

## Univers Student Wins Local Marathon, Two Unvers Grads Leave for College in Kentucky

By: Pam Mann

After school, Monday, January 10, 2011 in the IU art room

On Saturday, January 8<sup>th</sup>, Ouanaminthe held its first marathon, organized by Chicago Christians, with the purpose of raising funds for Ouanaminthe area ministries including IU. Prize money of \$100 US was offered to the Haitian who could run the greatest portion of the 26.2 distance in the fastest time. We never expected that a Haitian would actually beat out seasoned US marathoners to win the race but Institution Unvers' own Jean-Noel Stéphane did just that!

I interviewed Stéphane, a 13<sup>th</sup> grade student, today two days after the race. I wanted to know how he did it. Officials reported that the course was incorrectly measured and was actually 29 miles. Stéphane ran it, his first distance race ever, in 4 hours, 51 minutes!

Pam: Stéphane, what was your training program?

Stéphane: In early December, I heard that there was going to be a marathon with a cash prize. I decided, with God's help, I could win it. So, after finishing my last exam before Christmas vacation, I began to train daily. December 9<sup>th</sup> was my first day to run. I started at 6 a.m. and ran for three hours. I ran every day, always starting at 6 or 6:30. I took no cell phone so I would have no distractions. I always started at my house and ran all over the city.

Pam: You ran every day?

Stéphane: No, some days it rained. So I rested.

Pam: You started going so far right away. Weren't your muscles terribly sore?

Stéphane: Yes, I was sore and lost some weight. But I knew that I had to push myself. I had to ignore the pain if I wanted to win. Only the one who trains hard will win.

Pam: Did your family seem concerned that you were running so much?

Stéphane: Yes, they thought it was too much but I explained to them my goal and they accepted it.

Pam: What about the race itself? How did you feel as you ran?

(Stéphane has a beautiful smile. He grinned broadly at the memory.)

Stéphane: I knew no one else had trained like I had. I was relaxed at the start of the race because I knew how hard I had trained. At the start of the race, other Haitian runners ran very fast. I didn't care. I knew they did not know how hard the race would be to finish. I knew the pace I needed to run. Along the road, I had friends who encouraged me. They gave me water and Gatorade.



Pam: It's such an amazing story. We are so proud of you. Do you mind telling how you plan to use the prize money?

Stéphane: Sure. I want to buy an MP3 player. Then, I am going to use the money to go to the cyber café in my neighborhood. I need to practice typing to take the internet-based TOEFL exam. Scoring well on the TOEFL is my next goal.

Pam: Do you plan to continue running?

Stéphane: (Big smile) Yes. I plan to run on Saturdays before our regular school PE class. Running gives me inspiration. New ideas come to my mind when I run. I see things more clearly.

Pam: God bless you in your future endeavors and congratulations on your win. Thank you for allowing me to share your comments with friends in the US.

2 p.m., Wednesday, January 12, 2011

Today is the first anniversary of the 7.0 earthquake which killed possibly 300,000 people in Haiti. Across the country there are memorial services at schools and churches. Last night after sundown, robust hymn singing began in an evangelical church near the town square. When the church people quit, local businesses played slow music for everyone in the streets to hear. It did remind me of last year's mourning style. Today, in lieu of classes, the fourth grade and older gathered at IU for a conference of reflection. It was a mix of spiritual expressions (Dave preached, several students sang Christian anthems), political commentary (poems and speeches from students in French or Creole plus a dramatic performance by a local writer), and geological

information with advice on disaster safety procedures.

#### **4:30 p.m., Thursday, January 13, 2011 at apartment main room dining table**

Kids are shouting and playing in the driveway to the Catholic brothers' school. I hear them through the bathroom window. I've shed my school uniform for workout clothes. In a few minutes, I'll exercise with a DVD and try not to kick the bedroom wall. The clinic generator in Hugues' backyard provides a steady roar, the "musical" accompaniment to my reflections, what Haitians have for background audio if they're able to afford electricity.

I read the Matthew readings for UALC's epiphany Bible plan. What power Jesus had and, man, what a shock effect he created. Do we modern believers really want power like that upsetting our lives? When Jesus comes in power, he has control. Am I willing to give him control of my situation, wreaking whatever havoc for heaven's sake? God, I hope so. Come, Lord Jesus. Calm my sea. Exorcise my demons even if it kills my pigs. Get me off my butt and make me walk at your Word.

I was dragging this morning as we started off to school. There were no classes yesterday for the earthquake commemoration. The conference at school went past noon and then in the afternoon we did prep for the mission team, got caught up on email...I cooked and exercised and then the day was gone. I felt I should have accomplished more school prep, finished grading more papers. It wasn't a day off, Dave reminded me, just different work.

