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Editor: Dr. Jean-Claude Dutès

Contributors:

Margareth Corkery
Dr. Soledad Nelson

Layout Editor: Maggy Moise-Thomas

Zanmi Detroit is published by the Haitian Network Group of Detroit, whose mission is to promote Haitian culture and provide a forum for Haitians and friends to network.

Please e-mail questions or comments to
Info@
[haitiannetworkdetroit.org](mailto:info@haitiannetworkdetroit.org)

Zanmi Detroit
Haitian Network Group of Detroit
60 East Milwaukee
PO Box 2106
Detroit, MI 48202

Zanmi Detroit

FLORIDA IS NOT COOL, MICHIGAN ROCKS !



Summer is almost over!

For us here in Florida, we wish it would speed up its exit.

At time like this, many of us down here actually miss a cold crisp sunny Fall day. I know, I do. As I recall it now, Spring, Summer and Fall in Michigan are so agreeable and so kind. Perhaps, I will become a snow bird, head north on the dawn of May.

It is incredibly hot and humid here right now. So a mental trip to Michigan is not only just an escape, it is a mental hygiene necessity, just like a fresco with coconut syrup on a hot day in Haiti. Just the thought of it is like having my body encased in a cool armor that buffers and shields the hellish heat and stuporous humidity.

I have had enough, with just a little under two years here. On my way, I am leaving, heading to Farmington, Michigan.

Yes, oh yes, I am going to Bèl Bagay Lakay. Just hope that I won't be late. Not much time left. I got to be there by Friday July 28 so that I can be sure to be at the festival the next day, Saturday July 29 at 6 pm.

No, I don't want to miss a thing. I am planning to be there at 5 pm instead. There is nothing more comical, on the surface, than to see Maggy strolling in like a "bourik chajé" multi-tasking, going in twelve directions at once, and getting everything done. And Dr. Nelson, like the school principal making sure that all "t's" are crossed and all "i's" dotted. And, not to forget Shirley, our president, ever so cool and serene, projecting, perhaps knowing that it all will go as planned. Thanks, mainly to these

three tireless "Marie Jeannes," who do not take "No" for an answer, their vision, drive and resourcefulness, we are having another Bel Bagay Lakay, the art festival where Haitian artists and artisans offer us glimpses into their talents and the opportunity to enhance our living space.

Good bye, Florida. I have a date with Michigan.

"Florida, you will never understand: ce vie chodie ya ki gen tout charm lan" or in other words "it is the tried pot that knows how to blend the flavors.

Hello Michigan, see you later Florida!

"Bel Bagay Lakay, men mwen." Here I come.

The Editor,
Dr. Jean-Claude Dutès ■

ABOUT THIS ISSUE

This issue is centered on the festival and on the ever-expanding diaspora. **Bel Bagay Lakay is coming back to Farmington, Michigan on Saturday and Sunday July 29 and 30.** HINGD is eagerly looking forward to greeting you again this year.

In the following pages, you will read about your friends, children and relatives who have moved away from Michigan for various reasons. It is refreshing to learn how well they are doing professionally and that they are in excellent health. Continuing to read, you will learn about the Haitian born playwright that took Detroit by storm, meet our graduates and come across another reflective piece in the literary section.

As life would have it, for death is part of the life cycle, you will read about those who have touched our lives and forever left us their memories for comfort and solace. To their families, we offer our deepest sympathy and condolences. ■

BÈL BAGAY LAKAY 2017

Metro Detroit are you ready for Bèl Bagay Lakay 2017?



