

Soup and History: A Recipe for Learning English

By Bonnie Eisenfeld

Pumpkin soup is symbolic and celebratory among Haitian people. Hans Peter Desire and Reginald Saint-Louis, two young men from Haiti, contributed a recipe to the Center for Literacy's new global cookbook, not just about food but also about Haitian history. "This savory pumpkin soup is served by Haitians on January 1, the anniversary of Haiti's liberation from France in 1804." The soup is made from pumpkin, beef stock, vegetables, parsley, thyme and other herbs and spices. Under French colonial rule Haitians were not permitted to eat such extravagant food. "It is said that the soup was once a delicacy reserved for white masters but forbidden to the slaves who cooked it. After Independence, Haitians took to eating it to celebrate the world's first and only successful slave revolution resulting in an independent nation." Making and enjoying pumpkin soup is a way to remember and maintain the Haitian Revolution.

English Instructor Marjorie Scharf describes Hans Peter and Reginald: "Each of these young men loves to read, loves to learn, and is goal-oriented and resourceful." They live together with Bazelais, another young student from Haiti, with their extended family in Upper Darby and work at a local Assisted Living Facility. Hans Peter has completed some university courses in business and is now aiming for a career in Physical Therapy. Reginald has taken many undergraduate courses in engineering in Haiti and is planning to complete his Engineering Degree in Philadelphia. Bazelais has just completed his CNA program and is a Certified Nursing Assistant; he has had a life-long interest in sociology and philosophy as well.

Haiti, formerly a French colony, is located on the west side of an island in the Caribbean; its residents speak Creole and French. Haiti shares the island with the Spanish speaking country, the Dominican Republic. Haiti has a long history of natural disasters including earthquakes, hurricanes, and tropical storms. In 2010, Haiti experienced a severe earthquake (magnitude 7.0) in which approximately 300,000 people died. In 2017, the island was battered by Hurricane Irma, the most powerful storm ever recorded in the Atlantic Ocean. Many beautiful beaches were destroyed by the storm. Residents of Haiti are still recovering from both disasters.