



# The Haitian Connection Newsletter

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## After School Program Offers New Opportunities to Children



Haitian Connection has started a new venture, Open Door After School Program. The center is open to any child who needs a safe, undisturbed place to study. The kids are quite motivated because they all want to do well in school. Water and a small snack are provided, because the children are often hungry when they get to us. This program responds to a need in the community because many children do not have a place to do homework in peace. Self-directed study is encouraged and there is also staff available to provide homework help, which most children do not have at home. In addition to school work, the children have the opportunity choose a book from our mobile library, thanks to a grant from the Illinois literacy council. The older children help the younger ones. The children are really eager to read and do this with great attention and seriousness. We also provide some arts activities and want to do more along those lines. What gives us great satisfaction is the fact that the children are coming even when they have no homework. The center staff consists of Eliasme Jean Silfin, Gerald St. Fleur and Renate Schneider.



## Mental Health Agents Learn Massage Therapy

Political unrest and daily economic difficulties are causing a lot of stress for the Haitian people. Our female mental health agents are learning massage therapy to alleviate some of that stress and allow people to breathe even if only for a limited time. The women enjoyed the course immensely, and now hope to open a massage center, where they can offer their new skills to the community. Massage is good for body, spirit and soul.



## Haitian Connection Fosters a Culture of Reading



It is well known that reading to young children is an important aspect of encouraging healthy development. Thanks to a small grant from the Illinois Reading Council, Haitian Connection has been able to acquire a collection of age-appropriate books in Creole and French to make them available to young readers. This is meant as a mobile library that can be transported anywhere there is interest. For the moment the library is housed in the Haitian Connection Center. A large



body of research has shown that children who are exposed to books do better in a wide variety of measures, including vocabulary development, cognitive abilities, academic success, and socio-emotional development. (Duursma, Augustyn & Zuckerman, 2008).



A broad consensus has emerged among pediatricians, educators, and policy makers that early reading to children has lifelong benefits. These benefits may be particularly important for children from lower socio-economic backgrounds. Many studies have shown that children in lower income families generally experience less access to printed materials in the home, and are less likely to have parents who read to them, with multiple negative consequences for their language development and success in school compared to children from higher socioeconomic class



background (Nord, Lennon & Liu, 1999; Payne, Whitehurst, & Angell, 1994). Thus, strong policy recommendations have been made in recent years that support efforts to increase lower income young children's exposure to read-aloud activities.



Children in Jérémie have little access to books, especially since the local library was destroyed by Hurricane Matthew, and has not been rebuilt. As is evident from the photos, the children are curious, and very interested in reading. It does not take them long to become absorbed in what they are reading. The more they read, the more they are asking for more books. What a pleasure and privilege it is to watch children learn to love reading!



## Weight of Silence (2013) by Janine Harrison

White Jeep parting people  
in Port-au-Prince streets  
like the Red Sea  
as we drive toward  
the mountain,  
toward air devoid of  
exhaust fume velvet curtains.  
At a stop sign I see her,  
a plastic bag seemingly filled  
with plastic bags  
perched upon her  
bandana crown  
hand atop clamped down.

We leave the mountains  
the next morning,  
a small bird taking us  
to Jérémie, rural west,  
“City of Poets.”  
We walk downhill  
from the university  
guest house  
our light coloring  
causing stares and photos.  
Before us -- an onyx goddess  
all black sheen and defined muscle  
in back-to-basics shorts and tank top  
a large blue plastic cooler  
resting effortlessly upon her head  
in the vibrating heat.  
“Ju!” she calls. Water.

Along dirt roads to the guest house,  
to the university  
we see a roughhewn wooden casket  
being carried to its resting ground,  
a Caribbean Sea beach  
garbage dump--  
soaring Christmas tree compiled

of corroded metal chairs,  
women washing laundry  
in murky river water,  
pack mules hauling  
bundles of straw  
that flank both sides.  
Women hauling  
enormous bundles of straw  
wound with cloth  
upon their heads—  
women, eyes  
the dryness of straw,  
carrying, carrying.

After a week  
of brushing teeth  
with bottled water,  
cold water showers,  
Hurricane Sandy  
and tadpole water  
collected in buckets,  
hurricane dampness  
turning our book pages  
to damp paper towels,  
tempest taking away  
our class time,  
tucking away  
students' shacks  
within its fury,  
never to return them,  
we ride to the airport.  
An old woman walks  
with a wooden table  
complete with wares  
upon her head,  
from nowhere to little more,  
smaller woman behind,  
chair hoisted upon her own.

Janine's book **The Weight of Silence** will be published in September and she has graciously designated all the proceeds to go to Haitian Connection.

## Haiti

**Come and see.... The richness and beauty of Haiti.**



Discover its culture and learn of the tremendous courage of the Haitian people.

The Haitian American Museum in Chicago and Haitian Connection are organizing a trip to Haiti from **June 18 to June 26, 2019**

We will be traveling from Port au Prince to Jeremie, Camp Perrin, and Cazale, experiencing both the urban and rural landscape.

Total cost of the trip will be **\$1,500.00** (excluding roundtrip airfare from the US to Port au Prince.)

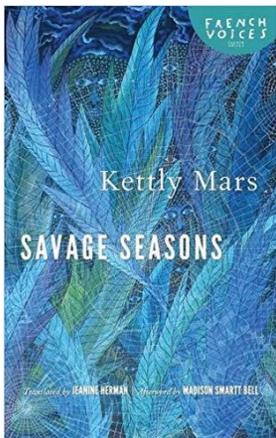
Tour guides will be Elsie Hernandez of the Haitian American Museum and Renate Schneider of Haitian Connection (with 21 years of experience in Haiti).

