

Area resident talks about her flight from Haiti

By Carolyn DeMarco
staff writer

The 29-year reign of terror by the Duvalier family in Haiti has ended with the self-imposed exile of "Baby Doc," but West Bloomfield resident Julia Rubiner says the odds are stacked against the new regime.

"It will be a year, at least, until an election will be possible and 10 years before the economy comes around. They have a tremendous task ahead of them, an almost insurmountable task. The 'fat teen-ager' has left the country, but other problems remain."

Rubiner, a West Bloomfield High School graduate who earned a degree from the University of Michigan in 1984, abruptly left a teacher's job in Port-au-Prince, Haiti, just days before the departure of dictator Jean-Claude "Baby Doc" Duvalier.

She and her fiancé, Andrew Bosworth of Washington, D.C., had both been employed since graduation by a private school serving children of American diplomats, corporation employees and wealthy Haitians. Bosworth is a high school teacher.

"THERE WAS no violence directed towards Americans, but we were afraid of getting caught in the crossfire. It was apparent that if Duvalier

stayed there would be a blood bath by the Tontons Macoutes, and if he left the Tontons Macoutes would be the object of the blood bath. It was not apparent what Baby Doc was going to do."

Rubiner said those outside of Haiti were more aware of what was going on than those in the country.

"It was evident in early December that something was going to happen, but it was an unclear situation. There was no word from the Duvalier regime, nothing from the opposition, and nothing from the American embassy. We smuggled in the Miami Herald for media coverage. Those papers were being confiscated at the airport."

"We listened to the short wave to BBC and Radio America reports, but those were brief. One announcer even said, 'If you're wondering what's going on in Haiti, join the club.'"

"It wasn't until Jan. 7 when they canceled school that it hit home. Until then everyone put on a smile and pretended everything was fine, when things were clearly going wrong," she said.

"WE STARTED getting phone calls from our parents saying, 'What are you still doing there?'"

Rubiner had just returned to the school Jan. 6 after a three-week holiday break spent in West Bloomfield and New York when the school abruptly closed.

"There was an unfounded rumor that the national armory had been broken into and guns taken, and parents began taking their children home without explanation."

The next day they were ordered closed but continued a home study program for the 325 students. By Jan. 31, when a state of siege existed, classes ceased altogether.

Rubiner said the trouble in Haiti, while brewing for months, increased in intensity in November when students in Genéval protested against the general misery in the country, the poorest and least literate in the hemisphere.

"Mrs. Duvalier," Rubiner said, "is rumored to have taken large quantities of currency from the country for her frequent shopping trips." When the Shell Oil Co. came to deliver gasoline, Rubiner said there was no American money to pay for it, so none was delivered.

There were gas shortages, and staples were not being delivered to the stores. Three students were shot and a school principal disappeared mysteriously while in police custody.

DUVALIER WAS supposed to leave the country, Rubiner said, but either was persuaded or threatened not to by his advisors. After that everything broke loose.

"Stores were closed and ordered to

open at gunpoint. Then the opposition came along and told them to close."

The day before Duvalier departed for France, Rubiner said, "The tension was so thick you could cut it with a knife."

Retaliation against the Tontons Macoutes began immediately. Seventy-five deaths were reported in Port-au-Prince alone, many of them members of the hated and feared Tontons Macoutes, or Volunteers for National Security (VSN), as they were officially termed.

Rubiner said the term Tontons Macoutes means bogeyman, the creature who came to kidnap the naughty children at Christmas. The unpaid VSN, estimated at 7,000 strong, extorted money from the Haitians in exchange for "protection," and were granted a license to kill by Duvalier.

They originally were organized by Papa Doc Duvalier to spy upon the army, Rubiner said, and were completely loyal to the family.

THEY DRESSED in dark blue uniforms, sunglasses and red patches with the VSN insignia, carried Uzis and generally terrorized the citizens. "They were ignorant but well-trained in military maneuvers."

"When Duvalier left they were hounded and killed. Their heads were

put on sticks. It was savagery, but it was understandable. They had terrorized for years."

