



J.A. CLERMONT FOUNDATION

Hope for the Children of Haiti

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August, 2015

Dear Friends of the J.A. Clermont Foundation,

I hope that this letter finds you well.

This summer I was unable to make my annual visit to the children at the Clermont Center due to a recent surgery. However, Ivon Alcime, PhD, a Clermont board member; my sister Lyzie, leader of the J.A. Clermont New York chapter; and Zanice Bond, PhD, a colleague of Ivon at Tuskegee University in Tuskegee, Alabama, were able to go in my place.

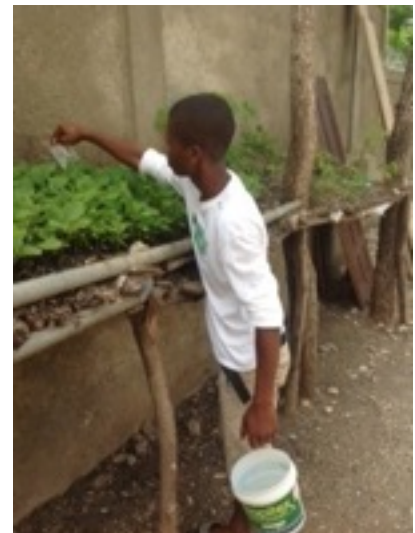
What follows is Dr. Bond's account and experience of her visit at the Clermont Center.

Renee Clermont,
Chairman of the Board
The Clermont Foundation

Highlights from My Visit to the Centre des Jeunes

This past March my sister and I attended our first Clermont Foundation fundraiser in Long Island, New York. It was inspiring, especially Dr. Ivon Alcime's presentation that introduced us to the beautiful children the Clermont Foundation supports in Haiti. Who knew that just two months later I would actually be traveling to Haiti--meeting the staff and the dynamic young men of the Clermont Foundation family?

I had not imagined that I would be putting my English as a Second Language (ESL) training to use in Jacmel, Haiti, so soon. After finishing my academic year of teaching at Tuskegee University (TU) in Tuskegee, Alabama, I began preparing English lessons for the twenty-four boys at the J.A. Clermont Center. I arrived in Port au Prince (PAP) with no command of Creole, little memory of my college French, or the French I used with some fluency twenty years ago while visiting France. Still, I knew Dr. Alcime, my friend and colleague from Tuskegee University, and Madam Lyzie Fortunat, whom I met at the fundraiser in March, would be there to translate and help me navigate during daily interactions. We took a spectacular drive--about two and half hours-- from PAP to Jacmel. The landscape-- green and lush--the steep mountain ranges, the goats, black pigs, gardens, and hardworking farmers in the distance were beautiful sights to me, a rural west Tennessee native.





Once we arrived, we met the children. They had prepared a program to welcome us to their home. They greeted us with songs, big smiles, and hugs. Dr. Alcime, Madam Lyzie, and I spent ten days together in a comfortable guest house that was attached to the main facility. A typical morning began with the sounds of the boys starting their day: some might be watering the herbs or vegetables planted within the compound. Some were doing homework, assisting in the kitchen, or hanging out with each other--waiting for one of us to open our door for a morning hello or bonjour. School had not yet ended for the year, so the boys still had to eat breakfast and dress for school. Their schedules varied-- some left for school in the morning while others attended school in the afternoon.

The well-organized and apparently stress-free mornings were due to the Center's staff. Angela, Papi, and the other staff members were very attentive to the boys. They were friendly and warm guardians. We all enjoyed delicious meals that often included freshly squeezed juice, freshly ground corn, or spinach picked from the garden. Goat dishes were a favorite for me as they reminded me of home and my grandfather's farm. Once the younger boys left for school, English classes for the older boys began.



Our on-site English classes focused on listening, writing, and speaking skills and convened in the morning for the older boys (or in the evening for the younger boys)-- keeping in mind their schedules and homework assignments. The more advanced students often engaged in dialogues using words and phrases we had studied in class. We also studied geography with maps, coloring books, and puzzles. Several students were fascinated with a book on Frederick Douglass, who was a former United States ambassador to Haiti. Some enjoyed hearing about Black American folklorist and author, Zora Neale Hurston, who wrote her most famous novel "Their Eyes Were Watching God" in Haiti. Others learned the thirteen countries in South America or worked from ESL books I had brought with me from home. Some of our classes were in the formal classroom with chalkboards, flash cards, and tables, while others were more informal. Sometimes a few of the older boys (often Madam Lyzie, Dr. Alcime) and I sat outside and observed the stars and the



moon-- Eddy, a resident born in the Dominican Republic, wondered where that "vagabond moon" was when it hid behind the clouds. I practiced my Spanish with Eddy, and we both learned new words. Gabby brought basil to me so that I could smell it. Then he took me by the hand to the basil growing in the yard so that I would be able to recognize it, too. During our walks around the compound, we often

shared words in English and Creole. The boys were patient with me as I struggled to pronounce words in Creole. Sometimes, when I butchered words, they couldn't contain their laughter-- neither could I--so we often broke out in robust laughter as we walked and learned together.

