Niece of Trudy Else picks up orphans Tuesday.

The aftermath of the killer earthquake in Haiti hits closer to home than many people realize.

Gothenburg resident Trudy Else and others have been trying to help her niece Kristin Heaton and husband Scott of Roca to get two sisters out of Haiti.

The Heatons were in the process of adopting the girls before last week's earthquake.

Late Monday night, Else said the Heatons were on their way to Pittsburg, PA, to be reunited with their new daughters—Bettania, 8, and Dieunette, 2.

"Their girls were on a plane that the governor of Pennsylvania had taken to Haiti to evacuate the Bresma Orphanage," Else said, noting that the girls had lived at the orphanage in Port au Prince which was damaged in the earthquake.

She said it's been an emotional roller coaster for her relatives since the papers had been signed and they were waiting for a phone call to pick up the girls.

"Then the earthquake hit and the paperwork was destroyed," Else said.

After the disaster, she said two sisters from Pittsburgh who operate the orphanage had stayed with the children.

“But the building wasn’t safe and they all slept outside,” Else said. “They had little food and water, if any.”

Else said 150 children at the orphanage needed refugee status to get to the United States. Thirty of the orphans have been adopted by families, like the Heatons, in the United States.

“The other children have had offers from many people to help secure them a home,” she said.

Many people, particularly U.S. senators and congressional representatives, have been working around the clock to help obtain the right paperwork for the orphan girls to come to the United States, she said.

“Thanks for all prayers and networking efforts,” Else said. “It took everyone’s efforts to bring this about.

“Please don’t forget the other orphans that still remain in peril in Haiti.”

Else said the Heatons were expected to return home with their new daughters Tuesday (yesterday).

She noted that Dieunette spent six months with the Heatons shortly after she was born with a birth defect.

Doctors at the University of Nebraska Medical Center offered to do surgery free of charge and she stayed with the Heatons.

“Her mom didn’t want to give her up for adoption so the Heatons had to take her back after her recovery,” Else said. “Later, the mother decided they could adopt her and the Heatons have been going through that paperwork for over a year.

ebarrett@gothenburgtimes.com 308-537-3636