

The past year of living and serving in Haiti has been something I feel like I've been waiting and preparing to do for my entire life. I cannot believe that my year as a Lumos scholar has come to an end, and I couldn't be more grateful. When I look back at the past year, I am in awe at just how much I have grown and how much I have learned.



(left to right) 1. This photo was taken during my first few months in Haiti. My shirt reads "there is good in the world and it's worth fighting for." After all the hardships I've witnessed this past year, I still believe this wholeheartedly. 2. Kathy- CEO- and Valery-Operations and Human Resources Director- are still the people I meet with most frequently. We work together on keeping communication between the US and Haiti clear and building more sustainability through leadership in Haiti. 3. Hiking the beautiful terrain has been one of my favorite things about living in Haiti.

Though I set goals for my year-long Lumos project, I knew from talking to several other Lumos recipients that I should be open to the possibility of things changing and I wasn't quite sure what to expect. When I look back, it is interesting for me to see how things shifted, but how ultimately my work still revolved around the major goals I set, which were focused on creating systems for marketing and operations for 2nd Story Goods and assisting with creating local business plans through ProLead, Much Ministries' employee training program.

Most of my planning with my organization had been done over emails and phone calls an entire year prior to arriving on the ground in Haiti. When I finally got to Haiti last October, our

director, Kathy, and I spent the first week having lots of conversations. I had several questions prepared so that I could understand where exactly the organization was, where she saw it going, and how we saw me fitting into the picture. The answers to these questions ended up steering my first few months. I was given a lot of freedom to take time to learn, ask questions, do research as I felt inclined, take on projects, and make suggestions. It was clear that Kathy had too much on her plate. Just as we had named my position in my Lumos proposal, I became an administrative assistant to her. I helped her manage her calendar, protect time to work on goals, and delegate more.

All of my questions about goals led to me reading *Traction*, a book about strategic planning that her and the CFO were studying, which then led to me helping with planning how we could integrate its systems into the company. Most of my questions and thinking were around operations and marketing since those were not only my areas of focus but also where I felt most drawn. Looking back now, I see that learning about the operations of the company and seeing opportunities for improvement took most of this year, and is an ongoing process. It takes time to learn the ebb and flow of a business and all the systems that are already in place. That being said, I also had a special advantage at the beginning to be looking at things as a newcomer with fresh eyes; this led to me asking a lot of thought-provoking questions. As my first few months progressed, I was naturally drawn more and more to marketing. Because I was still learning about all of the operations, most of my ideas and suggestions tended to relate to branding and sales. I spent a lot of time talking and brainstorming with Rebecca, who lives in the US and is in charge of our US retail sales, as well as Adam, who also lives stateside and is in charge of our US wholesale sales and warehouse. I became a sort of bridge of communication between them and our Haitian photographer, and all of us worked together on really nailing down our branding. I also managed the Enactus team at Belmont who was working

with us. They did a lot of research for us that first semester around trying to find a larger specified market to break into. In those first few months, I also really focused on forming relationships at work and learning as much Creole as possible.



(left to right) 1. I got to partake in improving our product photography practices this year, and have been really happy with the results! This is one of our top-selling products. 2. Drinking fresh mango pineapple juice at work every day is the highlight of my day! 3. At work, I spend many hours at a time glued to my computer. I am very productive when I'm at the office which leaves me exhausted in the evenings, but is so worth it!

In February, I was asked to stay on at 2nd Story Goods for another year after my Lumos project ended and to immediately step into the role of Sales and Marketing Director. I joyfully accepted! One year in Haiti felt far too short, and I love 2nd Story Goods with my whole heart. This conversation came as a result of us using the *Traction* book method to restructure the company and form an organizational chart. I was also assigned the role of “Assistant to the COO”; we did this so that I could keep helping Kathy whenever necessary and also be a part of operations conversations. Defining these roles was so good for the organization and for me. I am so thankful I had the freedom the first few months to learn and ask a lot of questions, and then was able to transition into a role with a lot of responsibility. As head of marketing, I was now responsible for coordinating our marketing efforts both in the U.S. and Haiti and casting an overall

vision and plan for our marketing. Stepping into this role was both exciting and challenging. No one was technically doing the job before; the responsibilities for it were shared by many and some had just fallen through the cracks. As a result, I didn't truly have anyone preceding me who could show me the ropes, but instead was gradually entrusted with some large responsibilities.

