

This summer I spent six weeks living in Cange, Haiti with the Zanmi Lasante (Partners in Health) organization, and working alongside other Sewanee students on three primary projects. First, Hunter Swenson and I photographed, documented and archived the history of every building within the Zanmi Lasante compound, such as the hospital and its different specialized branches. We also interviewed some of the oldest members of the organization. For our next project, we worked on the Lafontant Archive, where we scanned and properly stored all of the early photographs of Partners in Health that have been saved by the Lafontant family, including Paul Farmer and Pehr Lafontant, the founders of the organization. Lastly, our final and largest project was a photograph research study where we worked with four students from CFFL (Centre de Formation Fritz Lafontant) as well as eight different families in two small farming villages on the mountains. Using the photographs that the families are taking, we are creating an archive to watch the progression of the families over the coming years, as well as creating family albums for the families to keep and cherish for the rest of their lives.

Each week we would visit our families in Bois Jolie and Blanchard, two different mountains. The most crucial piece to this project was the building of relationships between the Sewanee students and these families, disregarding the fact that we are “blan”, otherwise known as foreigners, and simply becoming friends within a partnership. For each visit, we would plan a lesson to give to the families on things like light and composition; this would not only get the ball rolling for the visit and create some conversation, but also inform these families on useful and basic techniques. We then would have some time for the conversation to drift away from photography to discussing their children, school, their farms, and some for them to ask us

questions about what our lives at home look like, allowing us to get more comfortable with one another.

For our last visit, I suggested we take the time to look back on their photos from the past year. I loved watching the progression and their proud expressions as they looked at the photos they had created. This time, however, I thought we could focus on just their favorite images. I thought it would be a nice way to be reminded of how much they appreciated their photos...and it did just that and so much more. Each stop showed us how much each person had learned about photography and that they each saw something unique in their photos that they really loved. Alex Bruno likes the photos of important events and people in his life, whereas Marie Eliasaint likes the way that the colors in the clothes would match the trees and plants and concentrated more on the aesthetics in a photograph. Others were elated by the prospect of being able to remember big events and see how people look over the years. This pattern of different observations and likes and dislikes in the photographs enlightened us with the progress that had been made in the project in just one year in a way that we would have never noticed just by looking at photographs. Without having asked them what they appreciated about the photographs, we would have never heard their stories and heard what made them special. With Haiti having such a drastically different culture from the one we live in, we can not assume that we know how an event occurred. A photograph of a woman in a white dress may tell you that there was a wedding; however, it is not until you ask about that photograph more deeply when you learn that the couple is getting married after dating for 15 years and having seven kids but was not ready to pay for the wedding, or that the ceremony was held for four different couples to be wed all together.

The friendships we built with each family and the stories that we heard will guide us to understand the development around a small Haitian village.

These last visits were some of the most crucial to me because it showed me exactly why the project is so important. As a photographer, I could have traveled to any part of Haiti and photographed someone's home to see how Haitians live their lives. Instead, I cheered with families for their children's graduations, and shared mangos with farmers from their trees and learned about the family dynamic not just between siblings and parents but throughout an entire community. I learned about the how important education is and how much it is lacking in parts of the world. After many conversations with different people about their schooling, I have so many ideas for future projects as well as new academic goals for myself as I continue at Sewanee.

It was not until coming home that I realized how at home I felt in Haiti. Coming from a place that is so different from Haiti, it is still hard for me to explain to my family and friends exactly what I experienced while I was there. For this I am so excited to return to Sewanee to be reunited with the other Sewanee students who worked in Haiti this summer and to be able to discuss our feelings about missing our lives in Haiti, as well as to continue our discussions about how to share our experiences and prepare for our next visit.