

# SEA DOG

A Seafaring Captain's  
Lessons *in* Leadership



CHARLES L. STUPPARD

Captain, U.S. Navy (Ret.)



## Additional Praise for *Sea Dog*

The story of Charles Stuppard is nothing short of inspiring. His rise from poverty to commanding the Navy's most advanced warship exemplifies resilience and determination.

*Sea Dog* offers invaluable leadership lessons, practical advice, and profound insights. Charles has greatly influenced me as a Naval Aviator, Officer, and leader. This book is essential for anyone who wants to lead with purpose, compassion, and integrity.

—**LCDR Chris Kapuschansky,**

*Former US Navy Blue Angel 2022–23 and  
Blue Angel #2, in the movie “The Blue Angels”,  
US Navy F/A-18 Super Hornet Pilot*

Captain Charles Stuppard and I have been friends for many years. His reputation as a senior officer and leader in the Navy is noteworthy. He has been recognized as having a “head and shoulders above” capability to lead and motivate his subordinates, especially under stressful circumstances. *Sea Dog* should be guide for aspiring leaders in all walks of life.

—**Colonel Tom McNeil, USMC (Ret.),**

*President & CEO, Founder of MDL Partners*

Enroute to commissioning, USS Gonzalez encountered Hurricane Josephine in the middle of the Gulf of Mexico. Charles exuded an aura of competent authority as we weathered the storm. I was there during this scary circumstance. He is a man who weathers storms and knows what he is doing. He is a leader not just for his time—but for all-time.

—**John W. Flores,**

*Author of “Marine Corps Sgt. Freddy Gonzalez”,  
Former U.S. Coast Guard sailor*

*Sea Dog* is a road map to become an outstanding leader, one who acts with character, empathy and honor. It is a true guide to success and should be in the library of anyone committed to living an extraordinary life. Dr. Stuppard's story reminds me of my personal story, moving from Haiti at age 17 and becoming an attorney, a colonel and a USAF flight surgeon.

—**Dr. Rudolph Moise**,  
*CEO of Comprehensive Health Center, Family Physician*

# Sea Dog

*A Seafaring Captain's  
Lessons in Leadership*

Charles L. Stuppard

WILEY

Copyright © 2025 by Charles L. Stuppard. All rights reserved.

Published by John Wiley & Sons, Inc., Hoboken, New Jersey.

Published simultaneously in Canada.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, scanning, or otherwise, except as permitted under Section 107 or 108 of the 1976 United States Copyright Act, without either the prior written permission of the Publisher, or authorization through payment of the appropriate per-copy fee to the Copyright Clearance Center, Inc., 222 Rosewood Drive, Danvers, MA 01923, (978) 750-8400, fax (978) 750-4470, or on the web at [www.copyright.com](http://www.copyright.com). Requests to the Publisher for permission should be addressed to the Permissions Department, John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030, (201) 748-6011, fax (201) 748-6008, or online at <http://www.wiley.com/go/permission>.

The manufacturer's authorized representative according to the EU General Product Safety Regulation is Wiley-VCH GmbH, Boschstr. 12, 69469 Weinheim, Germany, e-mail: [Product\\_Safety@wiley.com](mailto:Product_Safety@wiley.com).

Trademarks: Wiley and the Wiley logo are trademarks or registered trademarks of John Wiley & Sons, Inc. and/or its affiliates in the United States and other countries and may not be used without written permission. All other trademarks are the property of their respective owners. John Wiley & Sons, Inc. is not associated with any product or vendor mentioned in this book.

Limit of Liability/Disclaimer of Warranty: While the publisher and author have used their best efforts in preparing this book, they make no representations or warranties with respect to the accuracy or completeness of the contents of this book and specifically disclaim any implied warranties of merchantability or fitness for a particular purpose. No warranty may be created or extended by sales representatives or written sales materials. The advice and strategies contained herein may not be suitable for your situation. You should consult with a professional where appropriate. Further, readers should be aware that websites listed in this work may have changed or disappeared between when this work was written and when it is read. Neither the publisher nor authors shall be liable for any loss of profit or any other commercial damages, including but not limited to special, incidental, consequential, or other damages.