The most difficult part about becoming the head of sales was the timing of it. Since July of 2018, political unrest has made tourism in Haiti practically non-existent, and because sales in Haiti have traditionally accounted for about 27% of 2nd Story Goods's total sales, our in-country sales have taken a huge hit. As a result of this, I took part in helping to make a difficult decision to close our retail store in Port-au-Prince in June. Though it only resulted in the unemployment of one person, it was an extremely hard decision to make because we know and love her dearly, and job creation is our entire purpose. It was also difficult because the store was in a fantastic location in the Marriott Hotel, and it had always been the hope for it to be a place to display the beauty of Haiti. I left feeling heartbroken for her the day we moved out of the store. But it was clear that keeping the store open was hurting the company at large, and that fact put many more jobs in jeopardy. In late July, we had to lay off the majority of our Haitian staff for three weeks because the lack of sales had hit us so hard. When everyone finally returned to work, we sat together as they talked about how hard those three weeks without pay were on them and their families, and many voiced that they didn't know how they were going to be able to pay to send their children to school for the upcoming school year. I left this conversation crying, collapsing a bit under the pressure of being in charge of sales which is directly tied to our artisans' pay checks. I knew we had to do something to show our employees that we care for them, and that our customers care for them. So Rebecca and I worked together on launching a Back to School Campaign, so that each of our Haitian staff's kids would get the first payment of

tuition for the year paid for. We ended up exceeding our goal; when we surprised them with the news they were overjoyed.



(left to right) 1. This was our last photo taken at our Port au Prince store. The mural reads: "a continual 'let there be'". I held on to these words after making this difficult decision, trusting that God was not going to quit working and being with us, and that has proven to be true. 2. Two of my best friends started a bike rental and tour company. Every week, we go on a ride to experience the beauty of the country that the world mostly sees the ugliness of, and it is so very powerful. 3. While work for our artisans was lacking, I took the opportunity to pay our sewers to make a blanket for me out of some of my most treasured t-shirts. They are very accustomed to sewing different fabrics together from the local market, and did a fantastic job!

So all of that being said, since stepping into this role in February, I have been putting lots of energy into rethinking our in-country strategy and finding new markets and new wholesale customers in the U.S. My work as the Marketing Director can be split into overseeing four main areas: U.S. retail sales, U.S. wholesale sales, Haiti retail sales, and Haiti wholesale sales. Because of this, I technically manage five people: the managers of those areas plus another marketing associate/photographer. In addition to meeting with them regularly to delegate tasks and manage larger projects, in this role, I have taken on related tasks that we have decided on as a team, worked on things assigned to me by Kathy, and also been largely self-directed. I



have so many ideas of things to do to increase our sales and improve our branding and an endless to-do list to prove it. Some of my accomplishments since stepping into the role include coordinating a calendar system for our social media and email marketing, launching over 30 new products, creating over 10 promotions and sales, making my first ads using Photoshop, crafting our first Facebook ads, organizing our first influencer partnerships, coordinating product photography with our pro-bono stateside photographer (a Belmont alum who so graciously offered to help!), and researching and reaching out to over 50 new potential wholesale customers. Over the past year, our retail sales have doubled and we have acquired many new wholesale clients; though I cannot take much credit for these things because we have both an amazing U.S. retail manager and wholesale manager, I have been able to tangibly see that my teamwork has been a large contributor to our growth.

All of these things have had a direct impact on the company, which in turn has a direct impact on the community. Most simply put, more product orders equals more work for our artisans. If there's anything that this past year has confirmed for me, it is the power of economic development through job creation. Most of my coworkers are living a much higher quality of life and providing a better future for their children because of their work with 2nd Story Goods. A job provides the means for their kids to go to school, eat, participate in extracurriculars, and hopefully continue on to college when the time comes. A job within our company culture transforms our employees into stronger leaders in their communities, which therefore leads to a greater impact in the community at large.