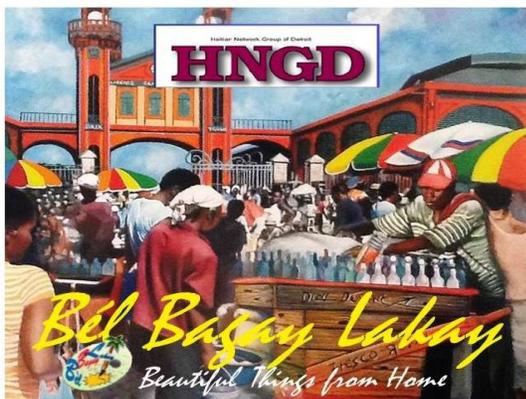
Well the Haitian Network 2017 Bel Bagay Lakay (Beautiful Things from Home) Haitian Art and Craft Festival is almost here. The biennial 2-day outdoor Haitian art and Crafts festival will take place on **July 29 and 30 2017 at the Sundquist Pavilion and Riley Park in Downtown Farmington.**

The event offers an opportunity to Haitian artists and artisans from the US and abroad to showcase their works. Several well-known artists will participate in this year's event. As you may know, the last festival was very well received. Having learned from the experience, you can rest assure that this well-anticipated encore presentation will be even better.

In case you missed the last one, the program, which is family oriented, will include fun activities for children and adults. There will be a kite making and drum lessons for children and several Haitian musical groups will perform in the evenings. Of course, the festival would not be complete without the delicious Haitian Cuisine: authentic Haitian food will be available for purchase.

As you can imagine, organizing an event of this magnitude requires a great deal of resources. The Haitian Network has been awarded a Minigrant by the Michigan Council for Arts and Cultural affairs in support of this year's festival. Royal Caribbean has agreed to be an elite sponsor of the project and we continue to host fundraising activities in support of the festival. Grateful for the kindness that some of you have showed us so far, we invite you to visit our website www.haitiannetworkdetroit.org or our Facebook for more information.

By Dr. Soledad Nelson ■



The Haitian Network Group Of Detroit Presents
A HAITIAN ART & CRAFTS FESTIVAL
July 29, 2017 - July 30, 2017
Riley Park & Sundquist Pavilion | Grand River Ave., Downtown | Farmington, MI

This activity is supported by the Michigan Council for Arts & Cultural Affairs Minigrant Program, administered by CultureSource.

WHERE ARE THEY NOW ?



DHALIA BALMIR made a decision in 2005 to leave Detroit and head for San Diego, California. As a long-time resident of the Detroit area and part of the metro-Detroit Haitian community, looking back, she says it's one of the best decisions she's made in her life. Although risky, she sold her home and moved herself and her 2



children, Soleil and Oren to the west coast. While in San Diego, she was recruited into one of the largest employers in San Diego, Qualcomm Technologies, a wireless communications tech company. Dhalia fell in love with the weather, the coast, mountains and deserts of southern California. Life has been pretty good. It's a great place to live and she's built a strong network of friends who she considers an extension of her family. Not to mention, she is living life and having so much fun! Last year she celebrated her 10th year at Qualcomm and her 11th year since she moved. Oren is now 12 years and in middle school and Soleil is at Arizona State University. For Dhalia, San Diego is now home. ■



CLAUDIA CHARLES



Graduated from Eastern Kentucky University with BS in forensic chemistry. From there, moved to Florida in 2004, then to Kalamazoo in 2005 then to Raleigh NC in 2008 where I currently reside. I have done work in environmental chemistry, worked with pharmaceutical companies looking for drug approval by FDA, and finally a control drug analyst. Have

traveled to Europe and some parts of the Caribbean. Artistically, I have worked as a portrait photographer for senior pictures, maternity pictures, engagement pictures, etc. But my true passion is for interior design and decorating, and am currently embarking on entrepreneurship in that field in Raleigh NC. ■



SASHA COMPERE

After leaving Michigan I moved to New York for my first job, working in Music Television Original Development at MTV Networks and then moving on to work on a Music Countdown special on Fuse Networks, which is part of MGM. I then moved to Los Angeles and have lived here for the past six years. I worked my way up starting at smaller production offices, eventually ended up at a position at NBC working in digital marketing, and



that job let me to where I am now, working for the queen Oprah Winfrey! I work as a Project Manager in Integrated Marketing at the Oprah Winfrey Network and have enjoyed learning so much about the business of television, marketing, and creating entertaining and inspiring content that truly relates to my community. Living in Los Angeles is hard work but definitely has been an amazing experience. I live a couple miles from beach, the weather is beautiful, the people are ambitious and driven, and the food is amazing (my favorite part). I am proud of where I came from and grateful for my parents who taught me that hard work can get you far in life! . ■