For general information on our other products and services or for technical support, please contact our Customer Care Department within the United States at (800) 762-2974, outside the United States at (317) 572-3993 or fax (317) 572-4002.

Wiley also publishes its books in a variety of electronic formats. Some content that appears in print may not be available in electronic formats. For more information about Wiley products, visit our web site at [www.wiley.com](http://www.wiley.com).

***Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data:***

Names: Stuppard, Charles L., author.

Title: Sea dog: a seafaring captain's lessons in leadership / Charles L. Stuppard.

Identifiers: LCCN 2024044832 | ISBN 9781394248247 (hardback) | ISBN

9781394248261 (ebook) | ISBN 9781394248254 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: Stuppard, Charles L. —Biography. | Retired military personnel—United States—Biography. | Leadership.

Classification: LCC UB443 .S78 2025 | DDC 359.0092 [B]—dc23/eng/20241015

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2024044832>

Cover design: PAUL MCCARTHY

Cover art: © GETTY IMAGES | STEVE WEST

*To my late mother, Grace, (1922–2019) who gave her all,  
so we could have it all.*

*To my wife, Nidda, who provided me with unconditional love  
and support. She is the epitome of a Navy spouse.*

*To the joy of our lives Javier, Maurice, and Charles who gave us  
Jace, Korbin, Ezra, and Noah.*



# Contents

Acknowledgments	ix
Introduction	xiii
<b>Chapter 1:</b> Haiti: Learning Lessons That Last a Lifetime	1
<b>Chapter 2:</b> A Strange New World	17
<b>Chapter 3:</b> The Arduous Journey from Air to Sea	33
<b>Chapter 4:</b> Underway: The First Journey as a Ship and as an Officer	47
<b>Chapter 5:</b> Running the Combat Systems Team	63
<b>Chapter 6:</b> Four Commanding Officers: Learning to Work for and Learn from Very Different Leaders	81
<b>Chapter 7:</b> On the Path to Becoming a Commander	105
<b>Chapter 8:</b> In the Heart of the Pentagon	117
<b>Chapter 9:</b> Command of the USS Arleigh Burke (DDG 51)	131

<b>Chapter 10:</b> From Exercises to Exits	145
<b>Chapter 11:</b> Teaching in School, Training in War	163
<b>Chapter 12:</b> The Base	181
<b>Chapter 13:</b> The Last Commands	195
<b>Chapter 14:</b> A Sea Dog's Final Lessons	211
Index	219

# Acknowledgments

I owe a debt of gratitude to many people who gave me freely of their time and energy, and contributed immensely to my success as a person and as a leader. They made me realize that “To Whom Much is Given, Much is Expected.”

I begin with my late mother, Gracieuse “Grace” Destra Stuppard, who left her country and her family to forge a future for her children. Without her, this story would not have been possible.

To my wife of forty years, Nidda Luz Melendez, who left Coamo, Puerto Rico, when she was about 3 years old and moved to New Jersey with her family. We met at Cornell University, and she became the rock of my life. She could have gone to Princeton University and I, to Columbia University, and we would have missed each other. Somehow, the path was laid out for us, and here we are. Her unwavering patience was fully tested as I volunteered her to edit my doctoral dissertation.

To my oldest son, Dr. Javier Stuppard, one of the world’s top 100 trombonists, whose perseverance and passion for excellence inspire me. I used to take my sons to Bush Garden when they were young.

After Javier's first performance in Switzerland, I asked him how it was? He responded, "Switzerland looks just like Bush Gardens." We both obtained our doctoral degrees within a week apart.

To my middle son, Lieutenant Commander Maurice Valentino Stuppard, who followed my steps in several ways. At my military retirement, he delivered the poem "The Watch" flawlessly and with style. He was flabbergasted when I presented him with my navy sword. He said to me, "Do I keep it?" I responded, "Of course, you now have the watch."

To my youngest son, Charles "Chuckster" Stuppard, the data scientist and mathematician, who was always the smart and quiet one in the family. We would have a "KFC-father-and-son-dinner" for his birthdays, and he would keep the stubs to remind me of the ones we missed. Maurice and I joke as Navy guys that we are the only two in the family not to be a Golden Key Honor Society member. Javier and Charles followed the example of their mom.