This feeling of inadequacy sure gets old but it never goes away. I took a deep breath when I got into my classroom this morning and determined to tackle the day one hour at a time. I spoke with Ma Blan about the meals needed for next week's team. I planned out my 13<sup>th</sup> grade English class. I decided the paper crane origami project for fifth grade was too difficult. I would start with a flower. Maybe the fourth grade could manage it too. I was already prepared for my two 11<sup>th</sup> grade classes. We're reading the story of Odysseus and the Cyclops....plus we're preparing pen pal letters for Pennsylvania.

Well, even the flower project was tough for 5<sup>th</sup> grade B. I collected half folded (read: grimy and crumpled) papers to store in hopes of a miracle transformation next week. With 5<sup>th</sup> grade C, I gave 5 minutes less to English review and probably gave a clearer explanation my second go at it. They did it: crisply folded little flowers! "When your parents ask, 'What is it?'" I told the class, "you must say 'origami' because now you know a Japanese word for paper folding."

They repeated, "Origami." And then, it was as if an idea struck the entire group at the same. They studied the cup-like blossoms with their bent petals and then, in unison, set the inverted cones on their heads. "I put on the hat. I'm wearing the hat. I take off the hat." They said this in English. I taught them the verbs for clothing last term and they recited these three sentences for the December oral exam. I laughed with pleasure at their memory and their creative humor. They were quite pleased with themselves at making me laugh. It was a gift, a reminder from the very people whom I hope to help that I'm making some headway. Yes, headway wearing hats.

#### **Sunday early afternoon, January 16, 2011**

A lot has happened this week. James-Michelet Blanc and Pedro Jean-Baptiste left for university studies at Georgetown College in Lexington, KY. These two young men have endured many ups and downs in their quest to study abroad from hassles with visa details to linking up with college scholarships and host families. Watching their perseverance has deepened my respect for their forbearance and faith in God. I admit I choked up a bit, saying good-bye to them. Now they must adjust to a northern Kentucky campus in the dead of winter, no small feat for bodies which have only known a tropical climate, but I expect to hear that they are flourishing as our seven other US-based grads are.



Another victory for this past week is the rare use of the cholera tent at the back of the UMC facility. By God's grace, the epidemic seems to be truly waning. At the DR border control, hand washing is still required of people crossing the bridge from Haiti. Now the Monday and Friday Dajabón market days seem permanently restricted to the large pavilion at the big new bridge upriver from the old one. This keeps Haiti small business people out of the city of Dajabón proper and gives DR border guards more control of the illegal immigration

situation. My sense is that, by now, everyone has figured out a way to buy and sell what they want.

We have had our sorrows. Pastor Cléonce, the founder of the large Baptist church in town, died last weekend. His funeral was today. The church was packed, standing room only. He founded George Mueller School, the first high school in Ouanaminthe, started the Boy Scouts in Limbé, began a clergy association, and planted many churches in the outlying areas of Ouanaminthe. There was a lot of wailing at his funeral. He died of cancer, spending his last months in Connecticut with family.

Univers lost a kindergartener over the Christmas vacation, Luxom Graveus. He died on December 26th. The father, Amos, came to Mèt Za, our bookkeeper, and asked for a partial refund for the tuition he paid for this school year. I happened to be in the office when Jaccin and Dave were discussing the situation as Za had explained it to them.

“What was the cause of death?” We Americans always want all the details.

You can imagine Za's blank expression as he wondered what difference knowing the cause made. Dead is dead. “Cholera,” he said.

We, then, of course, doubted the answer, wondering if it was really cholera or some other death by diarrhea. So why did we ask? Maybe we asked because we didn't know what else to say or we thought enough information will somehow console us.

Jaccin looked pensive, pondering what precedent granting this request might set. The epidemic has been waning. There are occasional cases but no more deaths. Do institutions here regularly refund tuition in the case of death? Probably not. But Jaccin decided the school could respond affirmatively without fearing that other families would abuse our generosity. Dave handled the refund to the father, a man distraught with grief. Jesus said (in Luke 6:21) those who weep now will one day laugh. Some days that laughter seems a long way off.

Again and again God presents to us portraits of perseverance in our students and in our neighbors. Like Stéphane, I need to keep my eye on the prize, pushing through the pain. Like Pedro and James, when a door closes, I need to trust that God is able to open another. Like my origami-capped fifth graders, I need to keep my sense of humor. And like Pastor Cléonce, I need to finish the race. If they can do it, I can do it, by the same grace of God.