MYLLA DANJOU-ALSOBROOKS

I moved back to the Washington DC area in 2004 where I joined the Smithsonian Buying Team as a jewelry buyer for 18 museums. After 4+years, I left Smithsonian and joined a company called Fire & Ice in Timonium, Maryland as a head jewelry buyer where I sourced one-of-a-kind pieces for 12 stores. Currently, I am working as a Regional Area Manager overseeing three jewelry stores.



On a more personal note, I married the love of my life Steven Tracy Alsobrooks in June 2013, and currently live in Virginia. I do have a special place in my heart for Detroit for a number of reasons. Most importantly, my loving Grand-mother Claire and Sister Gise Danjou still live in the area. In addition, I was a member of HNGD where I met some wonderful Haitian brothers and sisters with whom I have developed a lifetime friendship. I hope to catch up soon! ■

DR. JIMS JEAN-JACQUES

Tanya & Jim Jean-Jacques

The Haitian Network Group of Detroit recently reconnected with the Jean-Jacques family. Upon completion of his cardiology fellowship at Garden City Hospital, Dr. Jims Jean-Jacques moved to Rochester, NY with his family where he was awarded a fellowship in Heart Failure at Strong Memorial Hospital. His wife Tania, a registered nurse, was able to maintain her telecommuting position as a Utilization Review RN for United Health Care.



(By Dr. Marie Soledad Nelson) ■

RAYMOND LAURIN

Following Raymond's retirement from ERIM in 2000, we decided that 33 years of the harsh Michigan winter were just about enough and moved to Sarasota, Florida, one hour South of Tampa. With its several miles of white sandy beaches, and its spectacular sunsets, Sarasota is really one of the nicest

retirement places in Florida. Turtle Rock, our community offers a number of amenities, among them small lakes teeming with wildlife, miles of hiking trails and the proximity of the Legacy Trail, a 24 mile paved bike trail that runs all the way to Venice.



Unfortunately with our declining health, we felt that it was more appropriate for us to be closer to Diane whose Capital Women Care Clinic has been associated with the Shady Grove Hospital in Rockville, Maryland since her graduation from Medical School. Although that we still miss Sarasota and its gorgeous weather, we are enjoying the proximity of relatives and close friends and the many attractions the Washington Metropolitan Area has to offer. The Cherry Blossom festival in particular which starts in a few days is a nationally known event that attracts people from all over the world.

The King Farm Community where we live is a successful application of the new concept of suburbia with super markets, Bank, commercial facilities and community parks within walking distance. ■

RON AND ANA MOISE



Hi, I am Ron. My wife, Ana, and I are former residents of Canton, Michigan who have recently relocated to Florida. We have raised 4 children, two of whom are biological siblings. They are Ronald Gérard, Jeanine Tamika, Dajon and Jalesa. I am a Haitian born naturalized American

citizen, while my wife is a Chicago born Puerto Rican. Even though our children, granddaughter Josana and my mom, Ms. Jeanine Etienne, still live in Michigan, we have no regrets about our relocation to the sunshine state. After the record setting snow falls of 2012-2013 we knew right then we had to relocate to some place warm. When offered a job in Orlando, I did not hesitate to accept the offer. After 37 years of service to Delta Airline, I retired this past February. Taking advantage of my flying benefits, Ana and I often return to Michigan on some holidays and for special occasions.

We live close to Disney World. So, whenever our granddaughter Josana, who just turned 3, comes for visits, we love taking her to see the princesses. Her favorite is Princess Tiana, the very first black Princess at Disney. We are only an hour or two from some of the finest beaches in the country: Clearwater Beach, Coco Beach, Daytona Beach and New Smyrna Beach to name a few. We are enjoying Haitian and Latin American cuisines more than ever because of their easy access.