To my brothers and sisters who mean the world to me, Nicole and Eddy Michel, Enive and Josué Coicou, Daniel and Marise, Franz and Martine Zambrelli, Serge and Esther Gilles, Alphonse and Yvette, and Lydia and Paul Coicou. They are my rock star family.

To my nephews and nieces Lydie, Thamar, Rachel, Gloria and Sabine, Richard and Elvis, Danno, Ornella and Natalie, Peter and Manny, Tina, Fafi, Christian and Ricky, David, Tatiana and their children.

To my many cousins from my father's side and mother's side. Our Stuppard family is linked to the Charles, Bonhomme, Dalencourt, Poteau, Coicou, Chery, Compas, Boursicault, Dor, Pinard, Dupuy, Bazin, and Monestime families. They are such a joy with which to be.

To my brothers and sisters from Nidda's side: Cheo, Lucy; Felix, Miriam; Manuel, Michelle; Maria; Mamelta; the late Angel, Lisa; the late Tita and Maryland, and their children. Special mention to nephews and nieces Johnny and Raisa,

Charlie, Carlos, Lisa and Dereck, Rob and Lisa, Angelica and Jake, Nelson and Kim, David and Felicia, Edward and Jenny, and Wanda and Tony.

To my friends from Juvenat: Serge Vilvar, Rodrigue Valery, Kelly Gaspard, Frerot Dupoux, Ketty Camilien; from Centre D'éducation Scholaire (C.E.S): Yvon Fleurival, Marcius, Gasner Roche, and Ronet Germain. Best friends from Spring Valley: Lyonel Alexander, and from Fairchild: Roman Woloszyn and Andy Imperiale.

To my mentors who showed me the way; to name a few: Daniel Holloway, Peter A.C. Long, D.C. Curtis, Tony Watson, Sinclair Harris, Chuck Neary, Byung Min Kim, Danny K. Davis, David Swindle, Tom Daniel, Dick Formica, Leon Bury, Ramses Camille, Jeannine Raphael, Frere Mathelier, and Roger Valentin. Special mention to Phil Kellam, Dave Belote, Ray Gromelski, and Paul Hirschbiel who introduced me to local Virginia politics because if good people do not participate in politics, then the nation is liable to be led by those who are not as good, according to Plato.

To my Navy and military friends who are near and dear to many, to name a few: Robert Blondin, Elaine Luria, Monika Washington, David Coggins, Thomas Crimmins, Bob Cooney, Cary Frame, Stewart Wharton, Cynthia Findlater, Bill Crow, the CNIC "Landlords" of Hampton Roads, the 2004-2006 DESRON 2 CO-s, the 2005-2006 SNMG-2 CO-s, my Arleigh Burke (DDG 51), and JEB Little-Creek/Fort Story team.

To my Cornell University friends and classmates who are very dear to me and include David O'Connor, Gregory Nicholls, Jon Poe, Greg Busby, Jamie Hintlian, Jeannette Perez, Simon Krieger, Tina Gourley, and so many others.

To my Alpha Phi Alpha brothers at Alpha Chapter Alumni Association (Cornell), Tau Beta Lambda (Haiti), and New Delta Lambda (Chesapeake, Virginia) who provided me with a vision of hope and higher ideals.

To my L'Haitienne 925 brothers of The Grand Lodge of Washington D.C., whose mission included making me a better man.

A special thanks to my editor, Bruce Wexler, and the professionals at Wiley: Bill Falloon, Susan Cerra, Purvi Patel, Katherine Cording, Lori Zaher, and Meshach Ravitchandran. They took a ten-year work of love that started after I finished my doctoral dissertation and had gotten used to waking up at 5:00 a.m., and turned it into this book.

# Introduction

I can imagine no more rewarding a career. And any man who may be asked in this century what he did to make his life worthwhile, I think can respond with a good deal of pride and satisfaction: “I served in the United States Navy.”

*John F. Kennedy*

**W**hen I was a kid living amid the turmoil and poverty of Haiti, I could not have imagined myself on the bridge of the USS Arleigh Burke, in command of the lead ship of the most powerful and sophisticated class of ships in the history of naval warfare.

