

## It's All About Education

By Deb McIntyre, '11

Rachelle Mathurin, '11, comfortably chats in Spanish, in English, and she can effortlessly slip into French, Chinese, or—if need be—even a bit of Russian. Talking on the phone with her family in Haiti, she switches to her native Creole dialect. Rachelle is majoring in education studies with minors in speech communication and peace and social justice. A student chaplain, she is a winning member of the College debate team, member of two honorary societies, and is clearly headed for a great future. This success hides the difficult road she's travelled over her 25 years.

Rachelle's parents both valued learning so much that they taught their five daughters before and after school. Her father hired tutors to teach his children English and French and the family conversed in different languages according to a weekly schedule.

"My father didn't like the fact that education was privatized in Haiti, so he started a school where people could come and not have to pay," says Rachelle. He went into poor neighborhoods and invited people to send their children to

his school. Watching her father deeply affected her. "There was something about being in his classes and seeing him teach and looking at those people who were so eager to learn."

When she was 11, Rachelle's world turned upside down when her father died at age 36. Four years later her mother passed away, leaving Rachelle, 15, and her 16-year-old sister in charge of their younger siblings, ages 13, 10, and 6. Fortunately, Rachelle had been able to finish high school early and could care for

them while her older sister worked. "It was the toughest time of my life," she says. "I was like the mom at 15 years old." Her lifelong dream of attending college seemed unreachable.

Rachelle's uncles gave her a job teaching English and vocational skills to children and adults. Soon her abilities caught the attention of her pastor and mentor, Rev. Jean Lyonel Joseph, who hired her to teach English in the school run by his church.

By the time she was in her early 20s, Rachelle had a job as a translator and administrative assistant, keeping up her father's weekly language "game" with her co-workers and sisters. Then a miracle happened. She was chosen by the Le Flambeau Foundation to go to Berea College.

Rachelle was thrilled, but found it "very, very, hard" to leave her sisters. "I knew my going to college was a good thing because it would set an example," she says.

Last January, Rachelle learned that her family had survived the devastating earthquake that hit her homeland, though the home where she had grown up was leveled. Over spring break, she went back to Port-au-Prince.

This summer Rachelle returned to Haiti—this time to work as a teacher alongside Rev. Joseph in the new school he started after the quake.

Like her father, Rachelle believes education should be a right for everyone, but in reality it is unavailable to the poor in many countries. "Why would you block people's way to an education when they want it? It's for the benefit of everyone in society," she says emphatically. She wants to go to graduate school and eventually work in international education policy. To Rachelle, improving the lives of the world's poor can be solved through education. "I believe the only way to change a country is to change the minds of its people."



Ray Davis, '11

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