

Speech to the Medical Students of
Western University School of Sciences
309 E. Second Street, Pomona, CA 91766-1854

Date: October 2, 2006

It is an awesome privilege to stand here in this place and to talk with you. I am certain that Ms. Laura Webb, your schoolmate, my dear friend and a tireless volunteer at Hope for Haiti Foundation, always has a huge smile on her face when she talks about Haiti and I am proud to say that I share that passion and that love for Haiti as well.

Why Haiti? Well I guess judging from my accent you could tell that I was not born in Southern California. I am a native of Haiti who happens to be living in this wonderful country of ours, the United States of America, which has become my second home for over two decades. I said I was happy to be here and it's true. There are very few subjects that I like to discuss more than Haiti. Everything about Haiti interests me, but tonight I want to share with you a vision, a dream that I have for the country of Haiti and its wonderful people—a people that has had its heart broken repeatedly over the course of the last two centuries by a succession of political leaders and government administrations; a people whose resilience is second to none; a people with an uncommon charm and a zest for life; a people who daily struggles just to see the next day, the next week or the next year.

You've heard the stats over and over about how poor Haiti is, but I say to you today that my Haiti is one of the richest countries in the world—rich in the desire to live and live with joy and abandon; rich in the ability and the will to survive and adapt and evolve. Yes, it is a country that I am extremely proud of and blessed to be called its own.

Over a month ago, Laura called me to share with me about the club meetings she's been setting and attending. One in particular is the international medicine club where she had the opportunity to share with her schoolmates about her experience in Haiti during one of our medical trip. Some of the students who attended showed great interest and wanted to know how to get involved. Hope for Haiti Foundation is currently in a little town located in the southeastern coast of Haiti, called Les Orangers (aka Zorange). It is my village, the place of my birth; the place where I spent countless hours playing soccer, riding horses and eating mangos and simply enjoying life. Truly, it is my home.

Well 7 years ago, I created a foundation called Hope for Haiti Foundation. This foundation has two main objectives: first, to provide education to the children in the most remote villages of Haiti and second to provide medical care to the people of Zorange and eventually throughout the country.

Let me share with you briefly what happens today when someone has the misfortune of falling seriously ill in Zorange. Since there are no medical facilities there, family members or neighbors have to travel at least 11 miles with the sick either on their backs or on a rocking chair, crossing river beds along the way to get to the nearest town that may or may not have nurse. Upon arriving, if medical relief cannot be obtained, the journey continues on to Port-au-Prince which is about 70 miles away and at least a 7-hour long bumpy ride to get there. Since these sick people usually have no money to obtain the care they need, they seldom make the trip to the city or to the nearest town for that matter. You can imagine what the end result is.

Our vision is to make such a dire scenario a thing of the past. We want to provide comprehensive medical care to the people of Haiti starting in Zorange. We want to see newborns reach the young age of five years old and beyond and eventually graduate from high school and college and become contributors to the development of their homeland. This is our dream, our vision and our hope for Haiti.

We currently organize yearly medical trips to Zorange with people just like you; people who do not speak the language, who do not know the culture but have a much greater asset—a heart and a determination to help and make a difference. I strongly believe that living is making a difference in the lives of those around us, those we meet along the way. Yes, you and I, we each have something that we yearn to do forever. Something that sometimes keeps us awake at night not because of stress, but because we're thinking of, dreaming of and planning the next thing that we're going to do or the next step we're going to take.

I am looking at you, women and men, young, vibrant and driven. You have to be driven in order to be a successful student in this institution. However, let me tell you this is just a start. The biggest thing that will happen to you—or may have already happened to you—is to find something that makes you want to live forever. I call that “something” a passion. That passion has nothing to do about you and your own personal comfort. It has everything to do about others (REPEAT). As a result your life is changed and changed for the better. You begin to live a dream.

I am living a dream. I get the opportunity to work and collaborate and team up with people like Laura and many others and we go to Haiti, with the hope and dream of giving hope to the people in Haiti, we spend time encouraging, touching, hugging, listening to and helping those who are sick, and we pray for a better tomorrow.

I watch volunteers go to Haiti, and once they get there they start working for others. They start helping others. When it is time to come back, they are sad and happy at the same time. Sad because they're leaving after fostering relationships with people they've never met before but now are very fond of. Happy because they get to come back and spend time with their immediate family and friends. It is often hard but they take courage because they know they're coming back within 12 months. And very soon we will have a clinic where they can go on a monthly basis if they so choose or have the time to do so. The message from everyone goes like this: “Elade (Jean) I came to Haiti thinking that I was going to help these people. I was going to bring them something in the form of medical care and compassion, but in the end I have received much more than I could have ever given.”

It does not have to be Haiti. It can be somewhere in Africa, Latin America or Asia or right in your neighborhood. The bottom line is this: the world needs help, and it needs medical help. I do not need to give you statistics, but you can deduct a lot from the fact that many children born in Haiti do not reach the age of five. They die of malnutrition, lack of vaccination, and other preventable deaths. The world needs you.

You might say the problem of the world is too big and I am just one person. Somewhere someone coins a great phrase: “the power of one.” Trust me; one of you can make a difference. It starts with one of you and a vision and a dream. Be careful! People might call you a dreamer. That's ok. People have been called that and worse. You already

know that each one of you has a responsibility to the world. Those of us who can and are able, we must never stop thinking and devising ways to help. It does not have to be big. You are in the medical profession because of a strong desire to help. You already possess that desire, but we must never let it slip away from us. Because it can. Our own cares and worries can eat us up, but the minute we start focusing on how we can help someone else, we find the will to live and live with a passion. We live in a society that gives us the opportunity to get an education, get married and have children that will have plenty of opportunities. We have the opportunity to live well. We may get to see our kids have kids of their own, and turn us into proud grandparents. That's awesome!!! And then the light goes out and we say to goodbye to the world. But before we say our final goodbye, we can let our little light shine a bit brighter and light the path of others around us. We can partake in the blessing that comes from making a difference in someone else's life. I believe that is truly one of our purposes while living on this earth.

Wouldn't it be great if every child in every village or corner of the world had a right to an education and medical care? Is it your problem? No it's not. It's not our problem, but it can be an opportunity for all of us to ensure that it happens. We don't have to have a grandiose plan; we just need to find the "thing" that we do that makes us want to live for ever. The passion that you'll have in doing something that you won't ever want to receive a penny for, yet you'll never want to stop doing either. Because what you get back is priceless and immeasurable and invaluable. You get to help someone!!! Nothing beats that.

I thank you and wish you all the best in your studies.

Jean Elade Eloi
Founder
Hope for Haiti Foundation