I’m writing this book to help you imagine what is possible, despite whatever obstacles life throws in your way. I’m writing it to help you imagine yourself as a leader, even if you have not yet attained a leadership position.

As a leader, I've spent my career inspiring, motivating, and teaching, and I hope my stories and leadership lessons will inspire, motivate, and teach.

I started writing this book after watching a YouTube program, "Metropole, Le Point," in which one of the guests said that young Haitians were in dire need of positive role models. Though I know other Haitians who have been highly successful, after watching that interview, I thought that I might qualify as a role model. When I met with a group of professional Haitians in New York City and told them about my career, they suggested I share my story in book form.

The more I thought about the book I wanted to write, though, the more I realized it wasn't just for Haitians but for anyone who aspires to lead and succeed – especially anyone who was not raised in privileged circumstances and wants to become a "good" leader. Good is in quotes because I mean it both senses of the term. These leaders are good at their jobs, but they also are good as human beings. I have always strived to be good and do good work, and I believe this striving has contributed greatly to my success and the success of the organizations for which I worked.

Let me give you a snapshot of my career and in so doing, give you a sense of the lessons I hope to communicate.

After arriving in the US at the age of 19 speaking little English, I learned the language of my new country as well as the way things worked here and managed to graduate from Cornell University with a degree in mechanical and aerospace engineering. With that degree, I secured a job designing and testing jets for the US Air Force. From there, I switched military branches and went through the rigorous US naval officer candidate program featured in the movie, *An Officer and a Gentleman*. I spent many years as an officer on naval ships. After a stint working in the Pentagon in the Global War on Terrorism (I was there on 9/11), I rose to become the commanding officer (CO) on the USS Arleigh Burke. I finished my tour in the Mediterranean Sea as commander of US Surface Strike Group 06-1 and captain of the one US warship assigned to NATO's Operation Active Endeavor, preventing terrorism at sea.

I returned to “land,” teaching in the Navy’s premier leadership school attended by every senior US naval officer going to command, whether of a SEAL team, a nuclear submarine, or the Blue Angels. After this, I went to Kuwait in command of a special US Navy Task Group in support of the 10,000 sailors deployed as individual augmentees (IAs) fighting the Global War on Terrorism in the Middle East. Then, I was chosen to command the first joint Army–Navy base, comprised of 155 tenant commands from cyberspace to special warfare, with a population of 23,000 personnel. I concluded my naval career in the US Naval War College faculty.

Upon leaving a thirty-year career in the Navy, I became a leader in the private sector, first as vice president of the world’s #1 architecture and engineering company, AECOM, followed by a position as chief operating officer (COO) of a start-up company in Washington, D.C., and then served as general manager (GM) of a disruptive technology company in Boston, Canopy Defense. I was running my own company, Consulting & Leadership Services (CLS), when the US congresswoman, representing the Second District of Virginia, asked me to serve as her district director. As of this writing, I’m the dean of administration and dean of students at the Joint Forces Staff College at the National Defense University.

The first takeaway from this career snapshot is that I’ve enjoyed a great diversity of leadership roles. This diversity is important, because it’s allowed me to grasp the leadership strategies and tactics that work – and those that don’t work – in a wide variety of situations. I’ve learned, for instance, that the Boy Scouts’ motto of “Be Prepared” is as relevant to leaders as to scouts; that it doesn’t matter whether you’re commanding a ship or a start-up, preparation is a critical factor in whether you succeed.

The second takeaway is that my journey has been improbable, but its improbability is what makes it inspiring to others – or such is my hope. As you’ll learn, I started out having to overcome a lot of obstacles – obstacles that were difficult at the time but that also helped me become a creative, resilient leader. As you might anticipate, a Black officer in the Navy speaking in Creole/French-accented English is a distinct minority. I was shocked by the bias I

encountered, but it also motivated me to prove myself. People who have smooth sailing into leadership positions can become flummoxed in rough seas; they don't know how to deal with the unexpected ups and downs. I was unusual in that I was one of the few people on my ship who didn't get seasick through a hurricane. I learned how to lead effectively in volatile, unpredictable environments.

