



MAISON FORTUNÉ ORPHANAGE

An occasional bulletin to report progress of the children's orphanage in Hinche, Haiti. It is also available on the internet: www.richmonddioocese.org/haiti

February 2008

THE LATEST ON OUR GIRLS' CAMPUS

Following up on our last issue, we can report that our contract with the UN has been signed, and they are now leasing our original girls' campus. Jean-Louis has negotiated the lease of the former "World Vision" building across the street from our main campus. After repairs are made and furniture is purchased, we'll be able to admit girls on schedule in September. The plan is to use the first two floor of the building for the girls and put quarters for visitors and volunteers on the upper two floors.



View of the girls' annex from the balcony of the administration building

MEET ROSENEL PIERRE!

Several years ago Xaverian Volunteer Chris Roberson started a practice of sending us a little biographical sketch of one of the boys at Maison Fortuné for each issue of this newsletter. Somehow we got out of the habit. Jean-Louis wants to start this up again, and here is his story of one of the newer boys.

Rosenel Pierre is 12 years old. He was born in Hinche, but soon afterwards his father died. His mom is still alive, but has two other kids and really was not doing anything to take care of them. A few years ago Rosenel became sick and his mother took him to the Asile, the care center in Hinche for the very poor founded by Mother Teresa of Calcutta. Rosenel's mother left him there and never came back to get him. The Sisters kept him until they realized that he was getting too big to be with them.

At that point they asked me if I would take him. Given the number of kids I already had, I was not supposed to take him, but how could I say "no" to the Sisters when I know how hard

they work every day trying to save people's lives, feed the hungry, and assist the least fortunate when they are dying so they can die in peace and with dignity?



So, Rosenel is now with us. Since he had little schooling before he came here, he is in the 3rd grade at our primary school, where his favorite subjects are Kreyòl and math. He, like every Haitian boy I know of, likes soccer. His favorite food is rice, bean sauce and meat sauce (of course, he has little experience of any other kinds of food!). He has made friends easily here and counts as his best friends Shelton and Robenson. He is really a sweet boy with a big smile always on his face.

A DELIGHTFUL VISIT TO THE FORTUNÉ JEAN-LOUIS SCHOOL

Brooke Schaab, a former educator and currently a research psychologist analyzing health sector challenges in Western Africa for the US military, recently visited the Maison Fortuné school with a group from her parish, the Church of St. Thérèse, Chesapeake, Virginia.

Welcome to Mr. Lasaine's fourth-grade classroom. Mr. Lasaine stands in front of a group of 26 engaged students, immaculately dressed in a crisply ironed blue shirt. Likewise, his students are neatly attired in pressed pink-checked shirts and blue pants or skirts, the school uniform. Students sit three across, two for larger students, on a bench/desk skillfully crafted by Brother Piet Van Kampen and his apprentices at the local vocational school.

A tall boy approaches a 4x8' chalkboard and begins composing sentences in Kreyòl. His classmates watch as he struggles with his spelling. In Kreyòl, you not only need to get the letters

correct but you have to accurately place the accent marks. Students discuss the correct spelling with each other, come to agreement on the answer, and then turn their attention back to the student who continues to struggle, occasionally glancing back at the teacher. Mr. Lasaine nods at the class and they chorus their help. The sentence is quickly transcribed.



Lasaine Desir, 5th Grade Teacher

Next a slight boy literally bounces to the chalkboard, anxious to perform. Oh no--math word problems! He reads the problem, quickly writes a multiplication problem on the board, solves it, and writes down the answer. Mr. Lasaine stands quietly. The concerned student checks his work. It seems correct. He looks towards his classmates who appear uncertain. Looking back at his answer he quickly adds a descriptive word after his answer. Mr. Lasaine says, "Byen!" and the class burst into applause. The student bounces back to his seat with a broad grin. More students come to the board to perform calculations. Those who are successfully are greeted by spontaneous applause from their classmates.

