

CARLOT DORVÉ

A Dialogue With an Adventist Trumpeter From Haiti



INTERVIEW BY LAURIE SNYMAN

Carlot Dorvé was born in Petit-Goâve, Haiti. Driven by economic hardship, his mother left her countryside home as a teenager to the big city of Port-au-Prince, seeking work. There a man befriended her, and at their very first private meeting assaulted her, and she became pregnant with Carlot's older brother. After a period of being economically challenged selling food items on the street, she went

back for help from the father of her baby. She became pregnant again, this time with Carlot. A short time later she discovered that the father of her sons was having another family.

Despite such hardships, and experiencing one setback after another, Carlot kept his goals steady and pursued them with undeterred perseverance. And today Dr. Carlot Dorvé is a music educator, trumpet performer, and recording artist.

■ *Carlot, your early years were not easy ones. Tell us about your childhood and the accident that changed your life.*

I was born in Petit-Goâve, Haiti. Our mother was very protective of us boys. When I was four, my mother took me to her home village over the holiday season to meet my grandmother. I enjoyed all the attention from my grandmother and loved playing with the cousins I discovered there. I was playing with a cousin on a tree when my cousin wanted to move to a new location and yanked me out of the tree. I fell on a rock, and it broke my wrist. An infection developed and I was in much pain. Days later, without any medical treatment available in the area, my grandmother took me to the village

herbal doctor. He made some concoctions, chanted to the gods, and wrapped my arm tightly in a palm frond. He instructed my grandmother not to remove it for several days. The palm frond was not only too tight, but the infection worsened. After many days of pain, my arm started to lose circulation. An uncle noted my worsening condition and realized I needed serious medical intervention. People in the village carried me for many hours in an almost unconscious state to take a bus to a hospital in Port-au-Prince. My mother was distraught to see my condition. The physician at the hospital told my mother, "we must remove the arm, or he will die in a few days." My mother finally agreed, but feared what might happen after I became disabled.

■ *What happened after the amputation of your arm?*

My mother was persistent in making sure I would not act disabled and expected me to do all the same tasks my older brother did, in the same amount of time. I relearned how to dress myself, feed myself, fend for myself against bullies, swim, and do errands. My father was so angry at my mother for allowing me to go to the countryside where I was injured, that he broke off ties and told her to get rid of me. She stopped allowing our father to have anything to do with me.

■ *Losing your father was another loss in your young life.*

Yes, I did not realize it then, but I still had a heavenly Father, and He was guiding my life. The surgeon who amputated my arm told my mother about a school for handicapped children and I attended it for many years. One day, I heard a ragtag band on the street play for Flag Day. It stirred something inside me, and I dared to dream that someday I could play a trumpet. Then I learned that my school allowed students to join the band at age 12. I could hardly wait. At last, the day came when I turned 12.

■ *So that's how you started to play the trumpet?*

Not exactly. The exciting day finally came, and the teacher dismissed students one-by-one to stand up and walk over to the band room, students who were blind, lame, had malformed limbs and so on. But when my turn came, the teacher told me to stay seated. After all were dismissed except me, I loudly complained, "When may I go, Sir?" The teacher said, "You may not go; you do not have an arm and you cannot play an instrument without an arm." That year, almost on a daily quest, I pleaded and begged, but to no avail.

The next school year was the same story. No teacher would let me play or even attempt to play. I begged and pleaded, tears streaming down my face, day after day, and month after month. This was repeated the next year, and the year after that. Each teacher told me "you cannot play with only one arm." One day when I started to plead again, there was another teacher in the room. This teacher intervened and said, "Why not let him try? He will see soon enough that it cannot work." The other teacher agreed, and handed me an old, discarded trumpet. I was excited to have the old trumpet! I practiced and practiced that day and the days afterward. In order to practice more, I skipped the only school meals a hungry boy would get. I practiced during recess when the others were playing, and even after other students left for the day since I was

not allowed to take the trumpet home. I taught myself so well that I started to help my classmates with their music lessons on the trumpet.

■ *What technique helped you do what your teachers thought could not be done with only one hand?*

I held the trumpet with my only arm, used some fingers to hold it in place and then I pumped the keys.

Before long, I was asked to play in churches, for the president of the country, and even for a special holiday recital in a televised concert with an international choir where all could witness a one-armed boy playing the especially difficult parts on the trumpet. I started receiving invitations all over the country. More importantly, about the same time I attended an evangelistic meeting and was baptized. Thereafter, together with my friends, I would go to the mountains to pray for my future and for God to lead my life.

■ *The future was bright! Your mother must have been so proud of you.*

Well, that's another sadness I had to face. But God carried me through it. One day, my older brother informed me that our mother was missing. We searched for her but never saw her again. We assume that she was shot and killed in one of the many political uprisings we witnessed in Haiti. It was not only my brother and I who lost her but also our three younger siblings who were now dependent on us for their care.