Here is a preview of some other lessons I'll impart in these pages:

- Learn to focus on the right things. It is said that what the captain focuses on, the crew will be fixated on. If you become upset by trivial matters, so will your people, and you'll never accomplish major tasks. Recognize what deserves your undivided attention, and your entire team will lend their support.
- Measure your success as a leader by the impact you have on your organization and the people you lead in five to ten years. The litmus test for leaders is what people say about them after they've left their organizations. I left the ships and people who served under me in better shape than when I first encountered them, and that is a leadership legacy not everyone can claim.
- Create an environment where everyone is motivated to join the team fully; to embrace the camaraderie and accomplishment of a team rather than be a team member in name only.

These and many other lessons will be highlighted throughout the book, extrapolated from my experiences at sea and on land.

As proud as I am of my achievements, I write this book with humility and empathy. Above all else, I want to communicate to readers the value of being a good person, no matter how much fame or fortune you accumulate. The best leaders are the best people, and this theme will be threaded throughout my book.

Now, let me take you back in time and introduce you to a young boy growing up in Haiti who, unbeknownst to him, was learning lessons that would serve him well many years into the future.

# Chapter 1

## Haiti: Learning Lessons That Last a Lifetime

The secret to success is to choose great parents.

*David McCullough*

**T**alk to any leaders and they will say that their upbringing had a profound effect on the leaders they became. I was born in Haiti and spent the first nineteen years of my life there, and I was exposed to two very different leadership styles. The country's leaders, Papa Doc Duvalier and his son, Baby Doc, were dictators, and they led through fear and intimidation. My mother and father, as well as other family members and teachers, on the other hand, modeled different leadership traits. Years later as a military officer, I eschewed the stereotypical fear-inducing style in favor of a more compassionate, participative one. As you're about to see, the roots of this style are anchored in Haiti.

My mother, Gracieuse Destra, and father, Maurice Stuppard, grew up in St. Marc, a town thirty miles north of the capital Port-au-Prince. My mother grew up poor and had to quit school at age twelve, but her family's membership in the Lott Carey Baptist Church provided a connection to a US philanthropist, Dr. Sommerville, who helped her obtain a scholarship to Shaw

University in Raleigh, North Carolina. My mother told me that she and my father fell in love when they were eight, but their romance didn't begin until he also attended Shaw University on a scholarship.

My father studied divinity, and my mother studied education and nursing. After Shaw, they returned to Haiti and my father began a fifty-plus year career of preaching the gospel. I used to describe my parents' life of service, stating my father took care of their souls and my mother took care of their mind and body. They got married shortly after returning to the island and settled in the Northern part of Haiti, the Artibonites. My father became a Baptist minister and preached the word of God all over Haiti. He was well-known and recognized in Haiti, mostly amongst the poor. I remember hearing him speaking on the radio. In the mid-1960s, he switched to the church of the Nazarene and settled in Port-au-Prince to pastor a church in Carrefour. They would raise nine children: Nicole, Enive, Daniel, Franz, Serge, Charles, Erntz, Alphonse, and Lydia.

### **A Lot of Faith and a Little Fighting**

It was on Wednesday, January 1, 1958, at 6 a.m., that I landed in St. Marc. My mother had a very difficult time with my delivery. Many years later, she related a strange story about something that happened when I was a young child. She said the devil came to her in a dream and asked her for an exchange. The voice told her, "If you give me Charles, I will give you richness and anything else your heart desires." She categorically refused the devil's deal. Even when my mother was elderly, she would remind me that, "The devil wanted you because he knows you have a special mission."

Haiti was a distinctive place in which to grow up, an island beset by poverty and ruled by a dictator. But it was also a place of many friends and family, of a culture that was rich in tradition and pride. I have come to associate all the events of my life in relation to where I lived. I clearly remember living in the house by the

river at Carrefour, a suburb of Port-au-Prince. I remember sitting by the glass window and watching Hurricane Flora causing havoc in the neighborhood. I saw coconut trees bending at impossible angles but not breaking. I saw tin roofs flying. The wind whooshed as it rushed by our brick house with its cement roof, and I grasped the power of nature. Then a calm descended with no more wind, and mother said we were in the eye of the hurricane. I did not know hurricane had eyes. I wondered if it could see where it was going. The year was 1963; I was 5 years old.