We love Michigan and our family and many of our close friends live there, but Florida is now our home. We have no regrets for moving here, we fervently hope the rest of our loved ones will follow soon.

Come to Florida, "Lakay mwen sé lakay ou"... "mi casa es tu casa". One love .■

? SOLEDAD NELSON

After practicing Podiatric medicine and Surgery in the Metro Detroit area for several years, Haitian Network Group of Detroit co-founder and past president Dr. Marie Soledad Nelson finally realized her dream of living in sunny Florida. She accepted a position with the Gulf Coast Veterans Health Care Systems and resides in Pensacola, Florida. ■



? GUY & JULIENE OCCIDENT

Hello from Parkland, FL..It has been more than a year since we moved out of Michigan. Our experience and our interaction with the Haitian community, although small, have been exceptional. We found a dynamic group of new friends who accepted us with open arms. I remember that first get-together Maggy organized for us at her house. It was in the middle of the winter. The back roads were covered with snow and patches of ice were shiny and slippery. It was our first winter in Michigan, quite different indeed from the mild one we were used to in Richmond where the cold wave never lasts more than a week. It was freezing outside. However the laughter, the good food and camaraderie were more than enough to warm our bodies and spirits. It was a fun evening. In the end, we will remember our Michigan stay and we will keep with us the fond memories of the friendships made and a thriving Haitian community.

Since we moved to Florida, life has not changed much for Julene. She continues to work from home, maybe not for much longer. There is plenty of warm sunshine here and we must admit we do not miss the weather in Michigan. We will say though that we will take a snow storm any time over a hurricane. In the morning, before her day starts, she does usually take long walks in the neighborhood, enjoying the scenery, the palm trees and the blossoming flowers, always changing throughout the year.

On my side, life has changed tremendously. I left behind the hectic schedule, the long daily commute to and from work, the 18-hour work day, weekends included. I remember my last Christmas at work, exhausted and sleepless as I was facing a deadline for the first week of January. It was overbearing and draining. I don't miss those days a bit. The past year, I was able to enjoy my free time, playing tennis a few times a week in the morning or indulging in various topics of interest to me. Whenever Julene's schedule allows, we have been taking short trips to visit our sons in Richmond and Raleigh or in New York to visit her mother and to spend some joyful time with the grandchildren. We are the proud grandparents of a beautiful 4-year old girl and a charming 1-year boy.

Last September, we took a 12-day trip to Europe where we spent some time in Greece and in Paris. The photo below was taken at the Greek Island



of Santorini. Hopefully, if our schedule permits, we will take a trip to Michigan this summer. Meanwhile, let us know if you have the chance the visit the Ft Lauderdale – Boca Raton area. We would love to see you again. All the best to you, until next time... Guy & Julene Occident ■

? RALPH PIERRE

Ralph is an Area Supervisor at Tracerco Ltd which is a division of Johnson Matthey, a British multinational specialty chemicals and sustainable technologies company. He's been at this company in Philadelphia area for over 10 years (left Michigan in Oct 2006) travels throughout the country as well as Trinidad for work. On his off time, Ralph loves attending video game conventions, playing games on his Xbox and PS4, playing pool with friends and trying new restaurants and bars in the City of Brotherly Love . ■



? RÉJANE PIERRE

After leaving Michigan in 2002 and working for organizations that took her to Florida, New York, Chicago, Washington D.C., and Los Angeles, Réjane Pierre is now back in Chicago, currently working as Advancement Services Manager at High Jump, a nonprofit and educational program housed in the Latin School of Chicago that services students from families with limited financial resources. When she's not hard at work, Réjane enjoys traveling (the most recent trip being to Denmark and Germany this past December), website blogging about comics, Animé, film, and TV, and attending as many comic conventions in costume as she possibly can! ■



