

'He's a king [in Haiti]. When he leaves, people cry.' JOHN BROWN, REFERRING TO HIS FRIEND JEAN ELOI

He brings aid, hope to Haiti village

BY MICHAEL EASTERBROOK
STAFF WRITER

Born and raised in the Western Hemisphere's poorest country, Jean Eloi is not easily

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shocked. But one image disturbs the Cary resident every time he returns to his native Haiti: children much younger than his own rapping on his car window for coins in the sweltering streets of Port-au-Prince.

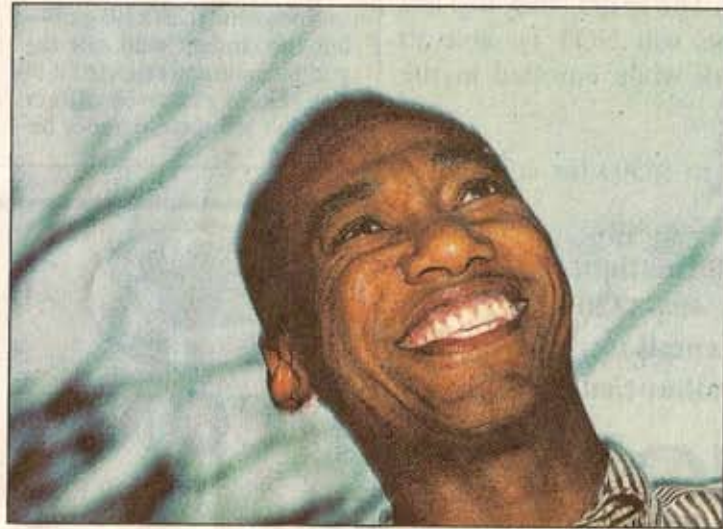
"That hurts," says Eloi, 41, who has two teenage daughters. "They shouldn't be in that situation."

Eloi (pronounced eh-LWAH), fears the recent ouster of former

President Jean-Bertrand Aristide will prolong Haiti's misery. Aristide, who has been accused by opponents of corruption and human rights violations, fled the country Feb. 29 as rebels approached the capital.

But Eloi, a biochemist who once dreamed of becoming a doctor, gave up waiting for politicians to fix Haiti's problems long ago. When he was 12, he began teaching reading, writing and arithmetic to children who weren't able to attend school in his birthplace of Zorangé. Then in 1999, he formed the Hope for Haiti Foundation.

Through the foundation, which is supported by private donors, Eloi has taken vitamins, medi-



Cary resident Jean Eloi has established an elementary school in rural Haiti and helps bring villagers medical aid.

STAFF PHOTO BY SCOTT LEWIS

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cines and teams of nurses to Zorangé and started an elementary school there that serves 360 students. His most recent trip was in January with a group of nurses, teachers, translators and others. He hopes to return in September.

"He's a king there," says John Brown, a friend in Cary who traveled with Eloi to Zorangé this year. "When he leaves, people cry."

By 2010, Eloi hopes to construct a new 10-classroom elementary school to replace the old one and create a secondary school and a trade school so students can learn tailoring, woodworking, typing and other skills. Family and friends say the poverty he witnessed growing up still lives with him.

"When you leave Haiti and come here, you realize what a wonderful opportunity you have," says Louis Adam, Eloi's younger brother, now a ninth-grade teacher in Dallas, Texas. "For you to close your eyes and forget what you left behind is impossible."

A mother's ambition

Had it not been for his mother, Eloi might never have left Zorangé. When he was still a toddler, his mother, Marie Vesta Adam, left the village on Haiti's southeastern coast to search for a job in Port-au-Prince, the capital, to support the family. Eloi's grandparents cared for him and

JEAN ELADE ELOI

BORN: June 21, 1963, in Zorangé, Haiti

FAMILY: Wife, Cherlyne Eloi. Daughters, Marquise Eloi, 14, and Maxine Eloi, 13

EDUCATION: Bachelor's degree in biochemistry, University of Maryland, College Park, Md., 1998; license in medical laboratory technology, Temple School, Silver Spring, Md., 1988

CAREER: Associate director of quality assurance/new business at Diosynth Biotechnology in Research Triangle Park, 2003 to present; associate director of program management for Diosynth, 1999-2003; technical representative, Covance Biotechnology Services, July 1999 to October 1999

RELIGION: Member of Hope Community Church in Raleigh

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his two brothers.

