

The fall semester of my sophomore year, I spent traveling with 40 other Saint Mary's and Notre Dame students on the "Semester Around the World." We were blessed to journey to Japan, Australia, Thailand, India, The Netherlands, and Italy. The majority of the time was spent in India, where we learned about and shared in the culture. I have vast memories from my experiences in India. However, what managed to come back with me was a certain feeling of how blessed I have been.

I have been lucky enough to grow up in a safe, middle to upper class town, with parents and friends who have done nothing but show their undying loyalty and support. And here I was, this sheltered girl, thrown into a sea of chaos. India to me was an attack on the senses in every way imaginable. However, the poverty remained in the forefront of my mind. When I came back home, I felt accountable for my fellow sisters and brothers of this world and wanted to give back in some way. The Honduras program seemed like a wonderful way to do this.

After the experiences in India, my initial reaction to Honduras was not one of shock at the poverty. However, there were several obstacles to overcome, namely the fact that I cannot speak a word of Spanish. It got frustrating at times that I could not communicate at a deep level with the Hondurans. However, eventually, I learned that words are not necessary in order to share love.

In Honduras, we worked through the non-profit organization, Heifer International. To speak generally, Heifer is an organization which donates cows and other livestock to needy families. They provide the training and support necessary for communities to build co-ops and learn to become self sufficient. They also address other issues, such as women's rights.

Working with the people of Heifer was an amazing and inspirational experience itself. The passion and dedication they had for their vocation was amazing, and something to aspire toward. In the beginning of the trip, they facilitated several meetings between us students and human rights activists, historians, and those working for non-governmental organizations. Through these meetings, we became aware of the problems facing Honduras, and the ways that they are being tackled. This gave us a firm grounding for the immersion that came next.

The first site Heifer took us to was a home for boys who had been involved in petty crime and gang related activity. Basically, the home provided shelter, religion, primary education, and technical training. The aim is for the boys to be productive members of society when they leave. It was truly beautiful to share time with these young boys. In Honduran society, rebellious boys are one of the most vulnerable groups, yet it never showed. They had amazing spirit and truly taught me that the language common to all people is love.

One of my most memorable experiences at the orphanage was with a 10 year old boy who literally sat by my side for two hours of his nightly free time, while he read my diary, in English, word for word. He understood about as much of what he was reading as I understood what he was saying to me in Spanish. Yet, he tried. In those moments, it was not the act of reading which meant so much, but what that act meant. It showed me that the lines humans create to denote social/cultural barriers are imaginary. The wars we fight in their name are in vain. We concentrate so much on our differences and pull away from one another in hatred. Young Jimmy showed me that differences can breed love as well.

After the orphanage, we traveled to several Heifer supported projects in rural villages. We had the opportunity to experience their daily lives as we literally climbed a mountain to get to a home and helped to build a Church for one community. I feel as though these experiences cannot be properly articulated in a 3 page reflection. However, as I often felt in India, experiencing the lives of those who have less breeds a greater appreciation for what I have at home. Yet these people are not poor. They are rich in many things: in faith, in perseverance, in generosity, and in spirit. In many ways they have more than me.

The final part of the trip was spent visiting the Mayan ruins and ancestors. It was a great way to conclude our experiences, as we did a bit of sightseeing of one of the great civilizations of the past. Meeting with the Mayan people was a highlight. It was amazing how much the Spanish had infiltrated their lives, yet they still maintained several of their “traditional” practices. I wish we had spent more time sharing with those amazing people.

Overall, I must say that my experiences in Honduras were amazing. I learned a lot about the problems facing not only Honduras, but the “third world” in general. I was able to make connections about the true interconnectedness of the world. While I felt the service component that I desired lacked severely, I learned that service does not always have to come through what one would normally refer to as great acts. Sharing a smile, a joke, or a hug can be just as helpful. And, as I think of my original intent to go and “help,” I now realize how egocentric it was. For, when people get together for the common good, they are working in solidarity to help one another learn a language of love.