

## HOSPITAL ALMA MATER: OUR HOME IN HAITI FOR 15 YEARS

---



*An x-ray drying in the courtyard of the Alma Mater Hospital. The MFP clinic motorcycle used for house calls is seen in lower left.*

### A Partnership that Saves Women's Lives

**G**ros Morne is a typical poor mountain town with cinder block houses and lean-to shacks crowded along the main street and side alleys. The town has no public water, we are waiting for electricity, and sanitation is a public health disaster. Fifteen years ago, MFP was drawn to Gros Morne by the pressing health needs of its people and the presence of the Alma Mater Hospital (AMH).

Our goal was, and remains, to bring sustainable, cutting edge medical services to strengthen existing Haitian facilities.

*“Our goal is to bring sustainable, cutting-edge medical services to strengthen existing Haitian facilities.”*

The AMH has 50 in-patient beds and offers medical, surgical, pediatric, obstetric, and emergency care to 140,000 people in the northern Artibonite region. Despite being housed in a modest structure (5 single room concrete buildings), the hospital provides adequate, and sometimes exceptional, medical care to the local population. Notable clinical programs include HIV treatment, well mothers and babies, high nutrition feedings, and a cholera treatment unit.

**M**FPE initiated a Women’s Health Program in 2010, which is now one of the largest on the island. Aggressive community education accounts for our success: more than 6,000 women examined and treated. We have brought modern computer systems, telemedicine, advanced nursing education, and high standards of quality assurance to AMH. We have saved the lives of many women stricken with cancer, and promoted a healthy life style for the women of Gros Morne.

**MFP** Medicine For Peace  
medforpeace@aol.com  
www.medicineforpeace.org  
Tel: 202-440-4545

## Spotlight on the Women of Medicine For Peace:



*Brittany Galvin, Judette Derelus, Michael Viola, and Erlöse Cerfrère outside the women's health clinic in Gros Morne.*

### *"Haiti captured my heart and mind."*

**Brittany Galvin** (Nurse practitioner, Administrator) hails from Green Bay, Wisconsin, home to America's favorite football team – as she tells it. While not all MFP volunteers agree with her football notions, we all stand by her commitment to improving health services in Haiti. As Brittany sees it, quality healthcare will help break the cycle of early preventable deaths due to poverty.

Brittany is a graduate of Quincy College and the Massachusetts General Hospital nurse practitioner program. She spent two years as a volunteer with a religious organization in Haiti and fell in love with the country. Immediately after the 2010 earthquake she cared for acute trauma victims in Port-au-Prince and responded to the cholera epidemic by treating patients in the heavily hit rural community of Pendu.

Brittany currently works at Alma Mater Hospital. She assists the MFP Women's Health Program by facilitating hospital and mobile clinic visits, organizing nursing education, and planning for MFP program expansion to other parts of the island. She explained that faced with the extraordinarily high cancer rates in Haitian women,

"The large number of women who have been screened and definitively treated at the MFP clinic is truly remarkable."

**Erlöse Cerfrère**, the Head Nurse in MFP's Women's Health Clinic, grew up in the Verrette District, an hour from Gros Morne. She attended the Providence Verrette High School before obtaining a B.S. in Nursing Degree from Notre Dame d'Haiti University.

Erlöse pursued her interest in public health by working for a HIV/AIDS Treatment Center in Port-au-Prince. The Center is part of Plan Haiti which has made significant gains in combating the HIV/AIDS epidemic in Haiti. In 2014, Erlöse joined the MFP team and her high energy and intelligence has made a significant impact on the program.

In addition to hands-on nursing care, Erlöse spends considerable time talking to women's groups, church congregations, and being featured on local radio stations to promote cervical and breast cancer awareness and the MFP cancer prevention program.



## Haitian and U.S. Nurses and Volunteers Leading the Way

*“I was very fortunate to work with the MFP Women’s Health Program in Gros Morne where I acquired the skills needed to perform cancer screenings.”*

**Orna Dieunane** (Community Health Nurse) joined MFP when we began our Haitian Women’s Health Initiative in 2010. Her journey to community health has not been an easy one. After finishing at the top of her class in high school and nursing school, Orna was accepted into the School of Midwifery at the University of Haiti in Port-au-Prince. Sadly, before her studies could commence, the 2010 earthquake hit and demolished the school.