? CASSANDRE PIERRE JOSEPH

Cassandre Pierre Joseph is the daughter of Pierrot and Nicole Joseph and big sister to Pierrot Jr. She is the Director for Workforce Retention Strategies at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York. She volunteers as the advisor to the Cornell University Haitian Students Association and the Cornell University African Dance Repertoire. She has twice been awarded the Outstanding Advisor Award for her exceptional commitment to students. She is one of the founding members of Caribblthacans, a social organization for West Indians and people of Caribbean descent living in the Ithaca area. She is also an active member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated. Cassandre continues to live the sassy life of a Port-au-Princesse! ■



DETROIT '67

By Margareth Corkery

In May 2016, the acclaimed playwright, Dominique Morisseau, presented her masterpiece, *Detroit '67* at the City Theater in Midtown Detroit. ***Detroit '67*** explores an unforgettable moment in the history of the city of Detroit. Throughout the play the characters are confronted with racial tension and economic instability. ***Detroit '67*** is grounded in historical understanding that resonates with the pressing issues that we face today. Morisseau began writing plays in college and since then she has earned numerous awards and honors. Her opus includes: *The Blackness Blues: Time to Change the Tune*, *A Sister's Story*. After college, she received a Playwright of New York fellowship at the [Lark Play Development Center](#). She has also worked as a Teaching Artist with [City University of New York's](#) Creative Arts Team. Dominique was on the list of Top 20 Most Produced Playwrights in America for the 2015-16 Season. *Detroit '67* is the first part of a 3 play cycle, entitled "*The Detroit Projects*. The other two plays are *Paradise Blue* and *Skeleton Crew*.



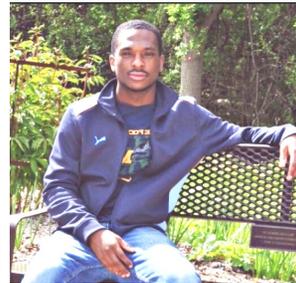
Dominique, the daughter of Linda and Frantz Morisseau is a die-hard Detroit; she is also very proud of her Haitian roots. All her life she has been influenced by her father and her grandmother, Edith Morisseau, who emigrated from Haiti in the 1970's; seemingly so effortlessly, Dominique has learned to embrace the cultural duality that surrounded her and become the well-rounded young woman that she is today.

On May 14, 2016 with the assistance of her cousin, Janny Magloire Milton, HNGD hosted a *Detroit '67* Dinner-Theater outing. On all accounts, this event was a real success! The evening started at the Gaelic League in Cork Town with a delicious Haitian-inspired dinner prepared by Chef Christian Noël; then the group of over 30 members of our community headed for the Detroit Public Theater for the pièce de resistance: *Detroit '67*. All in attendance concurred with the critics...The play was phenomenal! Dominique is scheduled to return to the Detroit Public Theater with another play. *Skeleton Crew* will be featured from September 28 to October 29, 2017. Stay tuned for the next HNGD sponsored dinner-theater outing! Nou pa ka pa la! (We just have to be there!).

■

MEET THE GRADUATES

Besides ensuring our physical and emotional survival, the second most important contribution parents make to the lives of their children is to provide them with best education their means allow. With an education we are always in a position to turn luck into an opportunity for durable achievement of any kind. In a tribute to both parents and their remarkable children, we are happy to recognize the graduates for their academic and /or professional achievements. ■



BECEL DUBREUZE III

I'm 17 years old, graduated from West Bloomfield High School. I'm now moving on forward to study Mechanical Engineering at Oakland University. ■

TATIANA DUBREUZE

I am 21 years old and a recent graduate of Oakwood University, located in Huntsville, Alabama, with a Bachelor's degree in Biology. My immediate plan is to start a Masters in Pharmaceutical Science with an emphasis in Cosmetic Chemistry in January 2018. After I obtain my degree, I plan on going to medical school to become a dermatologist. ■