(left to right) 1. Cross-cultural and lingual communication has proven to be both challenging and joyful. I am so thankful for the growth I have experienced this year as a result of this. 2. One of my very favorite days this past year was when I got to visit a coworker's family in the countryside. We picked mangos at his father's farm and ate them right off the tree! 3. A photo snapped of me while shopping for groceries in the market. This is something I am proud of myself for learning to do alone while also negotiating prices!

Though at this point, the majority of my responsibilities can be done remotely, I think it was absolutely vital that I spent this entire first year in Haiti and that I spend another full year there. And while partly that is because of some motivation, advice, and leadership development I was able to bring with me, mostly it is about what I have been given. In this time, I have learned about the Haitian culture and how that impacts every area of our business. My major was International Business and I am 100% learning firsthand about that! I am learning so much about how necessary it is to be humble, willing to compromise, and patient when working within another culture.

The presence of political unrest has made it a very interesting year to be living in Haiti. When the Haitian government lifted gas subsidies in July of 2018 that were enabled by a development deal with Venezuela, two things happened: people were outraged by the sudden hike in prices and the population realized that money given by Venezuela for infrastructure development was nowhere to be found and thus must have been pocketed, clearly revealing a high level of corruption within the government. Over the past year, there have been "manifestations" on and off, and a few times the country has been on "lockdown", meaning roads were blocked, businesses and schools were closed, and protesting ensued. There were at least two days over the past year when I was not able to go to work because the manifestations meant it wasn't safe to leave my house. There were more occasions when I wasn't able to go to the market or the bank when I wanted to because it wasn't safe to travel all the way downtown. There was a time when I had to seriously consider evacuating, though I

ended up not needing to and being able to stay safe in Gonaives. And then there was the end of my Lumos journey; I was scheduled to fly out of Haiti mid-October, but ended up having to leave two weeks earlier due to increasing unrest. Haiti has now been having constant protests for over a month and a half. Businesses have been closed, roads have been blocked, children have been out of school, gas shortages have been prevalent, and prices have soared. Though I know I need to be in the U.S. right now for my health and safety, it was very hard to leave early and has been so difficult to watch the situation unfold from the U.S. One big reason for that difficulty is thinking about my friends there struggling and about how many people are stuck in these dire circumstances with no possibility of leaving.

Over the past year, I have become more familiar with the tragic consequences the trans-atlantic slave trade continues to have on our world today and the effects of systematic racism. In the US, some find it easy to pretend that slavery was a long time ago and doesn't really affect the lives of brown and black people today. It is not difficult to follow the history of Haiti and see how slavery and racism have been huge factors that contribute to the state of the country today. While living in Haiti, the lasting effects of slavery have been evident in every day life, from people approaching me with mumbling voices and ashamed downcast eyes like I am some sort of master, to the deeply ingrained "slavery mindset" that includes the belief that people don't really have control over their own lives. During this past year, I have also committed myself to learning more about systemic racism, white privilege, and the black lives matter movement in the US. The more I have dismantled what society has taught me to uphold, the more I have started to understand the pain it has caused others.

During my senior year of college, I really wrestled with the privilege I have in life. I wondered what it was going to be like to live in Haiti of all places while struggling with such an issue. Incredibly, after a year of living in Haiti, the struggle is still present. As much as I try to



push it away and carry on with my day, it still smacks me in the face very often. Sometimes it looks like really noticing the shack-like house someone on my street lives in for the first time, and sometimes it looks like three people in a row asking me to give them the equivalent of 10 cents on my walk from work to my Creole class. It is so easy to be living in my own world inside my head, going over my to-do list and thinking about what I will choose to eat for lunch that day; yet time and time again, I am faced with the reality of the struggles that so much of the world's population still live with. I've had to learn what is and isn't in my control and to give my very best to change what is in my control. I have found that doing my job to the best of my ability is the best thing I can do right now. I've also had to learn that I'll always be learning, and that it is best to keep reading and keep listening with a humble heart.



