



PHOTOGRAPH BY NATHAN YOUNG

MISSION Minded

Six Geneva seniors share about their life-changing trip to Haiti

BY KATHERINE ANDERSON

Every summer, Instagram seems to be flooded by a sea of pictures containing teenage girls and small children from foreign countries, usually bearing the caption, 'I wish I could bring them back home with me.' Despite the stereotypes surrounding short-term mission trips, six Geneva senior girls discovered over this past summer that a brief trip to the Caribbean third-world country of Haiti can really invoke genuine, life-altering, spiritual and mental change.

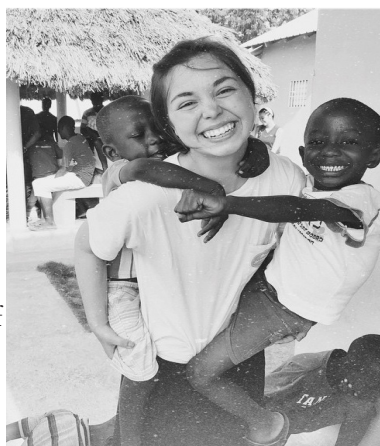
Addison Lipe, Delaney Young, Ashley Masso, Mary Claire Brock, Savannah Cone, and Kaylea Burt all experienced the strange mixture of culture shock and unconditional love that accompanies working with impoverished children through a faith-based program. While in Haiti, the girls stayed in a village built by Mercy International, a non-profit organization geared toward helping Haiti rebuild and rehabilitate. The village is located outside of Gressier, a small town just West of Port-Au-Prince, the nation's capital city and

one of the most damaged by the earthquake. They visited orphanages, spent concentrated time with the children in the village, and, most importantly, witnessed the incredible works of God in the lives of the Haitian people.

While most people return from mission trips changed in some way, not everyone expects the experience to affect them so greatly. "Being my first mission trip outside of the U.S., I boarded the plane to Haiti without much expectation of what was to come. Little did I know, the Lord, in His infinite goodness, had so much more in store for our trip than I could have ever imagined," says Brock. "The relationships I built are really indescribable. The hardest part was returning to the States after my eyes had seen extreme poverty and my heart had grown so close to people over 1,000 miles away. I think about my friends in Haiti daily."

Most of the group had already seen conditions similar to those in Haiti on other mission trips in suffering communities. Masso says, "I thought it was going to be similar to a mission trip in Paraguay that I previously went on, and in some ways it was. I wanted to serve the people of Haiti, but I didn't really know how."

As most people know, Haiti was brutally devastated by a catastrophic earthquake with a magnitude of 7.0 Mw in 2010. The effects of the earthquake and the nation's corrupt government are obvious



PHOTOGRAPH BY ASHLEY MASSO

HOLD ON TIGHT
Delaney Young being loved on by two Haitian boys.

everywhere on the western half of the island. Living conditions for the general population can be shocking, even for the experienced traveler.

"I thought I had a pretty good idea of poverty and despair due to places I'd been before," Cone says. "I was so wrong. The physical need in Haiti was unlike anything I'd ever seen. It is indescribably heartbreaking."

Lipe's first trip to Haiti was in 2012, so she was able to see more recent repercussions of the earthquake.

Before Haiti, she had not been exposed to a country like it.

"Even if I was expecting the worst," she says, "the conditions there still would have shocked me. There is no imagining the tent cities and extreme poverty. It is something you really have to see to understand."

The streets of Port-Au-Prince are crowded with crumbling stone buildings, humongous piles of clothes for sale, and towers of trash that threaten to topple out of the alleys at any moment. Children walk home alone from school carrying heavy baskets of laundry or food on their heads. Drivers are bombarded by desperate men who try to sell water bottles and

necklaces through the windows of buses. Trucks swerve through the streets, overflowing with passengers because there are no driving laws to obey. "When we landed in Port-au-Prince, I was immediately shocked by what a complete wreck Haiti is, even five years after the earthquake," says Young. "That's something that pictures and words just can't capture; it was heartbreaking. Seeing that, it was hard for me to grasp how anyone living in that state could still choose joy."