My father's church would receive shipments of provisions from America called Sinistré. There were several bags of powdered milk, gallons of white cooking grease, and big bags of barley. The Nazarene church also sent tons of previously owned clothing called Kennedy. The bags and carton boxes were clearly labeled "From the People of the United States of America." I thought to myself, "What nice people those Americans must be who would send free food and clothes to people they do not even know."

I started school and the teaching method back then relied heavily on rote memory. The teacher would call on us in front of the class. As required then, I would cross my arms as a symbol of respect and start reciting what I memorized the night before as she held the textbook in front of her, ensuring word-for-word regurgitation. Not knowing the lesson was grounds for severe punishment, which varied from kneeling, to facing the wall standing up, to spanking. Worse was the embarrassment in front of all the pretty girls in the class. It seemed that the girls always knew their lessons, but the guys not so much. Now I realize the girls must have felt absolutely pressured to study rather than endure the torture of embarrassment in front of the guys. This must have been the period when I started to take studying seriously. I memorized world and national events, but at no time did the teacher explain to me why a man named Christopher Columbus had to leave his own country to cause the decimation of a million Tainos in Haiti and the subsequent massive exploitation of African people, with the holy blessing of the Christian church and the tacit approval of

a so-called enlightened continent. It just did not make any sense to me then, but I continued to memorize the events, the names, and the places.

*Leaders need great memories – there is nothing worse than forgetting the names of people with whom you work or the steps of a strategic plan – and from an early age, I was taught to commit facts to memory.*

One day, the school director, Maitre Morel, gathered the entire school and said, “This will be a very important day in human history. America is sending three human beings to the moon. Their intention is to land on the moon and walk on it. We do not know what is waiting for them on the other side, and much is uncertain.” He then requested that we all pray for these three American astronauts and led us in singing two songs that I would later sing silently when I would be in the war zone in the Middle East or sailing the world’s oceans. We even chose one of these two songs at my mother’s funeral, fifty years later. One was the French version of “God Will Take Care of Us.” The other song was “Fear Not, I Am with Thee.” I sang and prayed as I thought of these brave and fearless American astronauts, with all my heart and all my soul. The year was, of course, 1969 and I was 11 years old. Though I did not yet envision myself in similarly heroic circumstances, the astronauts provided me with a model for when I was commanding a ship rather than a spacecraft.

We were dismissed from school shortly after this heroic flight when the Haitian Coast Guard under Colonel Cayard finally rebelled against Papa Doc Duvalier and took to the sea. I met up with my older brother, Serge, and cousins, Daniel and Carmen, in front of the school and we walked the thirty-minute stretch back home. We could hear the ships’ guns responding fort Lamentin’s cannon shots. After dropping off our book bags at home, we headed to the top of the mountain at “Morne Téquial” where my paternal uncle, Manno, lived. My cousins, Bob and Marco, with friend, Carlos, were already enjoying the battle! From the hill, I could clearly see three Coast Guard ships. The ships were targeting

the national palace, but the bullets kept on missing. The Haitian Army Fort Lamentin, at the entrance of the city, was only a few miles from our mountain top view. We saw the ships turning and pointing their guns toward the fort and delivering a few rounds, which also missed. I found out later in the day that one such bullet landed in the backyard of my friend, Jacques, three houses away from ours. Late afternoon, I went to see the obus, French for cannon ball, which was still on the ground. It was shaped like a three-dimensional, triangular, metallic block rounded at the apex. I thought the bullets once they hit their target would blow up, but apparently, they did not. They were designed to make a big hole in a ship or a building. How in the world were they going to destroy the national palace and cause president Papa Doc to run away?

Though I obviously didn't know then that the battle I'd witnessed would be relevant to my future career, I'd already develop an interest in naval warfare. A few months earlier, I had found a book at my Aunt Anthilde's house about D-day and had read about General Eisenhower and the Allies debarkation at Normandy. That was the very first book I remember reading from cover to cover by myself. It gave me an idea about shore bombardment, and the one I saw that day in Haiti didn't fit the definition! I told my cousin Marco about what I read, how the US Seventh Flotte commanded the vast expanse of the Pacific Ocean and how Admiral Arleigh Burke, the famous Seventh Fleet commodore of Destroyer Squadron 23 "Little Beavers," was creating havoc for the Japanese during World War II in the Pacific. If you had told me then that one day, I would be in command of the Destroyer Arleigh Burke, I would have thought you were nuts.

