

# Welcome HOME! Stone Oak

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## God Bless America

# Helping Hands in Haiti

By Alissa Nagle

Violette Kelley is making a difference in the lives of Haitian children, and she has been for a very long time. Graced with humbleness and humility, Kelley, a wife, mother, nurse, and founder of Helping Hands International, grew up in Haiti and remembers both the beauty of her home country and her family's own struggles. "Haiti is one of the most beautiful places to live...if you have the means. The beautiful tall coconut trees, the white sandy beaches, the tropical fruits and the big mountains are what I remember about Haiti. But growing up in Haiti was not easy," she said. A four-year Stone Oak resident, Kelley knows she was fortunate to rise from poverty. She has dedicated her time, money, and passion toward giving back to the Haitian community.

Kelley founded Helping Hands International (HHI), a nonprofit charity organization, after years of her own charity work in Haiti, including personally funding the education of several Haitian children. "It was in my heart for a long time," said Kelley speaking of the organization's roots. Although she moved to the United States in 1988, she still has strong ties to the Haitian community. "I know the culture, but I also know what the people have been through."

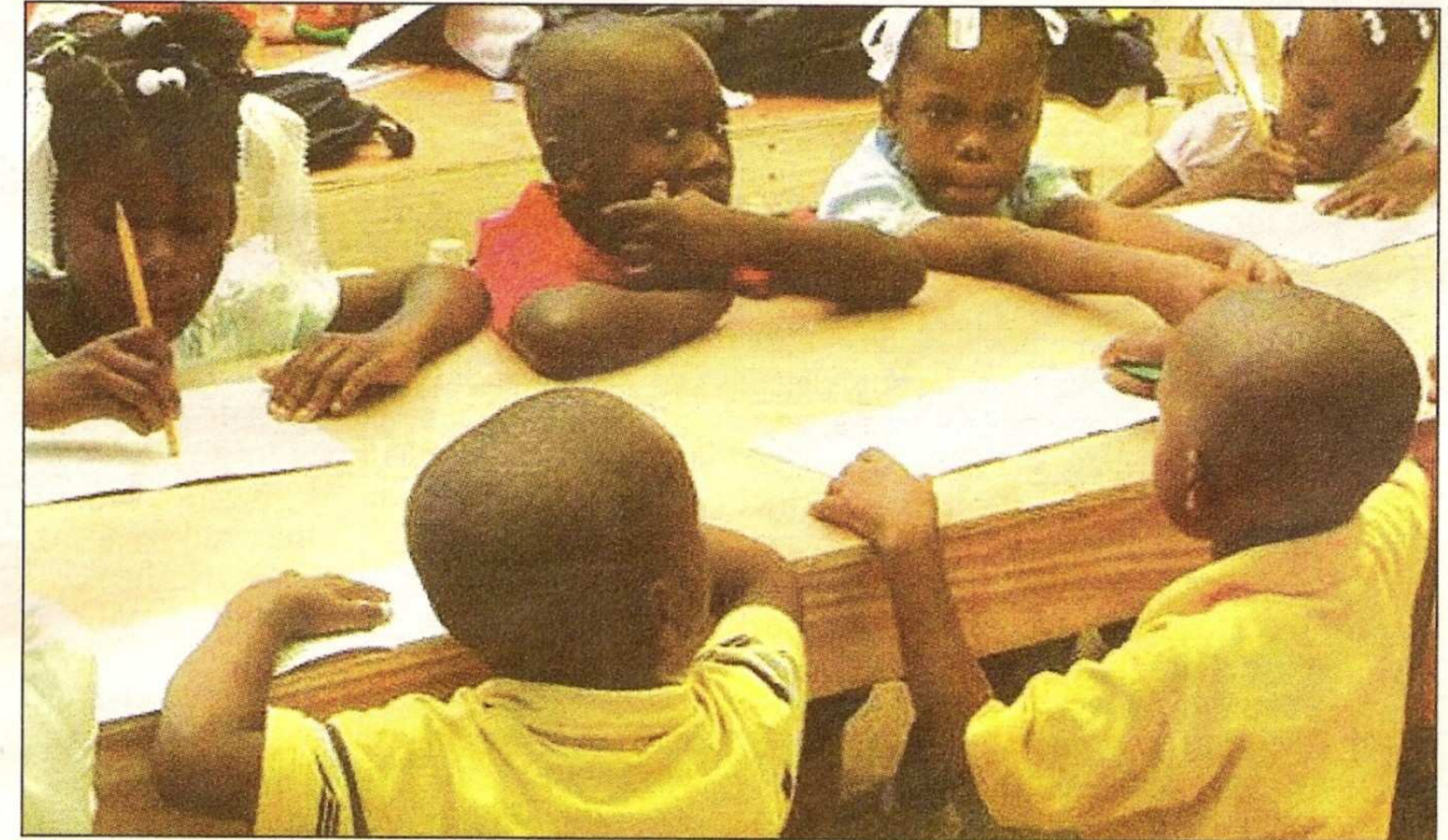
There is currently no public education system in Haiti, and families oftentimes have to choose between putting food on the table and paying for their children's education. "I understand the sacrifice parents

the family and sending a child to school," said Kelley. As a child, Kelley's mother worked two jobs to support her family and pay for her children to attend a private school almost two hours away. Kelley's own experiences and her faith prompted her to open a school in Port Au Prince, Haiti for poor children. Jehovah Jireh Academy, which means "God will provide," was opened in September 2008.

"We had children who had never been to school before learning how to read and write," said Kelley. Jehovah Jireh and its 100 percent Haitian staff created a structured environment where children could be provided with a fundamental education including reading, writing, science, math, English and French as well as two hot meals a day. The school also helped students learn how to identify career paths, manage their time and develop practical marketable skills such as carpentry, farming, car repair and gardening.

Perhaps more important than the curriculum is the spirit in which Jehovah Jireh was founded. "I truly believe education is the hope of tomorrow. I don't want the children to come with hat in hand all the time. If we can educate 100 students a year and teach them self-sufficiency and make them goal-oriented, we can change the face of the nation," she said.

Suddenly, on January 12, 2010, everything changed. A 7.0 magnitude earthquake struck the island nation of Haiti leaving 3 million people in need of emergency aid and 200,000 dead. Young children, includ-



Jehovah Jireh Academy students concentrate on their studies.

ing students of Jehovah Jireh, were left wandering the streets searching for food, water, and safety. The epicenter of the quake was located only about 15 miles from Port Au Prince. Violence and riots broke out, and looters depleted Jehovah Jireh's supply of food and water. The school, along with most of the city, was cloaked in devastation and left in shambles.

In light of the tragedy, HHI has remained unwavering in their support of the island nation. When large organizations swooped in to provide emergency aid, Kelley knew



Violette Kelley, founder of Helping Hands