

I carried my passport and my bright blue backpack. I carried bug spray and Spanish-to-English dictionaries. I carried six ounce “Fuente de Oro” plastic water baggies, which I wished I hadn’t, because bright-eyed little children in need desperately begged me for the water. I carried expectations, a mix of excitement and nervousness and pride, wondering what would happen on the trip, how certain things I might do would have an effect on me deep down in my soul, forever changing me.

I carried a camera, pens, pencils and notebooks, none of which were really needed, for I carried the land itself. I carried the sadness and the hurt of the dump, where skinny children ran around naked and begged for water or clothes or food or anything. Anything to escape this place where they had absolutely nothing, where they made their homes out of, ate from, and lived in the garbage and trash, constantly in that awful smell, which was like nothing I’d ever smelled—completely and disgustingly indescribable. I carried the sorrow felt by the elderly in the nursing home, many of whom had only a few more days left and had lost most of their loved ones, leaving them here alone together in a tiny three-room building with little hope for the future. I carried the longing of the Casa de Luz special needs children, who so greatly tried to communicate with me. They tried to sit up and look at me face to face or even to muster a single word. But none of these would have made any difference, for all they could have possibly said was felt with even more emotion when they looked into my eyes.

I carried antibacterial hand-wipes to save me from germs and sunscreen to save me from the intense, burning heat of the Caribbean sun. I carried water to save me from dehydration and snacks to save me from hunger. I carried the orphans themselves, who in turn, saved me from my pride and humbled me, by impulsively running right into my arms, so badly wanting to please me, so much so that they would offer up the few things they had, so desperately wanting to be comforted and loved and cared for and cherished, as any child should be.

Much of what I carried was determined by my purpose for being there. I carried Bibles and gospel tracks. I carried salvation bracelets and cross-shaped book marks. I carried true happiness and peace in my heart that cannot be really described without seeing the vibrant

glow I saw on some of the people's faces—faces now bright with truth and overflowing with genuine gratitude for the newfound tranquility they now had flowing within them.

I carried face paint, arts and craft instructions, children's Bibles and stickers. I carried string, beads, balloons and pumps. I carried joy, the lightest thing carried of all, which spread like wildfire through my heart, and across the towns I went to, by the smiles and giggles and hugs and laughter of the children who were so eager, excited, and thankful for the many things they received.

I carried love. A love that's true and that seemed to specially bond me with the people there. A love which made me feel weightless and free and humbled, like when all the deserving orphans from Jackie's House arrived at the party that my team and I had thrown for them. With combined looks of shock and happiness, they were in awe, for most had never received a party in their honor, had never opened presents just for them. Never had so many people simply love them.

I carried more leaving the trip than the combination of all I had brought with me or carried throughout the trip. I carried a new burden that would last forever: a burden to stop focusing on just myself in a society which is extremely fixated on doing exactly that. But, rather to help bring change for those who are so desperately in need, by spreading awareness of the hurt and hardships and pain and poverty that I witnessed firsthand on just one small island and small part of one big world.

And, that's exactly what I plan on doing.

My goal is to live a life of service to others, and I am interested in pursuing careers where I will be able to serve. With a newfound interest in science, combined with the time I have spend overseas in a third world country, I am considering ultimately becoming a medical doctor, since I would be able to increase my study of science and learn a trade that would allow me to help others in need.

I am immensely blessed to have had opportunities which will allow me to attend an institution that will help me reach my goals. I believe as a Christ follower it is my duty to use such resources as a means to help those who don't have the same opportunities. I view my future college education, as well as this scholarship, not as a means to further my education

and attain my own personal aspirations; but, instead, as a means to ultimately meet the needs of some of the millions of people suffering around the world.

I believe one's life is not measured in personal success or gain but rather, in the prosperity and wellbeing of the lives the person has touched. Knowing I only have one life to live, and that I will never know when I will take my last breathe, I remind myself to consider how I want to be remembered, and act each day in a way that reflects that.

As I close my eyes, I see the children of the Dominican Republic and am humbled, carrying those chocolate eyes and bright toothy grins in my heart like I carried the children on my back last summer.