(left to right) 1. Having a few friends visit this year was such a gift. Madison Barefield, who was a Lumos scholar in South Africa and still lives there, came towards the end of my Lumos journey. We talked all things social enterprise, as she is in the process of starting one! 2. On some occasions, I was forced into modeling for 2nd Story Goods! They're right when they say it really isn't as easy as it looks! 3.. On my chartered flight from Gonaives to Port au Prince at the end of my Lumos journey,. I unexpectedly got to fly the plane for a little while. It felt fitting for the end of such an adventurous year!

To be honest, I think one of the biggest and most important personal changes has been with my ego. Though I didn't know it at the time, for a long time, so much of me wanting to live and work in Haiti was about my ego. Through self-reflection and development over the past few

years, I have learned that our egos are naturally the motivation behind a lot of things, and it's not always a bad thing; it doesn't always come out in a negative way either. When I was in high school and starting college, I used to love to tell people about my dream of working in Haiti. They would automatically think I was such a good person and would be so impressed (It's funny because now it's almost the opposite. I don't particularly like telling new people that I live in Haiti because the compliments don't mean much to me anymore and it often makes them feel uncomfortable suddenly thinking they are not doing enough for the world by living their "normal" lives and working "normal" jobs, which I don't at all agree with!). Good thing I started working through this in college before actually moving to Haiti, because living a year in a developing country is definitely not for the faint of heart! It also will tear down one's ego rather quickly, because in general, the people living there are not at all impressed. Often times, people (especially those I encounter on the street or in the market) are hungry, or in need, or uneducated, or don't have formal jobs, and they see me, a white privileged girl with nice things. They do not understand why I'm there; they have no idea what a "Lumos grant" is or "UN sustainable development goals" are. If anything, I am more often than not seen as selfish-"sesh" as they sometimes yell at me- because I have things like money and food but do not share. Being called selfish by the population you are aiming to serve: talk about an ego destroyer!

But while unpleasant, this has been good for me. It has helped me develop some tougher skin and sure as heck has made me analyze what I'm doing even more. It's made me check my heart and pray a whole lot about my intentions behind things and for God to help take all the ugly ego-motivated stuff out. That stuff doesn't leave unless it's seen and worked through, and as a human, I will always have things like that to work through. The night before I left Gonaives, I wept. I do not think I have ever cried so hard about anything that wasn't

personally affecting me or a loved one, but was rather a fact of the world. I wept at the injustice I was seeing in the lives of the general population of Haiti. I cried for what felt like hours about the unfairness of it all, at the pain people were in and the exhaustion they were feeling, at the fact that a few rich people at the top were keeping all of the resources for themselves while people in their own country were starving. And as I packed my bags to go home, I realized that after a full year of living in this country, the struggles of it became my own more than they ever have before. Growing up I used to talk about how much I loved Haiti and its people, and I do think that came from a beautiful place in my young heart. But that night, after a year of living in Haiti and experiencing all of her glory of mountain hikes and ocean views and strong kind people and seeing so plainly so many of her lows, I wept for her like I imagine I would for my own child. And that's when I knew I had experienced true growth and that it had truly become my second home.

In the past year, because of the once in a lifetime opportunity afforded to me by the Lumos Travel grant, I have grown personally, professionally, and spiritually like never before. I have been forced to keep stepping farther and farther out of my comfort zone, and though it has been anything but easy, the growth that has resulted has been absolutely worth it. I have been given the incredible chance as a 23 year old to work within the leadership of a small company, and unique professional experience that will without a doubt positively shape my future career. And now, as a result of the year that Lumos grant gave me with 2nd Story Goods, I have been asked to stay for another year, doing my absolute dream job. I will forever be thankful to Belmont and to the Lumos program for helping me get from here (Nashville) to anywhere (Haiti)!