The Duvaliers were able to rule for so long in Haiti because of the fear instilled by the Macoutes and the ignorance of the people, she said.

"The people are incredibly ignorant, with no more than a 10-15 percent literacy. They are malnourished and have not developed properly. In addition, they are unaware of events happening outside of Haiti."

"It has always been a repressive government. There's no welfare, little agriculture. The fields have been stripped by continual sugar cane crops. Sisal and mangoes are the only exports. The economy is stagnant."

"There was never any grass roots opposition. They were exiled to Miami, New York and Montreal. And the government was always supported by the United States."

"In a way you have to feel sorry for Baby Doc," Rubiner said. He took over the government functions in 1971 at 19 years old and tried to make reforms at the insistence of the U.S. government. He was less brutal than his father, she said, and "tried not to be so corrupt, but got caught up in the momentum. He was a puppet."

"You have to give him credit for leaving Haiti. He did it for his own safety, but he may also have prevented civil war."

On the other hand, she said, "It's rumored he left only \$1,004 in the treasury, while he has accounts in other countries of an estimated \$400-800 million."



Julia Rubiner

RUBINER SAID the new regime under Lt. Gen. Henri Namphy in its first two weeks of rule has done all the right things — closed the airport, instituted a curfew, welcomed the exiles and espoused human rights, but she cautions, "so far it's only rhetoric."

Duvalier preyed on the Haitians' belief in voodoo and related fears, Rubiner said. "It truly is an opiate of the masses," she said. Until that fear is overcome, nothing can be accomplished. Perhaps recognizing that, one of Namphy's first acts was to change the flag colors from the red and black voodoo colors to the red and blue flown before the Duvaliers' reign.

Novi couple hurt in freeway mishap

Two Livonia couples, a Novi couple and the owner-driver of a Livonia limousine service are recuperating at home from serious injuries received in a freeway accident early Saturday morning.

The accident took place on the Southfield Freeway and left a Detroit man dead and a Dearborn Heights woman critically injured.

"It shows how you shouldn't take things for granted," said Andrew Lendrum, vice president of Total Protection Underwriters in Livonia.

The couples had been out together for a fun night on the town to celebrate Valentine's Day. The accident took place at 1:35 a.m., while the six were on the way home in a limousine they had rented for the evening.

The limousine was northbound on the freeway when it was hit by a car going the wrong way in the northbound lane, according to police.

The car, driven by Ralph Pullen, 45, of Detroit crashed into the limo. Pullen

was pronounced dead on arrival at Sinai Hospital.

The limo, driven by Gary Barrera of Livonia, spun out of control and was hit by two other vehicles, according to police. Barrera, 25, of Fairway is president and an owner of Expert Limousine Transportation Service of Livonia. He was treated and released from Detroit's Mount Carmel Mercy Hospital for chest bruises and injuries to his left leg.

A SECOND car hitting the limo was driven by Diane Hiltbrand of Dearborn Heights. Hiltbrand is in serious but stable condition at Mount Carmel Hospital.

Also hitting the limo was a truck driven by Gary Palmer, 39, of Farmington Hills. He suffered minor injuries.

After being hit by the truck, the limo burst into flames, according to police. Occupants of the limo were Andrew and Arlene Lendrum of Livonia, Mi-

chael and Linda Cassar of Livonia and Gordon and Jeri Korby of Novi.

Barrera picked up the three couples at about 8 p.m. and chauffeured them on a night on the town.

On the way home, Barrera told police he was driving in the far right lane of the freeway when he noticed a car, without its lights on, going the wrong way down the exit ramp.

Arlene Lendrum was taken to Sinai Hospital, treated for numerous injuries and subsequently discharged. Her husband said she suffered damage to her knee and back.

The Korbys and the Cassars were treated for minor injuries at Mt. Carmel and released.

Lendrum said the injuries received by the three couples were consistent with what would happen when two cars, each going 50 mph, crashed into each other.

"We were all tossed around. That's the equivalent of a 100 mph impact. We're just waiting to see how we all mend."

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