

## Interview with Haitian college student

"Marie Feline Guerrier, a tall, regal Haitian girl who is never less than perfectly composed, runs down the hall..."

-BROOKE HAUSER, *The New Kids*, pg. 200

*\*Originally published in the Summer 2012 Haitian Migrant Worker Journal.*

In the scene described above, Marie had just learned she was a recipient of a full four year college scholarship, from the Jerry Seinfeld Program. This was a remarkable achievement, especially for someone who had arrived from Haiti a few years earlier, and who had to learn English in addition to all the other adjustments she made. Marie's family and the Haitian community where she lived were proud of her accomplishments. As Brooke Hauser put it, they thought that being awarded the scholarship showed Marie's parents "had made a good decision coming to the United States, and that all of their struggles until this point had been worth it. ...She came from a good country that turned out good people."

The following quote (with minor paraphrasing) is from an essay Marie wrote, while she was a student at the International High School:

*"When I came to the United States, I started as a junior high student. Life in junior high was very hard for me. I did not speak any English. I could not understand anything the teachers were teaching, or the assignments they gave for homework. My job was to find a way to understand everything that was being said in my classes. I felt very lonely, not just because I didn't speak any English, but also because I had no friend. I felt stupid because I couldn't understand anything anyone said to me in English. I even felt I didn't belong in the school, because some of the Haitian students, who were immigrants like me, refused to talk to me because I was a newcomer. It was hard for me to ask them to help me by explaining things or by translating. I felt humiliated and isolated.*

*"I knew my parents brought me here for a better life, so I had to find a way to make my dream come true, which was to graduate college and work as a nurse. I brought an English Creole dictionary to class and looked up words my teachers said that I couldn't understand. I stayed after school to get extra help. The biggest decision I made, which I will never forget, was to sit with students who did not speak Creole or French. I made this decision because I thought it was a great way to learn English faster. Gradually, I became comfortable speaking the amount of English I knew with both teachers and classmates, so they could correct me. I started to understand almost everything in English. I was not afraid of raising my hand in class and being a part of any discussion."*

Recently, *Haitian Migrant Worker Journal* spoke with Marie, who was finishing up her junior year at Long Island University.

JOURNAL: What was it like for you, coming to the United States?

MARIE: My dad was already here. I thought it would be like heaven, but it's hard coming to a new country. I thought, *Oh God, I wish I were home!* In Haiti we knew our neighbors. Here it's different. You are on your own. It's hard to make friends. But I learned to be independent. The first couple months or even the first couple years you might think of going back because it's not easy living here.

JOURNAL: What are some of the experiences you had at the International High School?

MARIE: I went through junior high here, so I was more prepared for high school. If I needed help, I asked for it. I asked a lot of questions. I was willing to take advice from others. I wanted them to correct me if I said something wrong because it would be to my advantage later.

\*Continued next page

JOURNAL: What are your plans for the future?

MARIE: I want to help build a hospital in Haiti. Medical care is expensive. You cannot ask the less fortunate to pay for things. So many people died of cholera. They died because they couldn't fight that; they didn't have the money for medicine. That's why I want to have a hospital or a clinic to help.

JOURNAL: Tell us about college.

MARIE: Getting the scholarship (from the Jerry Seinfeld Program) was the most important thing in my life. I was one of sixteen recipients, from thousands of students in the five boroughs of New York City. I couldn't go to Long Island University (LIU), without the scholarship, because I couldn't afford it. I'm majoring in Nursing, with a minor in Health Science. It's an excellent school and hard. You have to stand up for yourself and ask for help when you need it. I have to go back and forth to financial aid and I have to study, or I'll never make it. One of your classes might have forty people. The professor sees your face, but doesn't really know you. I introduce myself, so they'll get to know me and remember me. Meeting with a professor one on one is something I really love. You have questions in class you might not ask because you're afraid everyone else knows the answer. When you speak with the professor, they know where you're standing and what your strengths are.

JOURNAL: What can you share with us about Brooke Hauser, author of *The New Kids*?

MARIE: She's amazing. She always walked in the school taking notes and remembering the students exact words, how they dressed and how they did their hair. I loved reading her book. It shows how we were as a group and how we connected. I'm happy I was in that school. She really showed how it was.

\*Follow separate link, "Book Review: The New Kids" to read our review of Hauser's *The New Kids: Big Dreams and Brave Journeys at a High School for Immigrant Teens*.



Graduation 2009 International High School  
\*One of Guerrier's classmates



Marie Feline Guerrier