Madam Lyzie and I were often team-teachers. We taught the younger boys to cut out hearts on construction paper. They drew, colored, and wrote thank you notes in English. Memorization and repetition are familiar pedagogical approaches in Jacmel. So, we spent time repeating and practicing. Our real-life experiences, conversations, and discoveries enriched the learning process and surely helped our eager students to understand, remember, and grow.



On Mother's Day Sunday, May 30th in Haiti, we went to a local Catholic church. Over two-hundred people attended the church which still showed residual signs of the earthquake. I was so impressed with how serious and committed our boys were during the service. They listened without fumbling or fidgeting. They sang and prayed with fervor. Waiting in line for communion, even our younger boys appeared reflective and mature.



Before leaving Jacmel, I had the pleasure of celebrating my birthday. Angela and the cook prepared a special meal for us. We had fresh flowers on the table, and the younger boys sang happy birthday in English and Creole. After eating, we all enjoyed ice cream, a treat most of the boys had never had, and cake. I was delighted to host this party, share this day with them, and give each a small birthday gift. Several boys gave me handmade cards that I cherish.

Perhaps one of the most memorable times for me was the evening the local priest visited us at the compound. He brought shoes, book bags, and school supplies for the younger boys. We had no electricity that night, so we used candles and the few flashlights on hand to see the shoes. The older boys leaned into a circle with the priest and his boxes of shoes, while one or two other older boys brought a little boy (one at a time) into the circle to try on shoes. When a pair of shoes fit, everyone cheered. One of the younger boys, who was new and had been having some trouble adjusting, came to the circle. He was unable to find a pair that fit. We all seemed to hold our breath as he tried on the third pair of shoes. Finally, a pair that fit! "Thank you, God," sighed one of the older boys squatting in the circle. We all exhaled-- relieved that each of the thirteen little boys received new shoes that night. We took pictures with the priest using the headlights from his car. The picture was not very clear, but the exuberance in the air and on their faces was unmistakable. The next day we took another picture of them in their school uniforms. They were delighted--holding their book bags and wearing their new shoes.

Since I've been home, several older boys and I have become friends on Facebook. With the help of the internet, our lessons continue. I have introduced them to African American artist, Jacob Lawrence and his paintings of Toussaint L' Ouverture as well as poet and former Senegalese president, Leopold Senghor, who wrote poetry in French. For Eddy, who speaks French, Creole, and Spanish, we have discussed Junot Diaz, Dominican-American writer and Isabel Allende, a Chilean writer. The internet has helped to facilitate learning as the artwork, selected poems, excerpts of literature, and maps are available to complement our study. Ironically, I recently read a post on Facebook about a large humanitarian group's failure to distribute already collected funds to Haiti. I replied to the post with my own first-hand account of the work being done in Haiti at the J. A. Clermont Center. Unlike larger international agencies, the Clermont Center is more local and grassroots with the welfare of Haiti's children as its core concern. Later this month, I will share my experiences in Haiti on a local radio program in Brownsville, Tennessee. Next year my sister hopes to visit the Center.

It was certainly a privilege to visit the J. A. Clermont Center in Jacmel. My donations and my heart will remain with the Center. I have experienced the beauty of Haiti-- its culture and its people. I have met the resilient young men at the J. A. Clermont Center who will, no doubt, become my lifelong friends. I look forward to the day when Clermont boys will become exchange students or college students or entrepreneurs or presidents-- leaders, husbands, fathers--independent world citizens committed to eradicating poverty and making the world a safer and more compassionate place to live. Thanks to the J. A. Clermont Foundation for allowing me to contribute in my small way to the deserving young men at the Center. 'Continued success to Madam Laurence, director of the Center, and all of the J. A. Clermont Foundation family.

Viva Haiti!

Zanice Bond, PhD
Brownsville, TN
July 2015

For up-to-date information on events at the Centre des Jeunes, follow us on Facebook by becoming a Friend of Renee or Herve Clermont. If you would like to make a donation by PayPal, please go to www.clermontfoundation.org or send a check to PO Box 1304, Columbia, MD 21044.

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