For further information and a detailed itinerary contact Elsie at HAMOC at [info@hamoc.org](mailto:info@hamoc.org) or 773/213-1869

Or Renate at Haitian Connection at [haitianconnection@gmail.com](mailto:haitianconnection@gmail.com) or 312/493-3719



### Book Corner



**Savage Seasons by Kettly Mars, 2015: University of Nebraska Press; Translation edition.**

Port-au-Prince, the 1960s: Baby Doc Duvalier and his militia are systematically eliminating opponents to the regime. Daniel Leroy, editor in chief of the opposition newspaper, has just been arrested. To find out what has become of him, his wife, Nirvah, visits Raoul Vincent, secretary of state at the Office of Public Safety. This fearsome head of the secret police is instantly smitten, and to ensure her husband's survival and protect her family, Nirvah submits to the official's desires. Becoming the mistress of a strongman in the regime is not without its benefits. Still, she has to endure her neighbors' inquisitive looks and the silent questions of her own children.

Kettly Mars's *Savage Seasons* describes a pivotal and painful period in Haitian history by weaving together two stories: the personal story of Nirvah and her family and the universal story of Duvalier's dictatorial regime and its abuses.

March 20, 2019

## **A Nation Unhinged**

Dear Friends and supporters of Haitian Connection,  
Haiti quickly disappeared from the news cycle, and for most of you it has just been a blimp. But for us in Haiti, nothing has changed, in fact we continue on our downward spiral. Prices are still going up, and the Haitian Gourdes is again 81.5 Gourdes to the Dollar (it had gone down for a few days). In February 2016, the exchange rate was 63.9 to one dollar. Since January 2016 prices have gone up 34 %. In addition, at least here in the Grand'Anse we have had such a dry spell that farmers are losing everything from this year's planting season. A friend stopped by my house yesterday and he was crying because of what he had witnessed in the country side. He is afraid we might see real famine.

In the meantime, not a word from the government. Actually, as I am writing this, Haiti does not have a government, since the lower chamber just passed a vote of no confidence for the Prime Minister. The president and the Prime Minister have been fighting for some months now. Of course, no word about the situation that the Haitian people live under. I get the sense that the politicians are all getting their affairs in order, just in case they will need to leave the country.

The instability began with a failed electoral process and fragile transitional government back in 2015/2016 as the president was elected with less than 20% turnout. Fast forward to July 2018, a nationwide protest across Haiti ensued against the PetroCaribe corruption scandal with Venezuelan oil money appropriated for Haiti. The end of Venezuelan oil has contributed to a fuel crisis which only worsened with exclusive contracts with companies who refuse to deliver new shipments when Haiti cannot pay their outstanding debts to the tune of \$35 million.

We now have had protests in July, in November, in February, and more scheduled for March 29, which is the anniversary of the constitution.

Given all this there is a general unease felt by everyone. This unease is beyond personal – a real force shaking everything at the roots. It is the desperate soul of a nation wracked in pain. Given all this, Haitian Connection stands in deep solidarity with the Haitian people. We will continue our work. While it may be a drop in the in the bucket, the bucket we fall in is a universe to someone, and opens ours to theirs too. We salute the courage of the Haitian people who despite great hardship continue to conduct their daily lives with dignity.

Best,  
Renate



# 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 97 women and their children; a small microcredit program is providing economic opportunity for women in 2 communities; a potable water initiative is giving healthy water to one thousand families; and local school teachers have received training in the Child-to-Child method. In 2016 Haitian Connection trained four facilitators in Divergent Thinking, and now Haitian Connection through its Divergent Thinking Institute is providing Divergent Thinking seminars all over Haiti.

Several new initiatives have been launched in 2017 such as a Language Institute to teach foreign languages to children and adults as well as provide training in pedagogy and methodology in the teaching of foreign languages.

An additional Continuing Education Institute has also been developed to provide continuing education in a variety of fields through seminars and conferences.

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. For 7 years Haitian Connection has also worked to strengthen the University of the Nouvelle Grand'Anse by partnering with professionals in the US and other countries.

## 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.

The cost of building a home for a woman and her family in Jérémie is \$2,000. The houses have three rooms and a latrine. You could contribute to a house, or even get your church/organization to sponsor a whole house. After Hurricane Matthew, this has become a priority for people in the region.

Scholarships for needy students from elementary to secondary schools.

Microcredit group: contributions accepted.

Mental Health Program: contributions to mental health center accepted (total cost for one year \$10,000)

Support for training programs in Divergent Thinking, mental health, Child-to-Child, and continuing education. For every program for 25 people we provide a meal for all participants and give the facilitators a stipend (about \$500 per training).

To support our projects financially, donate online by visiting our website at: [www.HaitianConnection.org](http://www.HaitianConnection.org)

If you would prefer to send a donation by mail, please address checks to: **Haitian Connection**

**5300 South Shore Drive # 27**

**Chicago, IL 60615**

When you order from Amazon.com, giving to Haitian Connection is easy! Simply go to <https://smile.amazon.com/> to get started!

## Get Involved

We are looking for volunteers: English teachers, educators, specialists in various fields to give short conferences or seminars.

To volunteer, contact **Renate Schneider** at [haitianconnection@gmail.com](mailto:haitianconnection@gmail.com) or by phone at **312/493-3719**; in Haiti: **011/509/3463-7532**

