

The Eloy Dynasty, Via Haiti

Say Haiti and there is an instant image of the earthquake-ravaged country in the Caribbean. This story, however, is about a family's success, a real-life Haitian version of the Brady Bunch. **BY MARY ANN LITTELL**

Take a family of five children thriving in Haiti, with its sapphire-blue sea and warm breezes, and transport them to New Jersey, where it's...New Jersey. The children speak little or no English and have never had to wear coats. Now sit back and wait for culture shock. It never happens. The children acclimate. They go to school (Bloomfield College, not the Ivy League) and grow up to become high-achievers—physicians, nurses, laboratory technologists and teachers—all the while remaining a close-knit, loving family.

It may sound like a TV sitcom—a Haitian variation of the Brady Bunch—but it's the true story of the Eloy family: Jean Daniel, Suzie, Jean Anderson, Gina and Nahomie. Four of the siblings are UMDNJ graduates. Daniel and Anderson are physicians, NJMS alums, and faculty members. (They are referred to by their middle names, since so many men in Haiti are named

Jean.) Suzie is a medical technologist with her master's in health science from UMDNJ's School of Health Related Professions (SHRP). Nahomie, the baby of the family, is a nurse currently studying for her master's in nursing at UMDNJ's School of Nursing (SN). Gina teaches fifth grade in Maryland. "I'm proud of my family, but I wanted something different," she says.

When the children were young, their parents, Bertin and Roselle Eloy, hatched a plan to relocate the family to the U.S. They sought a top-quality education for their children, something not readily available in their homeland. Also, sensing an undertone of political unrest in Haiti, the time seemed right to relocate. So the parents moved to East Orange in the early 1980s, leaving the children in Haiti with their grandmother, Anacilia Desulme, in their home village of Croix-des-Bouquets, eight miles northeast of the capital city, Port-au-Prince.

Their childhood in Haiti was for the most part idyllic. They went to school and played outside under the eagle eye of their grandmother. "She was very strict and watched us carefully," says Suzie. "We would not even think of disobeying her."

"Our brothers also watched over us," says Gina. "They were protective—maybe a bit overprotective. They never wanted us to date, just do our schoolwork." As much as Gina loves her grandmother, she remembers feeling sad that her parents were so far away. "I was the clingy one," she says. "When our parents came to Haiti to visit, I couldn't understand why they wouldn't stay. All my friends had their parents with them, why couldn't I? My siblings seemed to cope well with this situation, but it really affected me."

"I missed my parents, but didn't dwell on it," says Daniel. "Our focus was always on doing well in school. We never had to be told to study. Our parents said, 'You get the grades. We'll do the rest.'" The parents worked in a variety of job situations, from a chemical plant to a dry cleaner, to support their family, always with the goal of bringing them to New Jersey. It took much longer than they expected.

Reality intruded as the political situation in Haiti grew worse. "Our town was safe, but we sometimes heard gunshots off in the distance," says Nahomie. "We'd hide under our beds." Some classmates at the private school Daniel and Anderson attended were beaten and one was shot. The tight-knit family structure and their grandmother's love and vigilance kept them on track.

The parents were finally able to send for the three youngest children in May 1993. The older ones followed in August 1995. "My grandmother would tell us we were going to the U.S., but it didn't really sink in until we were on that plane," remembers Gina.

"I was glad to be with my parents, but the transition to a new country was diffi-



The Eloy family, left to right: Jean Anderson, Suzie, Nahomie, Gina and Jean Daniel.



Jean Anderson Eloy operating on a patient during his mission to Haiti.

cult,” she continues. “The language and environment were so different. There were times I cried myself to sleep.” The children spoke Creole and French, so learning English was their first priority.

The younger children attended school in East Orange, while the older ones went to Bloomfield College, enrolling in the ESL (English as a second language) program. “I considered Rutgers, but their ESL program would have taken too long,” says Daniel. “At Bloomfield, I could take ESL and science courses at the same time. By the end of my first year, I was pretty fluent.” Though Anderson was younger than Daniel, he had arrived in New Jersey first and was now ahead of Daniel in school. “It was helpful to have my brother guiding me,” says Daniel.

“Daniel was my role model and all my life I’ve followed everything he did,” explains Anderson. “When he said he was going to be a doctor, I decided to follow in his footsteps. Now I was able to help him.”

The family later relocated to Bloomfield, where the parents still live. All five of the Eloys graduated from Bloomfield College with honors. “It would have been unthinkable for us to separate or to go away to college,” says Suzie. “We were raised to stay close to home.” She continues to do so. The only one of the five who is not married, she works as a medical technologist at Refuah Jewish Health Center in Spring Valley, NY, and lives in Bloomfield with her parents, now retired.

Anderson graduated from NJMS in 2002, Daniel in 2004. Anderson completed a residency in otolaryngology/head and neck surgery at Mount Sinai School of Medicine of New York University in June 2007, and proceeded to complete a fellowship in rhinology, sinus, and endoscopic skull-based surgery at the University of Miami before joining the NJMS faculty in 2008. He is director of rhinology and sinus surgery at UH. Daniel, an assistant professor of anesthesiology at NJMS, is doing a fellowship in anesthesia at the University of Pittsburgh Medical Center. The program’s focus is on acute pain management, regional and orthopedic anesthesia—all specialties he will put to good use when he returns to NJMS in July 2011.

Nahomie works full-time as a psychiatric nurse at the Veterans Administration Hospital in East Orange and part-time as a medical technologist at St. Michael’s Medical Center in Newark. She attends school at night and says she will eventually get a PhD in nursing. Her husband, Anthony Gotay, MD, an NJMS alum, is a resident in psychiatry at Harvard South Shore Medical Center in Boston. “It has not been easy keeping up with our brothers,” admits Nahomie with a smile. “They thought we should all be doctors. But I think we’re pretty happy with the direction our lives have taken.”

“We actually thought we should all be surgeons,” jokes Daniel. “It didn’t turn out that way.”

The family maintains its close ties with each other and with Haiti. Fortunately, their grandmother and other family members living in Croix-des-Bouquets were safe following the devastating earthquake in Haiti, which hit close to Port-au-Prince earlier last year. “There was damage in our town, but fortunately, no homes were destroyed,” says Daniel. He traveled to Haiti on a medical mission in January, just a few weeks following the earthquake, working with surgeons from the NJMS Department of Surgery, including Ziad Sifri, MD, who shared his photos from the mission in the last issue of *Pulse*.

In March, Anderson traveled to Haiti on a mission with Project Medishare, a relief effort launched by the University of Miami. Through Medishare, teams of medical volunteers from throughout the U.S. went to Haiti immediately after the earthquake. Anderson went with Widny Pierre, a fellow Haitian and friend from Bloomfield College, who is an OR nurse. “We spent time at a makeshift hospital right next to the airport,” says Anderson. “It was just a huge open room with cots. I treated many people with facial fractures from the earthquake. We also helped people with medical issues unrelated to the earthquake. One patient I saw had a huge tumor in his mouth that I resected.” He says he hopes to return to Haiti soon. “There is so much need there. I would encourage all physicians to bring their skills to Haiti. It’s a very rewarding experience.”

The Eloys get together a few times a month at the parents’ Bloomfield home, with their grandmother, now 82, visiting once or twice a year. They say they never could have accomplished as much as they have without the support of their parents. “Our grandmother raised us, but our parents worked so hard for us,” says Susie. “All those years we spent apart were for us. And now we’re together.”

“I hope I can be as good a parent someday as my parents were to me,” adds Anderson. ●