



The Haitian Connection Newsletter

Lorraine Antieau, Editor

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News from Renate's Desk

Dear friends,

Deepest gratitude to you, our faithful donors, whose generosity allows the work of Haitian Connection to continue! Once again, your year-end giving will sustain us through another 12 months of outreach and support for our neighbors in Jeremie, Haiti. These gifts do not simply provide for the ongoing financial needs of our work, they also give us inspiration and courage to keep the faith in the midst of seemingly impossible circumstances.

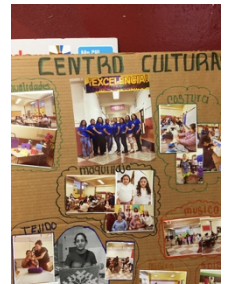
Humbled by your ongoing support,

Renate

College Group Collects School Supplies



A big shout out to the Global Outreach at Chicago State for their incredible success in collecting school supplies for Haiti. Haitian Connection shared this huge donation with the Centro Cultural. Collaboration and connections between all who want this world to be a better place are able to bridge differences in language and culture. This is what gives hope.



Afterschool Program Stays the Course Amidst Turmoil

Schools in Jeremie have been in turmoil since the beginning of the year. Teachers in the state-run schools have not been paid for several months (see Eliasme's story in this issue). So the teachers have gone on strike with the support of their students. This situation has created conflict between the state-run schools and the private schools, because the private schools are still functioning. The state school teachers want the private school teachers to stop working to demonstrate solidarity with them. On February 12, students from both sectors got into a brawl, which is unfortunate. Haitian Connection's afterschool program is filling the gap for the 15 participants, but sadly, that still leaves many students with no classes at all. Children of Haiti have lost so much schooling already, but Haitian Connection is striving to keep continuous education alive, providing a life line for the future.



Renate to Present at the Caribbean Studies Association Conference

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Caribbean Studies Association

CSA Secretariat

c/o The Sir Arthur Lewis Institute of Social and Economic Studies
The University of the West Indies, St. Augustine, Trinidad & Tobago
E-mail: secretariat@caribbeanstudiesassociation.org
www.caribbeanstudiesassociation.org

Dear Renate Schneider

On behalf of the Caribbean Studies Association (CSA) 2025 Program Committee, we are pleased to confirm that your submission: Building a Community Mental Health Program in Rural Haiti from the Bottom Up, has been accepted for inclusion in the Annual Caribbean Studies Association Conference, scheduled for St. Martin, June 1 - 7, 2025.



These photos were taken from a community mental health outreach just to illustrate what Renate will address at the conference.

Note: If you would like to contribute towards the expenses of this trip, please use PayPal or send a check to Haitian Connection, 5300 South Shore Drive, Apt 27, Chicago, IL 60615

Art Perspectives



Salnave Phillippe Auguste (1908-1989) was a lawyer and magistrate who wrote books on law and poetry. He began painting at the age of 52 to help pay for the education of his seven children. He joined the Centre d'Art in 1960 and became famous for his jungle scenes. He is often referred to as the « Douanier » of Haitian art, after the famous French naïve painter Henri Rousseau. Among the best known of Haitian artists of the second generation, Philippe-Auguste was well educated and articulate. Now known primarily for his lush jungle scenes with voodoo figures, he also painted still-life, carnival scenes and the exotic street market of Haiti.

Haitian Voices

Eliasme Jean Silfin is Haitian Connection's after school coordinator. He is married and has two children. He is one of our most reliable partners in Jeremie and supervises two other teachers in the after-school program. This is what he has to say:



I would like to share the experience I am having in my life. I am married, I have two children. Life for me is always difficult. I have worked as a teacher in a state school. I have worked in that position for 31 months, but I have never been paid. During the time my oldest girl was ready to go to school and I had to pay rent. Life became very complicated for me. Then we were hit by a hurricane, and the house we lived in was completely destroyed. We had neither food nor water. At that time life made no sense for me and my family. Thanks to Madame Renate who was able to support us. I always believed in myself and hoped for a better life. Right now, I have begun construction on my own house. I live in two rooms in that house, but life is still very difficult. But we need to still have hope.