Their grandfather wanted them to stay in the village to become farmers, but Eloi's mother wanted them to go to school and eventually brought them to Port-au-Prince. Eloi left the village for the capital when he was 9, moving into a two-bedroom apartment with his mother, stepfather, brothers, cousins and aunts. There were 16 of them in all.

When Eloi was 12, his mother was invited to Baltimore by a wealthy Haitian doctor and his wife to care for their baby. The money she earned there allowed her three children to continue studying and gave her the means to put her nieces and nephews in school, too.

She was able to return to Haiti only once in seven years, at Christmastime. Louis Adam remembers the visit well.

"She brought us three little toys, three small cars," he recalls.

"She put them in front of us to choose, and I remember that I jumped to select one, my other brother jumped to select one. But Jean didn't. He stayed back and let us choose first, and ended up with the smallest car."

One by one, Eloi, his brothers and stepfather reached the United States in 1982 and 1983. Eloi learned English quickly, earned his high school diploma and later entered a community college in Maryland. His mother was supporting him through her work as a housekeeper until she suffered a stroke in 1986. Eloi dropped out of college and earned a license as a medical laboratory technician to help maintain the family.

He met his wife, who is also from Haiti, at a church in Maryland and married her in 1989. After their daughters were born, Eloi returned to college in 1994 to study biochemistry at the Uni-

versity of Maryland, juggling his coursework with a full-time job. He formed the foundation a year after graduating.

"It had been on my mind for a long time," says Eloi, who has lived in Cary for five years.

A school for Zorangé

One of his first projects was the school — a rectangular structure of warped wooden planks topped by corrugated metal that doubles as a church on Sundays. The rent, books, materials and salaries for the six teachers Eloi hired to run the school cost about \$10,000 annually. Tuition is about \$1 a year, a lot of money for some there.

Sunlight streams through the planks and the roof leaks when it rains, but people in the village cherish the school, says Mary Ellen Decker, a nurse and a friend of Eloi's who has gone to Haiti with him twice.

"These kids show up impeccably dressed, not a wrinkle in their uniforms," says Decker, 43, who lives in Cary. Decker thinks one of the reasons they value it is that Eloi insists on charging tuition. "He refuses to allow this to be a handout approach," she says.

Eloi visits Zorangé at least twice a year, using two of the four weeks of vacation he gets from the biotechnology company where he works in Research Triangle Park. The company makes prescription drugs, and Eloi's job is to make sure they're produced safely.

The journey to the village from North Carolina takes two days — the first flying to Port-au-Prince, and the second traveling for six to eight hours on dirt roads to the village in the hills. The roads near the village are too rough for buses, so Eloi frequently has to walk the final three miles.

In the past four years, Eloi and others working with the foundation helped villagers begin digging a well and have connected several houses to a generator for electricity. Eloi also has led three teams of nurses to the village, and they have treated hundreds of people for wounds, parasitic infections and skin diseases.

The nurses aren't equipped to treat severe health problems. But just having the nurses there to examine them is enough for some patients.

"When they see these foreigners, blacks and whites, traveling through Haiti to provide care for them, they say, 'Wow, somebody is actually thinking about us,'" Eloi says.

Friends say Eloi gets as much from his trips as he gives. He plays soccer in the afternoons, and every morning at dawn, he carries a folding chair to a perch above the village and watches the sun rise. One day, he hopes to return for good.

"I'd go tomorrow if I could," he says. "But I have to put my kids through college first."

Staff writer Michael Easterbrook can be reached at 836-5701 or measterb@newsobserver.com.