JALESA MOISE

Jalesa R Moise is an American born Haitian-Puerto Rican student at Wayne State University. She is a Pisces, a member of Sigma Lambda Gamma sorority who earned her bachelor's degree in social work this coming June. She has also been accepted in the master's program at Wayne State University. Athletically gifted, she is a former AAU basketball and soccer standout and was the first freshmen ever to start a game on the varsity basketball team at Plymouth High School. Caring and compassionate, Jalesa volunteers to work with under privileged children in Detroit and Hamtramck communities. With a diverse cultural heritage, she is the daughter of Ana Moise from Puerto Rico and Ron Moise from Haiti. Her siblings are Jeanine Tamika, Ronald Gerard and Dajon. Her grandmother, a longtime resident of Michigan and recently retired registered nurse at Lakeland Center, is Haitian born Ms. Jelena Moise Etienne. ■



IN MEMORIAM



LYONEL CLAUDE JEAN-PIERRE

Lyonel Claude Jean-Pierre was one of 7 children born to the late Guérin Jean-Pierre and Elucia Exumé Jean-Pierre of Port-au-Prince, Haiti. The always smiling and jovial Lyonel was born on May 11, 1940 and transitioned from life on September 27, 2016, with his wife Jacqueline holding his hand and speaking softly to him, while their two daughters, Jennifer and Claudia, said their last goodbyes on the phone. Lyonel or the "Mayor" as he was affectionately known, received his education in Haiti. After a 37 year tenure at General Motors in Lansing, MI, Lyonel retired from the cold state of Michigan and moved to sunny Florida. Throughout the years he happily committed himself to his all children's extra-curricular activities, which includes attending the various tournaments their son played in at Lansing Catholic Central. Lyonel's devotion to his family was unparalleled. Although he left Michigan many year ago, those in the Haitian Community who knew him will miss him dearly. We extend our heartfelt condolences to his whole family and particularly his family members in Michigan: his daughter Claudia, sister Rose Marie and brother-in-law Dr. Serge Jean-Louis and nephews Nadine and Emmanuel Compère. ■



SHAHIDA MICHELLE DANIER

Shahida Michelle Danier was born on December 29, 1975. A proud Detroiter, she graduated from Cass Technical High School, obtained her Bachelor's degree from Columbia University in New York, and received her Doctor of Medicine's degree from Wayne State University. Dr. Danier joined the Reynolds Association Group as a partner where she remained for more than 10 years. In that capacity, she continued her commitment to serving her city as an Interventional Radiologist at Harper Hospital and an Assistant Professor at Wayne State University Medical School. In addition to her work, she was involved in the community through service and philanthropy. Most notably she served as editor-in-chief of the Haitian Network Group of Detroit newsletter and supported of the Rosa Parks Scholarship Foundation, American Diabetes Association, and UNICEF. Known to those closest to her as Shy, she was a beloved daughter, a caring wife, a won-

derful mother and a loyal friend. Shy was the embodiment of the female lead characters in the movies and TV shows she loved: strong, beautiful, intelligent, a tough competitor, and a trusted ally. And at the end, she waged a courageous and heroic battle against cancer, passing away on March 8, 2017. Shy will live on through the lives she touched at work, in the community and through her time with family and friends. No one will forget her infectious laugh and joie de vivre. She is survived by her son Aias Yves Danier, her husband Rosario Danier, and her parents Stella Crews and Michael Carethers. Shy will be missed for she was someone special who meant more than words can say. ■



JACQUES PIERRE-LOUIS

"A great soul serves everyone all the time. A great soul never dies. It brings us together again and again." – Maya Angelou

A native of Haiti and a long time Detroiter, Mr. Jacques Pierre-Louis passed away on December 17, 2016 in Farmington Hills, Michigan.

Our thoughts and prayers are with the Pierre-Louis family, especially his wife, Rolande, and children and their spouses: Michael, Chantal, Lauren, Janette and Fifine.

Yves Josepf Deriveau ■





In this section, the public is invited to showcase their literary talent by submitting short stories, plays, poems and essays on topics dealing with Haiti or Haitian experiences. Two HNGD members have decided to break the ice and be the first ones to take the plunge.

