveland laughs at how feckless our local paper is, and how the franchises persist in telling us all is well and remain calm like Chip Diller, when we can all readily see the chaos in the midst. I would wager today's headlines praise Chris Grant for a genius of a draft, trying to excuse the bloody abortion we all witnessed.

But then again, if we all really trusted the PD to deliver a complete and factual rundown of Cleveland sports, why are we here reading this site? The cure is simple: stop reading the PD, stop giving them subscriptions and page views. This place has the finest cast of writers ever assembled, and me too, who are objective, intelligent, and thorough on their reporting. Why even subject yourself to the PD's insults?

What is your preference in a band; a consistent sound record after record with more minor variations where you can immediately recognize the band from a few chords of a song, or a band that tries new sounds with every record? -southernflyer

It is my theory that a band that tries new sounds every record isn't good enough to find a particular sound and stick with it. These bands try to produce music for popular consumption, instead of producing music because they are musicians. This is why I prefer a consistent sound to a band.

Now, don't get me wrong, some bands take it too far and make all their music sound exactly alike. For example, you can read anything and sound like the Dave Matthews Band – all you need to do is read/sing the first two notes in a basic tone, take the next one as high as you can run it, and then drop the next to the floor. The second pattern follows: two normal, one not quite as high, one not quite as low. Sing anything that has eight syllable lines and boom, you're Dave Matthews. Try it – here's a Dave Matthews Band song I just wrote

Fuck Lebron James, He's a douche bag; Fuck Lebron James, he's a douche bag.

See how easy that was?

If the sound of a band is generated from how they tune their instruments (we are assuming they play instruments here, otherwise, they instantly go into the "suck" bin), then you've got a band with soul. When David Gilmour picks up a guitar, he makes sweet love to it in an erotic manner that produces a rich, soulful, and emotional sound. And as such Pink Floyd had a distinctive sound that was 100% Pink Floyd, but never boring or repetitive.

If I'm spending my time listening to your music, I want to hear your soul and your passion. Don't spoon feed me what you think I want to hear. Get up there and belt out your heart, and tell me that if I think it sucks, I should go somewhere else.

Also, why do bands take 3+ years to put out a record then go on a tour that seems to last forever? Should bands that go on "final tours" sign a contract that they will never

tour again, or at least not have another "final tour" for 10 years? I swear the Stones had a final tour when I was in high school. –southernflyer

Rock stars have an incredibly short shelf life. When the Stones did their first of eleventy final tours in 1943, they probably figured Keith Richards was going to die within weeks anyway, so they may as well milk his last moments on earth to make a few bucks. But low and behold, somehow Richards has managed to mummify himself and become indestructible, and continues to live and churn out farewell tours. But each and every time, the rest of the guys have got to be thinking this is it for real, because Richards has just got to be out of lives. Don't hate their sincerity.

I think a good class action lawsuit would teach these geezers a lesson. You buy farewell tour tickets, at a likely premium, because OMG THIS IS THE LAST TIME EVER I CAN HEAR THEM AND THESE TICKETS ARE GOING TO BE SO FREAKIN VALUABLE. Collector's items, right? Like Mark McGwire's 62nd home run ball, it was worth millions the day it was hit, and worthless as soon as Barry Bonds hit #70 forever tarnishing one of the great records. Likewise, the 1859 Stones farewell stone tablets were valuable back then, but are completely worthless now. So sue for your money back as a class.

Either that or go and enjoy the show, final tour or not. You can know they are filthy money-grubbing whores and will come back at the slightest inclination and/or bankruptcy, but still you're going to spend one night enwrapped in their art.

Which medieval torture would you least want practiced on you? –hikohadon

Scaphism. Scaphism combines my two worst enemies: feces and insects. You can Google the disturbing practice for the full gory details, but essentially scaphism means you would be eaten alive by insects in a pool of your own excrement. Originally I was going to go with cockle shells, or thumbscrews for your genitals, because, well, I don't really need to explain that, do I? But scaphism is the medieval equivalent of being locked in a room and listening to Stephen A. Smith and Craig James argue about ladies shoes, while Chris Berman read the phone book in the corner.

I am going to OBX and Charleston for 12 days in September but want to do a vacation

before that. I've never done anything exotic but I'm thinking of taking my girl somewhere with one of these groupon/travelzoo deals. Any particulars on all inclusive trips that don't break the bank? Belize, Riviera Maya, San Juan Del Sur, Puerto Vallarta, Antigua? - RickNashEquilibrium

How about Haiti?

Okay, you're not doing that – I understand. Most all-inclusives are quite similar, and will manufacture a lifestyle for you within the friendly confines of a resort community. There isn't anything particularly differentiating between any of the resorts as it relates to where it is located, however, there is significant differentiation as to how the resort is managed. The quality of the food, the quality of the facilities, and the overall amenities vary significantly, so my best advice would be to pick the place with the best amenities at the lowest cost.

Back when I was a kid, I would have to trust the travel agent's recommendation of a resort. That led to some dicey situations where the third world in which the resort was located seeped into the resort itself. Sleeping in dilapidated, unairconditioned places with lousy food, a small unclean pool, and a crappy beach meant the vacation relied exclusively on Al Cahol to make it fun. Today, you have a wealth of information at your fingertips, so use it. Look at the reviews, and the pictures, and make an informed decision, selecting the cheapest nice place, regardless of location. So what if the destination is South Padre Island – it's cheap, fun, and you're not getting any authentic culture going to an Aruban or Antiguan resort anyway. My best advice is to start at the bottom of the price list, and work your way up until you find a place.

Lars please explain to me how Golden Corral isn't the most disgusting trough in our fair country? –hikohadon

It is. There's no contest here.

Generally, the more a restaurant tries to do, the worse it does all of it. Golden Corral has everything from horse meat loaf to Nike-grade steaks to Love-canal grade fish. Everything is loaded with butter, cooked with as minimal of flavor as you can insert into the substance, and generally sitting in a trough of goo just waiting for some victim to claim it as their meal.

If you're eating at Golden Corral, you're fat and lazy, and intentionally trying to make yourself fatter and lazier. There is no other explanation for grazing Mr. Creasote style until your Wal-Mart underwear snaps under the stress for $5.95 on the culinary equivalent of a Chris Grant draft. You've got to be repressing a lot of self-loathing to do that to yourself.

This also brings up an important point: never eat fish at a buffet. Any time I see a family grazer place like Golden Corral advertising they have fish on the buffet, a little piece of my soul dies. Fish sitting under a warming dish smells and tastes like Haiti in July, and is about as healthy as it. Why is it even there? Do people really eat that? Horrifying.

Outside of Primanti Bros., Yuengling, and jokes about gap-toothed Yinzers having relations with farm animals, is there any purpose to the State of Pennsylvania? –justmebd

The state of Pennsylvania is an inbred-laden demilitarized zone that protects Ohio from the assholes in New York, New Jersey, and Maryland. Consider it like a moat around our castle.

It also contains Hershey, PA, and there's a lot of good that comes from there.

And... well, that's about it I guess. They did write the Constitution there, so that's something. Was our nation's capital for a while. But what have you done for me lately, Pennsylvania?

Please email questions to lars.hancock@yahoo.com , tweet them to @ReasonsImADrunk, or DM them to me in the forae to LarsHancock.