

Fleeing a Life of Political Upheaval and Violence in Haiti

Pro Bono
March 2019
Foster Garvey Newsroom

Contact

Emily Harris Gant
Matthew J. Yium

Two years ago, Emily Gant and Matt Yium joined forces to represent Anna*, a Haitian woman defending removal (deportation) proceedings in Seattle Immigration Court. In March 2019, the Immigration Judge granted Anna withholding of removal, an asylum-like remedy that prevented her deportation to Haiti on humanitarian grounds.

Anna's father was an active member and local leader of one of Haiti's major political parties, Fanmi Lavalas, a social-democratic political group. Due to her father's party affiliations, Anna and her family became the targets of a series of political attacks, culminating in an attack on her family's home. The attackers killed Anna's grandparents, burned her home to the ground and sexually assaulted her as she attempted to flee. After this incident, Anna's surviving family went into hiding within Haiti, while Anna fled to the Dominican Republic, then through Ecuador to Brazil and finally to the United States.

Anna entered the United States undocumented and soon found herself in removal proceedings alongside her sister and cousin. After decades of being failed by every government and safety net she turned to, Anna finally found her defenders in Emily and Matt.

Emily and Matt approached their hearing with justifiable anxiety. Anna's case had originally been scheduled for a hearing in July of 2018. Emily and Matt appeared for that hearing, only to see their judge deny all relief to Anna's cousin before adjourning Anna's trial date. Emily and Matt faced what appeared to be insurmountable odds, but they persisted. Emily won Anna's trust, locating Creole interpreters and securing expert testimony. Matt took the lead on drafting Anna's pre-hearing brief and handled direct examination of the team's witnesses at the hearing. Working closely with a well-prepared client, Matt delivered a

Fleeing a Life of Political Upheaval and Violence in Haiti

decisive performance. The judge, issuing his decision from the bench, began by remarking favorably on Anna's credibility. Emily and Matt had a good idea what this meant, and they were right: Anna would be one of the lucky few allowed to stay in the United States.

Anna won on the strength of her own testimony, which was developed through patience, practice and attention to detail with guidance from Emily and Matt. Thanks to everyone's hard work all around, Anna was able to escape a life of political upheaval, violence and oppression and find a safe harbor in the United States.

**Names have been changed to protect identities.*