

EYE on SIGHT

CCB EYECARE CARIBBEAN NEWSLETTER



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JULIETTE'S REALITY

(Overcoming Tragedy)

"From the day he attacked me, I lost my sight. I couldn't see anything again"

One year ago we introduced you to Juliette - a young lady who lives in the community of Canaries on the Island of St Lucia. On the morning of Friday, June, 12th, 2009, as she headed to work in the town of Rodney Bay, her life was forever changed when she was attacked by the father of three of her children, Matha Joseph.

With a cutlass in hand, Joseph chopped her all over her body with severe blows to her eyes, nose, ears and hands. As a result of the attack, Juliette lost the thumb on her right hand and a joint of her pinky finger on her left hand. She also lost her sight.

The entire "incident" was witnessed by passersby who rushed to her side, their quick action saved Juliette's life, but from then on, her life was forever changed.



A smiling Juliette

Isidore Jules - Juliette's boyfriend

"I had just passed KFC and I was taking out my phone to make a call and then I just felt a blow at the back of my neck and the person said in Creole "Now I am not the person for you, I chopping your neck." When I turned I saw that man, Matha. When I tried to run, he stepped on the back of my shoe and I fell flat on my belly and he continued chopping me, on my ear, my eyes, my hands," Juliette recalled.

In 2010, Matha Joseph was sentenced to eight years at the Bordelais Correctional Facility after he pleaded guilty to 'Grievous Bodily Harm'.

Three years later, a lot has changed for Juliette, but she is determined the deal with her reality.

"From the day he attacked me, I lost my sight. I couldn't see anything again. They took me to the ICU (Intensive Care Unit), they placed eye pads on my eyes and when they took them off I couldn't see again. The Doctor didn't tell me that I was blind; he only said, "I am going to send you to the Blind Welfare." ...I was like Blind Welfare? Me? It was a lot, it was hard...."

Naturally, there were moments of anger and now three years later, while her sight will never be restored,

Juliette is determined to move forward. In spite of her circumstances she is happy and thankful for the dedication of her boy-friend, Isidore Jules, the father of her youngest child, Isa, who is now 11 months old.



Seated on a white plastic chair in their modest three-room dwelling, with her daughter on her lap, Juliette looked back at the past year and the progress made.

"I'm okay, sometimes frustrated, but I'm okay; the pregnancy went well; I had no complications, but when I came home it was very challenging. I had a lot of help from my boy-friend. He has sacrificed a lot to live up to his responsibility. I have one regret though; I was promised a house by the Ministry of Housing, but I have not had any word; all I can do is hope for the best."

While she keeps hope alive, the challenges remain; one of

them being the struggle to use her hands.



"My hands are painful; I can hold my cup; I can hold a bottle, but there's still some pain. I am still so very scared; I thank God for my boy-friend who goes out everyday to provide. That's how I'm able to survive; everything is left up to him," she said.

SLBWA and Rehabilitation

The St Lucia Blind Welfare Association (SLBWA) has played a pivotal role in Juliette's rehabilitation. Winnie Weeks, the Adjustment to Blindness Officer with the Organization has



been by her side from the very start. The first point of focus was Juliette's mobility skills. *"From the time the incident happened and we found out, we were called from the Hospital. From*

that time we did an assessment, focusing primarily on her mobility skills. From the beginning, I was concerned that she was not very confident. I think it has to do with the trauma; her spirit was willing to get back on track and to start life all over again, but her confidence was hinged on how persons in the society would receive her."

One of the many roles of the SLBWA is to ensure that clients are visited promptly and assessed based on their needs. Winnie attempted to get Juliette back on track by enrolling her in an Information Technology (IT) Programme at the Association's Headquarters in the capital of Castries.

"We tried to let her understand that she has to take one step at a time. First we went for the IT Programme, but there were situations, such as her pregnancy that put a damper on things. But there is hope, now that she has had the baby, she recently called and said, "Winnie I'm ready!"

The effort of the SLBWA has not gone in vain, Juliette is eternally grateful.



"I am adjusting; I have to give special thanks to the St Lucia Blind Welfare, Ms. Winnie and Mr. Avril, but sometimes I wish that I could open my eyes and see again. I have been able to move around a bit more on my own. I try to do things on my own; take care of the baby; clean, but sometimes it is challenging; I wish I could see

at times," she said with longing.

But according to Winnie Weeks, there is always hope.

"There is hope in Juliette, from the time I met her, I felt that determination; her wanting to get back on her feet ... sometimes she feels a little bit disappointed with society. There have been so many promises - but the promises are made and they never happen," she said.