LOVE LIVES THERE



She is lovingly called Chika. She is a feisty 7 year-old. There stops the commonality with most little girls that age. In her short life Chika has endured more than the majority of us will experience in a life-time. For you see, Chika was born in the midst of turmoil, three days before the 2010 earthquake that killed and injured hundreds of thousands in Haiti. A few years later, her biological mother passed away; Chika and her siblings remained with her father until her godmother, Erzulia, started caring for her. Shortly after, Chika was taken in by the Have Faith Mission in Delmas (Haiti). Chika quickly adjusted to her new life and made friends among her peers. The staff at the orphanage remembers her as being endearing, but feisty and full of energy.

If this were a made for TV movie or one of the princess stories that she loves so much, Chika would have grown-up and lived happily ever after. Sadly, the reality is much less idyllic. A little over two years ago, the vivacious and seemingly healthy little girl started experiencing some health issues. Luckily, Mitch Albom the force behind the Have Faith Haiti Mission, swiftly intervened and brought Chika to the US to allow her the opportunity to have the best of care. Once she arrived in Michigan in May 2015, Chika was diagnosed with DIPG brain tumor, a condition that would have cut her young life short in a matter of months if she had remained in Haiti. Thanks to Mitch and his wife Janine, Chika is still with us fighting with all her might to get back what was so unfairly taken from her. In the process, with the hope that the progress of the illness could be halted and that she could be cured, this resilient 7-year old has been

poked, probed, cut open, administered enough drugs to open up her own pharmacy, and so much more...

Chika's story could make the most cynical person shed tears, yet in the midst of this tragedy there is a reason to smile. Chika is surrounded with so much love, care and attention that I have no doubt it makes her ordeal more tolerable. With Mitch and Janine she has been able to experience what it's like to have two loving parents dedicated to making her happy and giving her the quality of life that she deserves. From the get go, they have been fighting tooth and nails to help her recover. With the help of their close friends and family members, this admirable couple has put their life on hold to keep vigil around Chika 24 hours a day and ensure that she is never alone and that all her needs are met. Kathleen, Patricia, Patty, Anne Marie and Connie, to name a few, are pretty much camping out in their house so that Chika gets her daily dose of love and care.

This special little girl has brought a lot of people together; people whose path would have never crossed otherwise. I, for one, am one of them. Almost 2 years ago, I met Mark Mendelsohn who travels back and forth between Michigan and Haiti to help run the Have Faith Haiti Mission. As anyone who knows me will tell you, I love to cook. For me it is the best way to show care and affection; I truly believe that a meal cooked with love has curative powers and can bring people together. Naturally, upon hearing Chika's story, I offered to prepare her a Haitian Meal. Mark informed me that rice and beans and chicken with gravy were her favorite dishes; I obliged and so began my story with Chika... My son Andrew and I have visited her and her new "family" a number of times. For the past couple of months she has been bedridden and I have witnessed first-hand Mitch's and Janine's dedication to her. Their whole life revolves around Chika and they will turn down any en-



gagement or invitation if they feel that it is critical for them to be by her side. So many times I have seen Mitch come home after work, not as Mitch Albom the celebrity, the successful radio talk show host, the famous sport commentator or the bestselling author, but as a father genuinely concerned about his ill child. I have witnessed this ritual over and over when he arrives home after his radio show: he puts his bag down, greets his wife with a peck on the cheek, he heads straight to Chika's bed, gives her a kiss on the forehead, whispers a few words to her, he requests a full account of how she has been doing since he left home for work, then he takes over and starts tending to her needs. Once I asked him why he and Janine were so dedicated to Chika and going over and beyond the call of duty. He looked at me in the eyes and simply replied "She should expect nothing less from us". Some would say, he is in charge of the Mission, he brought her here and should therefore do everything to help her. While I do not discount that fact, what Janine and Mitch have given to Chika comes from somewhere very deep in their hearts. Yes, it should be expected that they do everything possible to help her, but not to the extent they have done it! They could have easily placed her in a facility where she would have received the best of care. Instead, they chose to open their home and their hearts to Chika, made her a full-fledged member of the Albom family and allowed her to experience all the perks that come with it. The best part of Chika's adventure with her new family is that they gave her something even more precious: the love, attention and care any child should receive from loving parents. All the while, Mitch and Janine have never attempted to usurp her biological parents' place in Chika's heart. In an effort to keep her mother's memory alive, they have gone extra lengths to collect stories about her and even flew her godmother Erzulia from Haiti so that she could spend time with Chika and recount anecdotes about her mother when she was alive.