However, in stark contrast with their surrounding dark and dismal conditions, the people of Haiti have a surprisingly optimistic outlook on life. "The Haitians love life and truly live it to the fullest," Lipe says. "Most would not change anything about it. Almost everyone that I met there who had been to the U.S. wanted to return to Haiti because, to them, all of our amenities are just too much."

Although it seems as if the usual routine would be to impart some form of American joy and wisdom on the children, it is typically the Haitians that impart joy and wisdom on American visitors. There is a lot to learn from the way Haitians live for the Lord and continually show compassion.

"It was evident that the Lord was working in so many different and unique ways," Cone says. "One precious little girl was named Esmika. I still think about her sweet kisses."

Kisses, hugs and hand-holding from a child is hard to avoid, since several swarm you every

"Even if I was expecting the worst, the conditions there still would have shocked me."

Addison Lipe

A Personal Perspective

BY KATHERINE ANDERSON

On my own summer mission trip to the rural town of Neply, Haiti, my perspective on life was changed by a little girl named Shelove. Shelove could barely speak the native language of Creole, was emotionally underdeveloped and could never remember names. She referred to me simply as 'Mama Blanc,' or her white mom. Everywhere I went, Shelove was with me. As the days went by, I realized that Shelove had only one pair of battered shoes. She did not go to school like the other children, or try to write her name in cursive in my journal pages like the other children did. She was limited by her circumstances and lack of education, whereas I had every possible opportunity available. Coming back to America, I had a new inspiration for achieving anything and everything possible. That inspiration was Shelove. She is not able to experience school, travel or even communicate freely, privileges I had never thought twice about. But I will never take those things for granted again.

ALL SMILES Anderson instantly fell in love with this smiley girl, Shelove, on her own trip to Haiti.

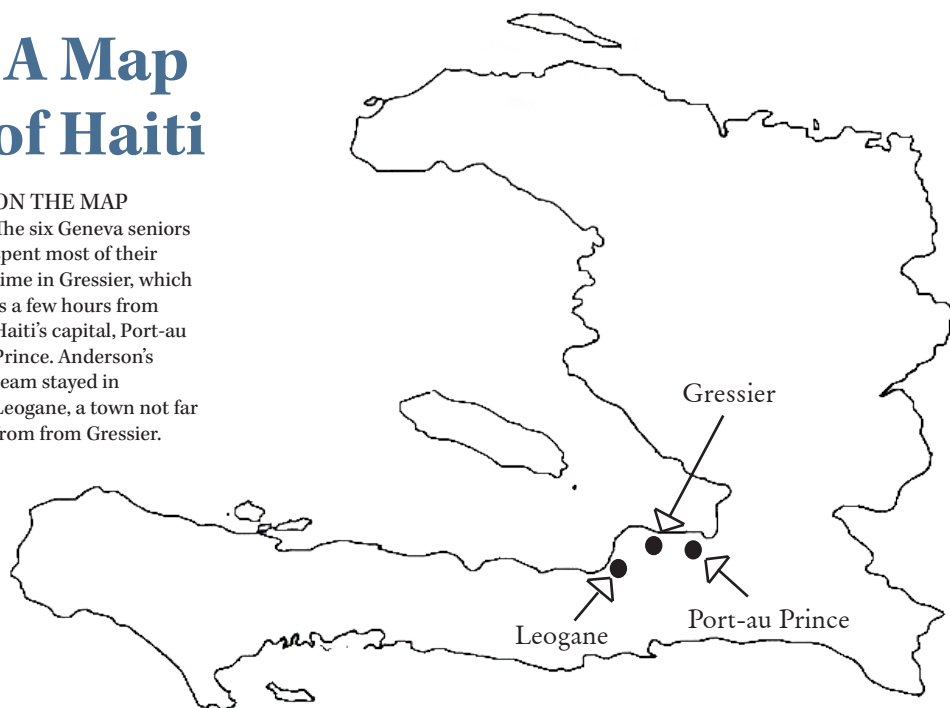
PHOTOGRAPH BY KATHERINE ANDERSON



A Map of Haiti

ON THE MAP

The six Geneva seniors spent most of their time in Gressier, which is a few hours from Haiti's capital, Port-au Prince. Anderson's team stayed in Leogane, a town not far from Gressier.