Madame Love and Renate became fast friends while Renate lived and worked in Jeremie. She is as people say in Haiti “fanm vayan”, a fighter. She fights for her children; she fights to stay alive. In this fight she is carried by an incredible faith in God. It is this faith in God that enables her to carry her burdens cheerfully despite setback in health and in making a living. Here are her words translated by Renate Schneider:

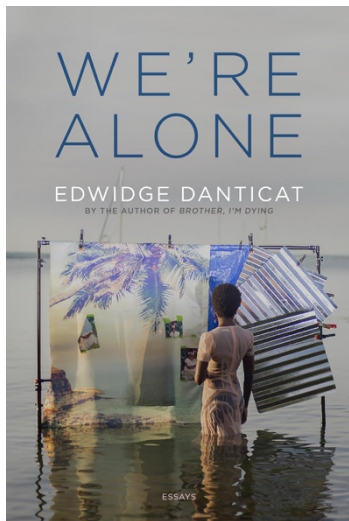


I would like to talk about my situation in Haiti. At this moment I feel like I am not really living. Things are very difficult. I try to find a way to make a living, but life does not really want me to. No matter what I do, nothing seems to work. For me this life is very difficult. Many young people finished school, but they cannot find any work. All day they have nothing to do. As parents we cry in secret when we see all that and remember all the sacrifices we made to send them to school. All the many things we bought to sell, and it is all gone. The little income we have now goes to eat. If we have food for breakfast, we will have no more for the rest of the day. Your children look at you, but you cannot give them anything. I am thinking all the time, have stomach aches, and cannot sleep. I hope that sometimes a friend will send me a little something. Life is strange and everything is very expensive. If God does not say a word, tomorrow will be worse

especially for the children. When we have breadfruit we can eat, but when the harvest is finished, we have to wait 6 more months for the next time we eat. Oh God, when will you say a word so we can live like human beings. Even if you borrow a little money from the bank, insecurity makes it difficult to work with that money. The interest on that money you borrowed is very high. So, we have to live in suffering.

Book Corner

We're Alone by Edwidge Danticat



A collection of exceptional new essays by one of the most significant contemporary writers on the world stage.

Tracing a loose arc from Edwidge Danticat's childhood to the COVID-19 pandemic and recent events in Haiti, the essays gathered in *We're Alone* include personal narrative, reportage, and tributes to mentors and heroes such as Toni Morrison, Paule Marshall, Gabriel García Márquez, and James Baldwin that explore several abiding themes: environmental catastrophe, the traumas of colonialism, motherhood, and the complexities of resilience.

From hurricanes to political violence, from her days as a new student at a Brooklyn elementary school knowing little English to her account of a shooting hoax at a Miami mall, Danticat has an extraordinary ability to move from the personal to the global and back again. Throughout, literature and art prove to be her reliable companions and guides in both tragedies and triumphs.

Haitian Refugees Strive to Resettle



A colleague of Renate's from Haiti sent the following piece at Renate's request. She has been instrumental in helping Renate's former students to resettle in the US.

On April 25th, 2023, eight individuals arrived at the airport in Kentucky and began the resettlement process there. There were six adults and two children at that time. In the fall of 2023, I sat in on some of their Asylum meetings with their lawyer. I learned some of the stories about what they experienced in Haiti before they came to the US, stories about why they wanted to leave Haiti and unfortunately leave their family and friends behind.

One family had a 7-year-old daughter who was going to school even though it was dangerous for most people to go out. She experienced a gang member showing up at her school interrogating her teacher. From that experience at her school in Haiti the first year after she arrived here in the US, she had difficulty sleeping because of the trauma she experienced. Now her family is a family of five and the children are thriving. And the parents both have jobs and are doing quite well.

Recently one of the women who came with her fiancé told me the story of why the new Trump immigration policies of expedited removal and deportation are causing her so much fear and anxiety. She told the story of when she and her fiancé were hiding in their home in Cite Soleil as the gang members were going around surrounding the homes and bringing people out. They looked out and saw the Gangs had bodies piled up in a wheelbarrow and they were taking them away, all people they had killed. She wanted me to understand that the memory of that is still traumatizing.

(Haitian Refugees Strive to Resettle, continued)

She and her fiancé were married a year ago and they have a baby girl who everyone adores. She and her husband are both working. All of them say they cannot go back to Haiti. They will not be safe. They are particularly afraid for their children.

One of the young men who came talked about how the night before he was to leave, he had to flee his home in Cite Soleil and before his flight that morning he snuck back into his home to get his stuff, so he'd have some things to bring with him to the US. He is now working for a resettlement agency in Kentucky as a caseworker because he's fluent in several languages.