Chika is not the only one who benefits from that kind of love. There are about forty of our young compatriots at the Have Faith Haiti Mission who have gained from the Albom's philanthropic activities. The kids affectionately refer to them as Miss Janine and Mr. Mitch, and they in turn know each child's name and remember every quirky detail about

each of them. Needless to say that they always look forward to Mr. Mitch's monthly visit that brings presents and fresh news about Chika. "Why?" I wondered again and again for many months about Mitch's and Janine's unwavering dedication to these children. They are not Haitians and therefore, not morally obligated to help the less-fortunate back home. Yet, here they are with Chika and the children at the Mission that is affording them exceptional quality of life and the best education they could have ever hoped for. Eventually, I gave up trying to understand and accepted the fact that they are just caring and loving people. After the earthquake they saw the plight of our people and decided to lend a hand to the most vulnerable members of the population... And out of all this, Chika is the biggest winner. For that, I will always be grateful to Mitch and Janine. The thought of my next visit to a certain house perched on a little hill in Franklin, always warms my heart and brings a smile to my face, as I know for a fact that love lives there ... And Chika is getting it all!

Maggy Corkery, March 12, 2017

Addendum-

Sadly, Medjerda "Chika" Jeune passed away on April 7, 2017 after a feisty battle against DIPG. She died peacefully surrounded by her parents Mitch and Janine and the people who tirelessly cared for her during her illness. Chika always longed to go back home. Mitch and Janine made sure that her final resting place was in Haiti, in a beautiful spot in Parc du Souvenir. Chika will be missed by all who knew her, but her memory will never fade away for she has left an indelible mark in our hearts. ■



Welcome to a New Year

Thursday, January 1, 2015

Huntington Woods

9:38PM

The first day of the year. The first day of the beginning of a new cycle: joy, abundance, peace, prosperity, and self-realization, I so declare. It does not matter who comes along on the ride with me, I am enjoying the ride. I am living it in gratitude, respect and amazement at the fact that I am now whole and should strive every day to remain whole as I am moving forward from healing to manifestation.

Although, the first day of the year was not exactly as envisioned: it did not have the quality and luminosity of Christmas. A little of loneliness was lurking around the edges, although, the remembrance that the luxury of a day such as this one will not return any time soon kept it a bay. The luxury of time stopping to let laziness reign supreme with no associated guilt or shame.

I just finished the latest book by Chimamanda Adichie and it made me marvel at the ability of some people to cause others to dream just by the way they weave their words in such a savant and imaginative way and the way they make it seem so effortless. I know it is not without efforts. My words tonight are a little stiff, almost like I do not know what I should write about, but want to write anyways. I am all over the place.

JM just sent me a text wishing me thousands of blessings for the New Year. I told him about the new home. I know he will be pleased and hopefully, he will worry less about me. Christelle is in East Lansing staying the night at the Scott's house and I know that she will have a good time with Mable, Kevin and daughters. It will feel like the good old days for her and she will feel the warm hospitality of a loving family. Sometimes, I can feel that she misses it and that she loves going to the Larkins, the Scotts, etc... because of the family unit: the mom, the dad and the kids. It feels to her that things are still the same or more normal as she said it once. What is normal? She will learn as she grows up that normal is redefined every day, based on people, circumstances, and the times. She will learn and realize that love given and received is the only thing to insist upon and when one cannot find it from others, one gives it to self. Self-love, it is necessary as breathing because at one time or another others' love will come lacking and only in the surety that one is important and worthy of love, that one will find the strength and fortitude to keep on going on this journey and make every day the first day of a new cycle: joy, abundance, peace, prosperity and self-realization.

Regine ■

Thank You! Merci! Mèsi!



Corkery Appraisal Services LLC

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