chance they get, vying for your affection. For most people, there is one child that especially stands out. “One girl named Enous taught me how to love selflessly,” Lipe says, referring to her 2012 trip to Haiti. “She is the most kind-hearted twelve-year-old I have and probably will ever meet. She was always at my side asking me (or signaling, really, because of the language barrier) what she could do to help, and loving on everyone throughout the day. Saying goodbye to her was one of the hardest things I have ever done.”

Sometimes a single interaction with a child can leave a lasting impression, as Kaylea Burt recalls: “Mary Claire and I were interviewing one of the children in the village and asked him if he enjoyed going to school. His answer changed my life. He liked his school because the teachers didn’t beat him very hard. I used to constantly complain about uniforms and homework, little things like that. Now I’ll catch myself worrying about something relatively trivial and remember that little boy, and all of my problems seem so small.”

For others, it is the culture itself that makes a difference. For the Haitians in Gressier, there are

OVERJOYED
Seeing joyful faces is one of the best outcomes of serving the children in Haiti.

no reservations about expressing faith and happiness. “My favorite part was seeing how God transcends cultures,” Masso says. “The people in Haiti had their own way of praising God, which was hours of dancing and shouting in a small, hot building, and we had our ways too, however more subtle.”

The girls were deeply impacted and affected by their experiences in Haiti, and carried that with them back home. Young says, “That was when I truly felt the gravity of Haiti’s impact on me. I didn’t fully see God’s hand in all of it—the interactions with the kids, the incredibly heartbreaking stories we heard, and the devastation and ruin we saw—until I got back home and was overwhelmed with this feeling of sadness and joy that I can’t really explain. It changed something inside me, for good.”

The Haitian perspective on life is



PHOTOGRAPH
BY DELANEY YOUNG



IT'S A LOVE HAITI RELATIONSHIP

Young, Brock, Lipe, Cone and Burt enjoy an afternoon with friends in Haiti.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ASHLEY MASSO

again 'I did not know.' I held on to the sliver of hope that if I chose to take action, I can at least do my part."

Without the drastic change in culture and lifestyle, the trip to Haiti would not have been as meaningful. "At first it seemed unfair," Masso says. "However, I realized that this affluence is such a blessing. Because God has given me so much, I now have the privilege and responsibility to give so much more away."

The lessons taken from the experience of a mission trip stay with you forever. "Just like everyone says,"

Cone says, "coming home from something that depressing changes your perspective. Complaining and whining just seem wrong after something like that."

Even though the conditions may be grueling and the aftermath may be painful, the spiritual growth and close relationships

formed in Haiti are well worth briefly giving up the cushy lifestyle we are all so accustomed to. Sometimes, in order to truly discover the strength of God's grace, you have to venture out into the

unknown. The six Geneva seniors who visited Haiti this summer will never forget a moment from that mission trip, and the children in Gressier will never forget them.

PHOTOGRAPH BY MARY CLAIRE BROCK

contagious. Their values and priorities seem to make more sense than the constantly stressful, material things that take over everyday back home. "They realize that the people in their lives and the God they worship are all that truly matters," Lipe says. "I have been trying to remember that every day since my trip."

The only fallout to this experience is what can be described as "post-Haiti depression." These withdrawals include irrational anger at anyone even remotely privileged, a growing hatred for ignorance, and hours of crying caused by the phantom weight of a child in your arms.

"I'm not a very emotional person," Brock says, "but I cried a lot the first three days I was back. It was such a harsh reality, coming back to a land of excess when you've seen such poverty accompanied by true gratefulness. I know the words of William Wilberforce hold true, 'having seen all this, you can choose to look the other way, but you can never say



LOVE WITHOUT END

Brock captures this priceless expression of love that she can hold onto forever.