Two of the young adults, who I met because of their connection with a youth center in Cite Soleil that was promoting a peaceful alternative to joining gangs, felt they were constantly in danger. They talked about how they were approached by gang members in their area who would come to the center and try to get them to cooperate with them. They recounted how it was not unusual to look outside the gate that tried to keep intruders out and see gang members killing and burning bodies across the road from them. One of them is now a city bus driver and the other is working as a nursing assistant at a senior center. Both have been successful in getting their driver's license and purchasing a car with the help of my parish community.

All these young people were assisted the first year they were here by the community and Catholic Charities. They were living in two apartments in a complex where they didn't always feel safe. They were successful in moving into a different apartment complex that they feel is nicer and safer than where they were before. They managed to furnish these apartments from what they were earning in their jobs and through community support.

Four of the young adults who came had University degrees, the three men graduated from the University Renate started in Jeremie, Haiti after the earthquake. They have degrees in agronomy. One of the young women graduated from the University of Notre Dame in Port au Prince with a degree in business management. The other two women had responsible positions, one a teacher and the other helping at the youth center before she had her first child.

I've asked them about their plans with the policies of the new White House administration. They are all here legally in the humanitarian parolee program, but unfortunately those in that program are being targeted to be sent back. Just yesterday I worked with two of the moms as they were filling out their family plan should they be separated from their children.

They tell me, "We can't go back to Haiti." Everyone knows it's too dangerous for them to return there. They do not want to uproot their lives here. They don't want to go into hiding or work with smugglers who might help them get to a country where they'd be welcomed as asylum seekers. They have accomplished so much and continue to move forward with new accomplishments.

We all want to feel safe and be safe. The policies coming out of the new administration are causing them daily anxiety, fear, and worry. It has been re-traumatizing. I believe they are more fortunate than most as they have filed for asylum and there are many people in the community who know them and are working to keep them safe and protected.

Haitian Connection

Haitian Connection is a 501(c) (3) tax exempt organization founded in 2005, which focuses on the needs of women, children, and young adults in the Jérémie region of southwest Haiti. A variety of projects have already touched thousands of lives: houses have been built for more than 104 women and their children; a cash without condition initiative is providing hope for women in 2 communities; our summer camps for children help them take their minds off the difficulties they see all around them, and our after-school program inspires the necessary motivation to keep the children's minds focused on learning.

As a response to the earthquake in January 2010, and its psychological aftermath, Haitian Connection has established a mental health program in Jérémie to provide counseling as people resettle, tally their losses, and adjust to a new reality. 27 members of the community have been trained in psychological first aid. This served the greater Jérémie area well after Hurricane Matthew in October of 2016. Our mental health agents were able to hold community meetings to give people an opportunity to debrief and receive some training in stress reduction techniques. During the current crisis in Haiti, the mental health program is a necessary tool to help people in the community cope with ever mounting stress

Support Us

Haitian Connection is a 501(c) (3) nonprofit corporation registered in Illinois and your gifts are tax deductible. Our projects depend on volunteers and the financial support of people who desire to help.

Scholarships for needy students from elementary to secondary schools help to develop a cadre of educated youth who form a resource for the future of Haiti.

Teachers' salaries. To help students learn and advance we need teachers who are paid and motivated. Many rural schools do not have any means to pay their teachers, and the students do not have the possibility to pay tuition.

Summer Camps and Afterschool program need financial assistance so we can offer more children participation in these programs.

Cash without Conditions is providing poor women with a monthly stipend to help with school expenses as well with the ability to provide food for the family and pay medical expenses when needed.

Mental Health Program: This is crucial to provide more outreach and also to train additional community mental health agents.

To support our projects financially, donate online by visiting our website at: <http://www.haitianconnection.org/> and clicking on the PayPal button.

If you would prefer to send your donation by mail, please address checks to: **Haitian Connection**
5300 South Shore Drive # 27
Chicago, IL 60615

Get Involved

We are looking for volunteers to search for grants and help with grant writing, as well as groups and organizations interested in having us give a presentation on the situation in Haiti, mental health in Haiti, leadership development, remote English teaching, or infrastructure development for computer literacy. Contact **Renate Schneider** at haitianconnection@gmail.com or by phone at **312/493-3719**.