At the time, naval battles were of secondary importance to battles with other kids. During contentious marble games, I would end up in a fight with a boy named Gary.

Gary was stronger and I would end up losing every fight. One day, I got tired of being beaten up and asked Harry Laventure, a friend of my brothers who was a black belt in karate, to teach me a few moves, and he agreed. My first martial art lesson in Harry's

living room was a joy. We started with the front stance, walk forward and back, then middle punch, and then high block and low block. We practiced for an hour. In the next lesson, we progressed to front kick and side kick, my favorite. It was a most precious gift from Harry, which he gave to me freely, and I was grateful. One day after a marble game, Gary charged toward me. I stretched into a Shuto Khan stance, wrapped my hands around his waist, and down he went. I could not believe my eyes; my very first victory. My self-confidence soared, and Gary never picked a fight with me again.

### **My Mother Leaves and a New School Starts**

On April 1, 1971, my mother told me she was going to New York. I knew what happened to parents who went overseas: They disappeared and never came back. Later, they sent for their children and family, then abandoned the country. I had lost several friends, like Doddy Mathelier and Ralph Gousse, through these overseas departures, and I remember the circumstances and sadness of each exit. Now, I was losing my mother, the person to whom I was closest. I felt desperate and devastated. I wondered what would happen and how long would it be before I saw her again. We took her to the airport, and she went to the Pan American Airways counter for her ticket. She had on a beautiful dark navy-blue skirt and a matching top over a white shirt – she was always pretty, and she looked especially now as she gave us a final kiss. I could see the tears on her face as we said our goodbyes. She made her way toward the gate, and we all went upstairs to the second-floor open balcony to see her walking toward the Pan American Airways stairway and ascending, as if she were taking a transport to heaven. I did not even wave to my mother; I didn't want to attract the attention of my stern and disciplined father. My eyes instead tracked her every step until she disappeared behind the airplane door. We watched as the airplane lifted into the sky, which was the first time I had seen anything like it. My father had been to the United States several times to preach, but I was never invited to go to the airport with him. I asked my father, "What

happens, if as the airplane takes off, it loses air? Can it just fall out of the sky?" I wanted to know if there was a possibility that my mother could be in danger. My father turned toward me and said sternly, "Son, ask God for forgiveness right now! Do not think such bad thoughts." I felt so small and stupid, because he must have thought that it was a wish. I only wanted to know if that was a possibility though, because the most precious love of my life was up there, in that thing. Years later when I was at Cornell University and taking fluid mechanics and studying the effects of turbulent flow on an airfoil, I discovered the answer was yes. It is possible for an airplane to lose altitude, not air as I thought, and literally fall from the sky.

Having passed a rigorous test, I was able to move on in my schooling and registered to attend the best school in our town at Carrefour. Prior to joining that school, I had usually been the top student in my class since kindergarten, with results published monthly and announced publicly. The competition at this new school was tough, and I had to quickly get used to not being number one anymore.

Juvenat Sacred-Heart High School was the place where I began to develop intellectually and spiritually and met some of the best friends of my life. But it was also a place of strict discipline – I learned that it can be carried to negative extremes. You did not want to be called out by the headmaster, Frère Mathelier. One day we were all lined up prior to entering the classroom when I realized we had a test, and I had forgotten my pencil. While in line, I asked a fellow classmate to borrow one. From the second floor where he addressed the entire school daily, Frère Mathelier saw me talking and immediately called, "Stuppard, report to my office." After he was done talking, each class filed to their classroom, starting with the most senior class. I patiently waited for my class to file in and instead of going to class, I peeled off to the principal's office. There was no discussion, no explanation, he said, "You are not supposed to talk in line, it will cost you." I extended my right palm out and he smacked it with a piece of flat rubber we sarcastically called *Ovaltine* (i.e. medication for the soul). Then I held out my left