"For me she is normal"

In the midst of all the challenges, Juliet is not alone; she constantly made reference to her partner, Isidore Jules, who has been by her side ever since tragedy struck. Isidore is by no means daunted by Juliette's condition and has resolved to remain with her through thick and thin.

"She's a lady and I have no trouble with her. I will never get tired of doing things with her. I have a garden that I did for her, since we've been here we have reaped sweet potatoes and tomatoes," he said with pride.

With tears in his eyes, Isidore was not afraid to express his undying love for Juliette and looks forward to a bright future.

"I want to stay forever with her. I felt as though I was involved in her troubles, too. She gets sad at times; because sometimes she wants to clean the house and do other things on her own and that can be a challenge. There are times when I feel as though she can

see like anyone else. For me she is normal.

She knows that I love her; she knows that very, very well. I want to marry her before I die; I want Isa to know that I'm her father and I want her to grow up knowing her mother. That is my great wish," he said.

Juliette's story, although a tragic one, will undoubtedly inspire many. The journey has been a long and hard one, but hope remains.

"Sometimes I look back; with four children, sometimes I really wish I could have done more. I want to play a more active role as a mother. Not being able to see drags me down sometimes. But I'm alive, I have to encourage myself."

"Don't give up on me, I will get there. It's a big challenge but remember I will get there. This is my reality."



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wbr9uMEZJSc>



In 2011, the team from **Caribbean Council for the Blind/ Eye Care Caribbean** along with our partners sought to fulfill our mandate of preventing blindness and visual impairment while restoring sight and creating opportunities for persons whose sight cannot be restored.

Here are some of the highlights of our work in 2011.



<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=211OISyp72U>

From the Desk of the CEO - Arvel Grant



The quarter ending December 2012 marked several outstanding high-points in our relentless effort to achieve a Caribbean compliant with the objectives of Vision 2020: The Right to Sight.

With financial support from Sightsavers and the European Commission, we were able to convene the 2011 Vision 2020 Meeting for the Caribbean, with the full and effective participation of Health Officials and Civil Society interests

from thirteen (13) member-countries of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM).

The two-day deliberations took place at the Trinidad Hyatt Regency Hotel, and were facilitated by Dr. Juan Carlos Silva (PAHO/WHO), Dr Richard Wormald (International Centre For Eye Health, London), Philip Hand (Sightsavers) and Charles Vandyke (Eye Care Guyana).



Dr. Juan Carols Silva (PAHO/WHO) and Dr Maltie Mohan Algae (Ministry of Health - Suriname)

For the first time, Suriname, participated in an official gathering of **CCB-Eye Care Caribbean**.

Using a standardized template (developed for the collection of Vision 2020 related Health Information for the Caribbean), the Delegates provided comprehensive updates on the state of Eye Health Services in the respective countries and pledged to continue this process by using the data collection template in gathering information to support deliberations of future Regional Vision 2020 Meetings.



(l-r) Prime Minister Baldwin Spencer, Arvel Grant and Finance Minister Harold Lovell

During the quarter: Antigua and Barbuda's Prime Minister, Baldwin Spencer and his Finance Minister Harold Lovell, paid a follow-up visit to the Fiennes Institute in Antigua, where they presented residents and staff with thirty-eight (38) pairs of prescription glasses, courtesy of **CCB-Eye Care Caribbean**.

CCB/Eye Care Caribbean also finalized proposals to take-over a public building in Antigua, to be used as part of a National and Sub-Regional Programme to ensure affordable, available and accessible Eye Health Services to the poor and near-poor in Antigua and Barbuda and the rest of the South-Eastern Caribbean.

During the 4th quarter, we invited bids for the refurbishing of a building which is being transformed into the Eye Department on the compound of the Mandeville Regional Hospital in Jamaica.



Patients waiting at the Eye Clinic at the Mandeville Regional Hospital - Jamaica

It is anticipated that construction activities will be completed by April 2012 and that two additional Operating Theatres and a Spectacle Laboratory will commence operation from that location by June/July 2012.

We anticipate that with the inauguration of the additional theatre space, the Southern Regional Health Authority in Jamaica will move from just under 500 cataract surgeries per year (based on 4-6 hours of theatre-time each week) to approximately 2000 cataract surgeries each year, in a population of 612,000 residents.