■ *That's indeed sad. In this seemingly hopeless situation, God opened a door that you could never have dreamed possible.*

Some years after losing my mother, I was offered an exchange program in Michigan. I had only been in Michigan for one week when Haiti was hit by a devastating earthquake. The buildings where I had practiced trumpet were destroyed. The collapsed buildings took the lives of some of my classmates. Providentially, the U.S. offered me a temporary protected status. Soon after, a Michigan State University alumnus heard me play at a church where I was attending, and offered me a scholarship. Then, I was further blessed to become a friend of the famous trumpeter, Wynton Marsalis, and he offered to pay for my room and board while I attended Michigan State for four years where I earned a Bachelor of Music in trumpet performance.

■ *And after that?*

I went on to earn a Master of Music in trumpet performance from Pennsylvania State University and then a PhD in music education from the University of Missouri. My dissertation research was on the experiences and perceived reality of brass instrumentalists with physical disabilities.

In the area of love and marriage, Kiara Dillard and I recently got married. She is an Adventist physician; so, there are two doctors in our home! We married in the midst of the pandemic—wearing masks. Kiara’s beautiful mask matched her wedding gown.

■ *Congratulations and God bless your marriage! We’d enjoy hearing more about the love story, but tell us about opportunities you have had to share your faith with classmates and professors.*

God has used me to be a witness about my deep convictions regarding Sabbath. When my class was going to play at Carnegie Hall in New York City, the students were all excited. But when I learned that there would be a Friday night dress rehearsal after sundown, I told my professors, “I cannot go because it conflicts with my beliefs on keeping the Sabbath.” Not only the professors but my fellow classmates argued with me, saying it would only be a short time during the Sabbath hours. They also told me about other Adventists that had performed during the Sabbath hours. One of my professors cautioned: “To be a successful trumpet performer will be impossible for a Sabbath keeper.” But I did not waver. I used the opportunity to explain to my professors more about the Bible and the Sabbath. This caused some curiosity amongst some of them, and they read several books about the Sabbath. People who would otherwise know nothing about the Bible Sabbath now have a full understanding of God’s fourth commandment.

At Pennsylvania State University, I was encouraged to play in bands and orchestras during the Sabbath hours. I was told, again, by my trumpet professor, “You cannot make it as a performer unless you do.” Even my Jewish professor told me, “I don’t feel I’m breaking my Sabbath when I play during the Sabbath hours.” However, I stood firm. Whenever I left music recitals or concerts just before Sabbath, despite their negative comments about my Sabbath observance, my professors and fellow students would whisper, “Happy Sabbath, Carlot,” as I walked out of the room.

Let me share one incident that I hope will be of encouragement to others. When I was a teaching assis-



Carlot, with his wife, Kiara, a family physician.

tant at the University of Missouri, I was assigned to work with the marching band. I told my teachers that I would be leaving early Friday nights at the start of the Sabbath. I had only been at the school two months when I was summoned to the guidance counselor’s office. I wasn’t sure what the meeting was about, but when I entered the office, I was told to go to the conference room. When I walked in, the entire faculty from the music program was sitting at a long table with one chair vacant for me to sit. I was somewhat afraid. I thought, “They are going to take away the teaching assistant job that I need, or maybe even my scholarship because I have been leaving my job early on Friday evenings, just before Sabbath commenced.” The chairman started the questioning: “Carlot, we brought you here because we would like you to explain your beliefs, since they are impacting our music program. Please explain to us about your Sabbath and how you plan to observe it despite the music schedule we have here.”

I prayed for God’s help and immediately felt a sense of peace. As I looked at the faculty all staring at me, I realized this was my opportunity to share the gospel and the Sabbath, so I gave them my best Bible study. I laid out the story of the Bible, from creation to Christ dying on the Cross. I spoke about the Ten Commandments and how God expects His followers to keep those commandments. I was met with lots of shocked looks as I spoke for over 45 minutes. As I ended, everyone was silent, and I almost started up again, but my chairman said, “Thank you for explaining so thoroughly and plainly what you believe. We

will make sure that you never have any problems with your Sabbath again while you study here. We will adjust your workload to the weekdays and try to make sure that you are covered on weekends.”

I never had a problem on campus again with Sabbath observance. Every teacher in that conference room now has an understanding of the gospel because the Sabbath is such a witness. I was able to tell them all about something they had never really heard before. Even just saying, “I am a Seventh-day Adventist” was a witness.

■ *As you reflect on your own experience at three different public universities, any final advice for someone studying in a public university?*

Pray! When at Michigan State University, I was a part of campus ministries, and attended Immanuel Institute, a Bible study training course. I studied the Bible with over 100 students during my years there. Some of them have accepted the Adventist message

and have been baptized. One returned to China and started an Adventist group in her community, another married a pastor in Michigan and is serving with her husband in campus ministries at Michigan State University. A third, formerly a jazz musician, became a minister, and is now serving in the West Virginia Conference.

Prayers and God’s answers to those prayers gave me the privileges of pursuing my love of music and at the same time, of finding lost sheep on those public campuses. 🏛️

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