Not one to be deterred, Orna began working with Medicine for Peace in Gros Morne, expanding our women’s health program and garnering the tools needed to run and promote a large cancer-prevention program. Currently, she is pursuing a certificate degree in community health and hopes to continue collaborating with MFP to decrease the terrible burden of disease in her country.

Orna resides outside of Port-au-Prince while she completes her MFP-sponsored degree. She commutes home on the weekends to the southern coastal town of Aux Cayes to be with her husband and 6-year-old daughter, Maella.



*Orna Dieunane in the MFP women’s clinic. She is the recipient of an MFP Scholarship in Community Health for Nurses.*

*“Medicine for Peace has a wonderful tradition of promoting sustainable health care, activism, and human empathy.”*



**Monika McGreal Viola** (Administrative Volunteer) maintains deep roots in Medicine for Peace. As daughter of founder Dr. Michael Viola, she knows the history of our organization since its inception. She recalls making frequent trips to JFK Airport in the 1990’s to welcome a steady stream of Iraqi children brought to the U.S. for curative surgery.

These formative experiences led Monika to pursue a degree in Middle East Studies at Brown University with a focus on international humanitarianism. She has graduate degrees in fiction writing and literature.

Monika worked in the U.S. MFP office on both the Bosnian Children’s Project and the Haitian Women’s Health Initiative, and she has travelled to both countries with MFP. At present, she volunteers her technical writing and administrative skills to assist with MFP’s reports, brochures, strategic planning, and social media.

## Torture Victims Struggle to Obtain Asylum



*UN refugee camp in the DRC where Amelie worked before fleeing repeated sexual assaults by soldiers. (Source: UNHCR)*

### Amelie's Story

In January 2017, Amelie came to the MFP Clinic for Torture Victims at Bon Secours Hospital in Baltimore seeking our help. She is a 40-year-old woman from the South Kiva region of the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC). She worked for ten years as a nursing assistant in the refugee camps in the DRC along the Burundi border.

The DRC border is politically unstable and unsafe for refugees who find themselves under constant ethnically motivated attacks from both DRC security forces and Burundi rebel soldiers. Amelie alleges that in 2013 she was attacked twice by soldiers wielding machetes and whips, and then sexually assaulted. She escaped a third attack in 2015 and fled the DRC to visit her

cousin in Baltimore, where she requested political asylum upon arrival.

Amelie's forensic examination at the MFP Clinic revealed the diagnostic scars of machete cuttings and whip lashes, and profound psychological effects from her sexual assaults. MFP experts documented their findings in a medical affidavit for the immigration court.

Amelie meets the criteria for asylum, yet she faces an uphill battle in today's immigration climate. She has been waiting for two years for her initial immigration hearing at the U.S. Customs and Immigration Office. The Trump Administration is applying pressure on Immigration Officers and Court Judges to increase the number of denials for asylum seekers. It is likely that many highly deserving torture victims – like Amelie – will be forced to return to the country from which they fled.

While Amelie waits for her hearing, she has found a safety network in Baltimore where MFP's social service partners are actively working for her recovery. The Asylum Women's Enterprise found her temporary housing, and Esperanza (Catholic Charities) provided her with a pro-bono lawyer. Psychologists at the Intercultural Counseling Collective treat her debilitating psychological symptoms and assist her in the hard task of getting through each day. In the meantime, she waits and hopes.



Medicine for Peace is a 301 (c) (3) not-for-profit medical relief organization incorporated in New York and Washington, DC. We have had medical, mental health, and education projects in El Salvador, Iraq, Bosnia, Haiti, and the United States.

MFP is supported by caring individuals – like you – and small foundations who share our vision of mothers and children prospering in a world free from war, torture, and extreme poverty.

**PLEASE DON'T FORGET HAITI**

**DONATE NOW:** [www.medicineforpeace.org](http://www.medicineforpeace.org)