Dr. Marlene Smith Day and Dr Richard Wormald



Louis Braille - His Life and Legacy

“Louis Braille was the inventor of a system of reading and writing used by people who are blind or visually impaired. As a small child, Braille was blinded in an accident; as a boy he developed mastery over that blindness; and as a young man, still a student at school – he created a revolutionary form of communication that transcended blindness and transformed the lives of millions. After two centuries, the Braille system remains an invaluable tool of learning and communication for the blind, and it has been adapted for languages, worldwide”. (www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louis_Braille)

Louis Braille was born on January 4th, 1809 in a small town called Coupvray, near Paris in France. He injured his eye at the age of three years while playing in his father’s harness workshop. Although his parents sought treatment for him, the injury became infected, resulting in blindness in both eyes by the age of five. In what was deemed quite unusual at that time, Louis Braille’s parents exposed him to a normal childhood and he flourished. He learned to navigate the paths and lanes in the town with canes made by his father and seemed to accept his disability. “His bright and creative mind impressed the local teachers and priests and he was encouraged to seek higher education”. (www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louis_Braille).

At the age of ten, due to “his intelligence and diligence, he secured a scholarship to attend one of the first schools for blind children in the world, the National



Institute for Blind Youth”. Though the condition and resources available to the School, left much to be desired, it provided a stable environment for persons who are blind to learn and build relationships.

(www.wikipedia.org)

However, Louis needed a new way to learn that would bridge the gap between the system of raised letters (Hauy) taught at the school and verbal instruction, with limited books in the library which were difficult to read. Nevertheless, he was a good student and after exhausting the school’s curriculum, he was asked to remain as a Teacher’s Aide. By 1833, he was promoted to a full professor and remained at that Institute for much of his life.

His ear for music led him to become an accomplished cellist and organist; he later served as organist for churches all over France. (www.afb.org/braillebug/louis_braille_bio.asp).

The Braille System:

Louis Braille was determined to fashion a system in reading and writing that could bridge the critical gap in communication between the sighted and the blind. In his own words: “Access to communication in the widest sense, is



access to knowledge, and that is vitally important for us if we (the blind) are not to go on being despised or patronised by condescending sighted people. We do not need pity, nor do we need to be reminded that we are vulnerable. We must be treated as equals – and communication is the way this can be brought about” (www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louis_Braille).

Origins:

In 1821, Braille learned of a communication system devised by Captain Charles Barbier, of the French Army. Barbier willingly shared his invention called “night writing” – a code of dots and dashes impressed into thick paper. These impressions could be interpreted entirely by the fingers, letting soldiers share information on the battle-field without having light or needing to speak. The captain’s code was too complex use in its original military form, but it inspired Braille to develop a system of his own (www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louis_Braille).

Design:

By 1824, by the age of fifteen, he had largely completed a system of his own from Barbier's "night writing", by "simplifying its form and maximising its efficiency" using a series of only 6 raised dots; then published the first-ever Braille book in 1829. In 1837, he added symbols for math and music.

But since the public was sceptical blind students had to study Braille, on their own. Even at the National Institute where Louis taught, the system was not introduced until after his death.

"Braille had been a sickly child, and his condition worsened in adulthood, A persistent respiratory illness dogged him and by the age of forty, he was forced to relinquish his position as a teacher".

When his condition reached mortal danger, he was taken back to his family in Coupvray where he died in 1852 at the age of forty-three."(www.en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louis_Braille)

Braille began to spread worldwide in 1868, through the efforts of a group of British men from (the organisation now known as) the Royal National Institute for the Blind." (www.afb.org/braillebug/louis_braille_bio.asp).

"Now practically every country in the world uses Braille. Braille books have double-sided pages which saves a lot of space, while reducing the size of the document. Braille signs help people who are blind to navigate in buildings and public spaces. And, most important, people who are blind can communicate independently, without needing print."(www.afb.org/braillebug/louis_braille_bio.asp)

Now many every-day gadgets are adapted with Braille, including watches, clocks, and dominoes; and to produce Braille books with precision and faster there are Braille Embossers. While recent technologies, particularly the computer with speech software, have, to some extent, replaced the need for Braille, the value of Louis Braille's invention cannot be overlooked or discarded.

World Braille Day, observed on January 4th each year, highlights the invention of Louis Braille and recognises the immense benefits it brought to persons who are blind, world-wide.

REFERENCES:

1. www.afb.org/Braillebug/louis_braille_bio.asp
2. www.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louis_Braille



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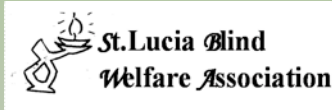
Sightsavers



The Government of Antigua and Barbuda



The St. Lucia Blind Welfare Association



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<http://www.eyecarecaribbean.com/act-now/make-a-donation>

Our Mission.....

Our Purpose.....

Our Goal.....

Our purpose is preventing blindness and visual impairment while restoring sight and creating opportunities for persons whose sight cannot be restored.

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