

Lauren Atchison 2nd Period Pernici

I climbed into the white twelve passenger van clutching my pillow in one hand and waving goodbye to my mom with the other. The excitement floated around in the air as thoughts of mission trip in Navajo danced in all forty-seven of our heads. It was going to be a long drive but the memories made on the reservation would be well worth it. We arrived at the site twenty or so hours later, all of us ready to love on the children of Arizona and glorify Jesus Christ. I ecstatically bounded up the stairs to my small, hot, cramped, room, getting more and more thrilled with every step. Sounds of over-joyed squeals and air-mattress pumps brought the hallways of the old building to life again. There wasn't a single person without a smile on their face. And why shouldn't they have been happy? The things in store for their spiritual lives that week would change them forever.

The next morning we woke up to the "Hairspray" soundtrack and groggily climbed out of our deflated air-mattresses. My back ached but the anticipation of the day worked like a band-aid and instantly made me immune to the pain. I pulled on my work clothes and loaded up in the van again with my group Cannon de Chelly. After double checking for everything, we headed off to the local church for kids club, a free bible school for the kids who live on the Navajo reservation.

When we opened the chain link gates to the small neighborhood church kids poured in, and immediately started jumping rope, and climbing all over us. The grin on each child's face just screamed to me how much they needed our compassion and for someone to love them. So no matter how hot it was, we played tag and gave piggy back rides and by the end of the day I wanted to stay here forever. These kids were abused, starved, and sad and I was lucky enough to be a part of putting the glitter back in their innocent eyes. Their isn't a feeling I've experienced, better then making someone's day a little brighter and these kids weren't afraid to tell you when you did. They would proudly tell you that you were their new best friend and demand you to chase them. The two days I spent reading books, making crafts, and playing four square with these kids changed my life and theirs. I was extremely blessed to get the opportunity to run kids club, but the week didn't even come close to ending there.

Two days later, when kids club was over, I went to paint a house in a nearby neighborhood called Pigeon Springs. This was a time for bonding with our teams and humbling ourselves to people who had a lot less then us. We painted for about 4 hours in the heat of Arizona in July and it was very meticulous work but I had the opportunity to talk to several different people while the walls changed from white to blue but the walls weren't the only thing that changed. As I spoke with my group leaders and friends, I began to see that the things we did in Arizona weren't hard to do, and I started to wonder why I couldn't make a difference like this in Dallas. Why did it take two days of driving to help people? It really got me thinking and inspired.

The last night on reservation was by far, the best night of my life. Fifty of us crowded into a Hogan a few miles away from the housing, thinking it would be just our typical worship service that we had had every night. But something this particular night was different. The atmosphere was filled with joy for all the amazing works God had performed in all of us that week and the sadness that we were leaving the next morning. As we settled down on the dusty floor or the traditional Navajo house, music

started playing and my gaze focused intently on the beautiful wooden statues of Jesus on the Cross. The feeling was overwhelming and calming at the same time. I felt like I could have spent forever in that moment, where all the chaos of the world melted away and I just got to focus on the greater purpose of my life; serving God.

After an enlightening message on how we should continue to serve the Lord, they told us that they were going to wash our feet like Jesus had done to his disciples the night he was crucified. That's when my heart changed. I hadn't been putting my heart into God completely and this week when I had, it was the best thing I ever experienced. As my church leaders came around with the water buckets and washed our dirty feet I burst into tears. I wasn't worthy of a single thing I had gotten and I had taken it all for granted when it could all disappear in a split second. My leaders Maggie and Kourtney prayed for me and told me how proud of me they were and I was the happiest I have ever been. The joy carried late into the night, just telling people how great they were, praying, and encouraging others. I never knew that a group of forty-seven real world people could build each other up as much as we did.

That night made me want to continue to make God the center of my universe when I got back to Texas, and so far there has been a huge change in my life. Mission trip changed my perspective and gave me a reason to look forward to growing in Christ. I have this undeniable passion growing each day to bring people to church and glorify my creator. I can't wait to see where this takes me.