

“A Servant’s Heart: Choosing to Serve.”

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“The best way to find yourself, is to lose yourself in the service of others.” This quote, spoken by Gandhi, tells the ultimate summation of what I have learned throughout my volunteering career. Many students look upon Volunteering as a graduation requirement, or resume booster. To many, it is just that; a way to spend the day to boost chances of some form of self-benefit, to increase personal gain. Now, I am aware of how hypocritical it is for me to be writing this essay on volunteering while I am applying for a scholarship that will only benefit myself, but there are still merits to my words and experience. Over the course of my years as a Christian, Scout, and musician I have served with various volunteer organizations. It is true that I have played the drums for my church over the past eight years because I love to play the drums. It is true that I have helped all of my friends on their Eagle Scout projects in hopes that they would one day help me achieve my finished project as well. It is true that I participated on the Belize and Philadelphia mission trips because I enjoy the company of those who accompanied me. However, I also play the drums for my church because I love seeing the fingers and feet of the audience in the congregation start to tap as I begin to liven up the service. I also served as the Senior Patrol Leader of my Boy Scout Troop 163 because I wanted to transition the troop to becoming completely boy led, as it was intended to be, and as it is now. It is also true that I served on the mission trips to Belize and Philadelphia to serve those who are and will always be less fortunate than I am, as a small way of saying my thank you to the world for all I have been given, and as a way to try and give back in any way I can. Volunteering is not something you simply go and do for a day. Volunteering is a facet of a personality that pervades every aspect of

one's life in the most fulfilling, enriching way possible; the knowledge that you made a difference.

Out of all the experiences I have had, the memory of one little boy in Belize will always stick with me as both a happy memory and an unforgettable lesson. In 2013, my church took eighteen youth and two adults on a mission trip to a little town called Progresso in Belize. While there, we spent the mornings mixing and pouring cement on top of a ten foot tall improvised scaffolding to create a hurricane-proof roof support for the new cinderblock church. We would work on the church from nine to noon, then we would have lunch with the villagers who lived nearby. After lunch we broke into different stations of the Bible School we had set up; sports and games, music, and puppets. At four, we finished the last of the stations and played around with the village kids until dinner at five thirty. There was one boy who stood out to me, however. His name was Israfeel, and he was the first child to be running around the house we stayed at in the morning, and the last to leave at night. To this day I have never met anyone so full of life. Every day Israfeel brought his five marbles to lunch to play with. He never let any of the other children touch them, because he said they were the only toys he had. Every day at lunch he would bring out the same five marbles, play the same game where he would roll one down a little ramp and try to bounce it off the others. And every day he would treat those five marbles as if they were the most precious treasure in the world because to him, they were.

After I saw Israfeel playing with his marbles alone in a corner at lunch one day, I walked over and sat down next to him, and showed him how to play some games on my iPod touch. I was amazed at how quickly he adapted to this technology he had never seen before. After I showed him my favorite game, he got the hang of Jetpack Joyride pretty quick. He actually broke my high score the second day he played it. Watching him grasp this new technology so quickly

was heartbreaking. To see such a quick witted, honest, lively boy growing up in a land where opportunity was near nonexistent was one of the most depressing things I had ever seen. Israfeel said he wanted to be a lawyer someday, go off to a large university, then come back and become the mayor of Progresso to make things better for his single mom and brothers. Dreams fit for the best of the best, coming from a little boy in a poverty stricken town. Looking at that intelligent, determined child under the heat of the sun, I had no doubt that he could achieve those dreams.

So the days went on. Slowly the church roof support came closer to completion, and far too quickly the day we were to approach. Eventually, it was the day. The bus pulled up, we loaded our supplies into the back, then we went back to say our goodbyes. I said goodbye to all the other village children, but Israfeel was nowhere to be found. I even ran over to his house and asked his mother if she knew where he was, (in my broken Spanish), and she motioned back towards the bus. After a few more minutes of looking, I turned towards the bus. However, just as I was about to step onto the bus, I felt a little hand press into mine. I turned and there was Israfeel, pressing three of his five marbles into my hand, his determined face streaked with tears. Then, before I could hug him goodbye or say a word, he turned and ran off, leaving me with three of his beautiful marbles, marbles that adorn my desk to this day.

There are those who say that volunteering makes no difference. They say ‘what difference can one person make, how can it possibly matter?’ Those people are wrong. Even if those who they meant to serve are only slightly better off, they themselves will be forever changed. Just as Israfeel gave up three of his only marbles, I will forever seek to give as much to those who I serve as Israfeel gave to me that final morning.