Mr. Lasaine points to the tall boy who earlier struggled to compose sentences and names a song. The student quickly jumps to the front of the room and directs the class in a song. Each verse of the song adds another hand gesture. Obviously, this is a class favorite as their voices are loud and joyful.

Time for a lesson in French. Mr. Lasaine writes a letter on the board and explains how this letter is pronounced in French and how it differs from Kreyòl. He puts the newly learned phoneme in a word and asks a student to read it. This is followed by a sentence which the class reads in unison. Next a student comes to the board and writes a dictated sentence. Correct! Applause! Mr. Lasaine comes and whispers in my ear, "We are writing, 'Welcome to our visitor from the United States. We are glad that she came to visit our classroom.'" Wow! He modified his lesson on the spot and personalized it for the students to take advantage of what we in education call a "teachable moment."

What would come next? An impromptu English lesson. Mr. Lasaine wrote "yes" and "oui" as well as "no" and "non" on the board. Each time he called out "yes" the class stood up. When he said "no" they sat down. Mr. Lasaine taught the students new words in English and also provided a short activity break.

In two hours I was privileged to observe a master teacher instruct his students in composition, grammar, French, complex mathematical word problems, with a short lesson in English. He took advantage of a learning opportunity to modify the lesson to include the unexpected visitor to his classroom. His students were never bored. Rather, they were excited and engaged. They took pride in the success of their classmates.

For me, the best moment was when Mr. Lasaine came up to me and whispered in my ear, "My students are intelligent, oui?" Yes Mr. Lasaine, your students are very intelligent and they have an outstanding teacher.

A GREAT WAY TO SHARE YOUR TAX REBATE

It looks as if some of us will be getting a tax rebate within the next couple of months. If you want to share some of this "windfall" please think of the Endowment Fund of the Maison Fortuné Orphanage Foundation! This way it will be a windfall for the kids at the orphanage as well as for you. It will also be invested and consequently keep on giving into the future.

AILING TRUCK NEEDS REPLACEMENT

Unfortunately, the orphanage pick-up truck is nearing the end of its useful life, and needs to be replaced. Jean-Louis would like to get a safer vehicle for transporting the kids. The pick-up works for getting sacks of rice from the market, but it is unsafe for carrying children, especially on Haiti's very rough unpaved roads.

The Toyota utility vehicle we would like to get costs about \$40,000. The Foundation has \$5,000 set aside. St. Mark parish in Virginia Beach recently donated another \$9,200, and is committed to raising an additional \$14,000, leaving \$12,000 still needed. IF YOU CAN HELP, please check the "vehicle" box on the attached contribution form and send in your extra gift for this purpose!

ANOTHER VISITOR'S EXPERIENCE

This report comes to us from Valerie Villanueva, a junior at the College of William and Mary and a member of St. Stephen Martyr Church in Chesapeake, Virginia.

My trip to Haiti was an absolutely amazing experience. Finally being able to meet the children living at the Maison Fortuné orphanage was so exciting! I had heard wonderful things about the orphanage before my trip, but these comments paled to the experience of actually being there. During our short five-day visit, I was able to learn some Kreyòl, enough that combined with their limited English, I was able to communicate and play with the boys and become a part of their lives. It is difficult to put into words how gratifying it was to be able to share time with this small community. I feel truly privileged and I hope to visit again.

Upon my arrival, I immediately went out to meet the boys, and they began talking to me and asking me to play games with them. Equipped with a small notebook of translations and with the help from the older boys who are learning English in school, I was able to play and hold short, fun conversations with the children—even those who spoke only Kreyòl. I was extremely impressed, not only with how smart the boys are, but with their remarkable dedication to their studies. I took time to study with a few of them every day, mostly helping with English and Spanish grammar. Through this daily close interaction and observation, I realized that, despite what we Americans would consider serious limitations, these children were some of the happiest people I have ever met. They lacked iPods and Nintendo games, large malls or movie theaters, but they were reasonably satisfied with what they had. They enjoyed each other's company playing soccer with a tennis ball or gathering around a small television to watch, quite possibly for the 100th time, a videocassette of the movie *Victory* starring Sylvester Stallone. They were so content with their limited entertainment; I couldn't stop reflecting on how blessed they were to be so happy with what they have.

