When Staci Bechard ’13 reminisces about Haiti, the image that she says she will always remember isn’t what you might expect. It isn’t the 680-mile flight from Florida on a 15-passenger cargo plane or the seven-hour trip on a “tap tap” bus over the winding mountain roads from Port-au-Prince to Jacmel. It isn’t even the devastation lingering two years after the earthquake of 2010.

What she says she will never forget is how friendly the Haitian people were. “It’s rude not to say bon jour [good day] to everyone you walk by in Haiti. Once we asked a woman for directions, and she took 15 minutes out of her day to show us the way.”

Bechard, who is majoring in integrated elementary and special education in the College of Education, Nursing and Health Professions, has volunteered the past two summers with the Haiti Family Initiative (www.haitifamilyinitiative.org). The Delaware-based organization sends teachers, social workers, and medical personnel to help Haitians whose lives were shattered by the earthquake.

A native of Newark, Del., Bechard says she has always been drawn to community service. “I guess it started with Girl Scouts. I’m pretty blessed and privileged to have what I have, and I feel that I should help others.”

She admits that when she arrived in Haiti, she was not prepared for the devastation. “I had been to Gulfport [Mississippi] and New Orleans with church youth groups to help after Katrina,” she says. “But Haiti was in complete devastation; no organization. Some homes stood as they were just after the earthquake.”

At a wellness and recreation camp in a Salvation Army building, Bechard “taught English to children who lived in tent cities. It’s really hard in a population like that because we were only there for 10 weeks. After that, the kids just roam around. They don’t have resources—no books, no Internet. Education drives everything. You can’t improve anything without it.”

Bechard is using her experience to create a manual to help teachers from industrialized countries adapt to teaching in Third World countries. The manual will be published through a grant from the Women’s Education and Leadership Fund at the University of Hartford.

Bechard’s enthusiasm for education is also evident at the University, where she is a tutor; a member of the education honor society, Kappa Delta Pi; and a founder of the University chapter of Students for Education Reform. She is a regular on the dean’s list.

Two summers in Haiti have clearly colored Bechard’s sense of responsibility. “Imagine if the U.S. hired 200 engineers to put water in every town in Haiti,” she says. “Imagine if we did something as simple as that, how much of a difference we could make in someone’s life.”