Another great aspect of my trip was being able to experience the Haitian culture firsthand. Spending a week living in an ordinary rural Haitian setting, without standard American comforts (such as warm water), and speaking with local citizens about their way of life, allowed me to realize how much I have taken for granted in my own life. Like many Americans, I never give much thought to the conveniences and comforts that I enjoy, but now I think twice before complaining about hardships in my life.

I am so grateful to the Lord for the chance to travel to Hinche, Haiti, and I would like to thank the Schrack family for allowing my brother Alex and me to join their family for what turned out to be one of the most memorable experiences of our lifetimes. I now view the world through a different lens.

RANDOLPH-MACON COLLEGE VISITORS

Last month a group of students and faculty from Randolph-Macon College in Ashland, Virginia, visited the orphanage. One of them shared his experiences with us.

During our January Term travel course to Haiti, we spent nine delightful days at the Maison Fortuné Orphanage. We had the opportunity to experience a variety of interesting activities, including eating excellent Haitian cuisine, taking cold showers, visiting the market and carnival, an afternoon at a waterfall, playing and feeding the children at the Azil, and attending church.



Back: Ambrose Phillips, James Richardson, Hassan Shonekan, Ben Burrell; Middle: Camille Grivet, Alexandra Sweeney, Daniel Prevot; Front: Chuck Leska

A primary purpose of our visit was to teach students at the orphanage some fundamental computing concepts using the Computer Science Unplugged (csunplugged.com) approach and materials. For five days we taught three classes each day for about one hour to about sixty students from the fifth and sixth grades and high school students. The students' enthusiasm for learning and their ability to pick up on the concepts was inspiring.

The classes were primarily taught by our students Ambrose Phillips, Hassan Shonekan, James Richardson, and Alexandra Sweeney with some teaching as well as translation into French provided by Camille Grivet and into Kreyòl by Daniel Prevot. Among the topics we covered with the students were how the computer uses the binary number system to store integers, text, and images; some fundamental algorithms performed by the computer including sorting and searching; how multiple computers can be used to solve problems by examining a sorting network; playing the "orange game" to illustrate the need for cooperation among computers when working together; and, lastly, the need for precision in giving instructions to the computer.



Teaching the binary number system

As we left to return to our homes we felt that we may well have received far more than we gave. We want to thank Brother Harry Eccles and Lefort Jean-Louis for their hospitality and friendship; they made us feel so comfortable and at home with them. We especially will miss the boys: their thirst for knowledge, enthusiastic participation in our activities, smiles and laughter, and friendship. We bring back with us memories we shall forever cherish and look forward to our next visit to Haiti.

ENDOWMENT FUND UPDATE

We are very grateful for those who have contributed to our Endowment Fund campaign, helping us move toward our \$3,000,000 goal by 2012.

Those who have contributed as of January 31 are listed on the next page.

We will soon be mailing a survey form to all of our previous supporters, and we hope that you will return that survey to us as soon as you can, enabling us to know better our community of donors.

MAISON FORTUNÉ ORPHANAGE, HINCHE, HAITI
INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP CONTRIBUTORS: 2007-2008

Listed below are those individuals & groups that contributed between July 1, 2007 to June 30, 2008 to the day-to-day operating budget (food, clothing, salaries, furniture, etc.) or to the capital budget (for building construction), through the Haitian Ministry Commission of the Diocese of Richmond. We are most grateful; the orphanage could not survive without

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The Founders of the Maison Fortuné Library contributed \$100 or more for the purchase of books & library furnishings. Our deep gratitude to each of them.

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