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## Helping My Little Brothers and Sisters

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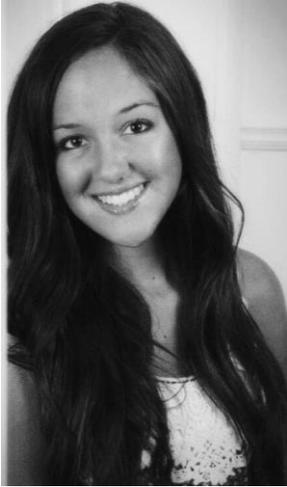
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# Helping My Little Brothers and Sisters

## **Abstract**

In lieu of an abstract, below is the essay's first paragraph.

When I think about my trips to El Salvador, I think of peace and joy. I also think of peace and joy when I think about Christmas break and summer. In the blur of a school day, it can be so hard to find these things—why? How is it that we can accomplish so much in one day, from 8am until midnight, but still feel as though we've missed out on something bigger, something better? My argument is this: I think we were created to experience life to the full. I think we were made to feel joy and peace and sorrow and love in their fullest forms. I think that we came from something big before we got here, and that we're going somewhere big when we leave here, and so, I think God created us to be something. When I experienced El Salvador, I didn't just think these things anymore—I knew.



## Helping My Little Brothers and Sisters

*Megan Gillson*

*When I think about my trips to El Salvador, I think of peace and joy. I also think of peace and joy when I think about Christmas break and summer. In the blur of a school day, it can be so hard to find these things—why? How is it that we can accomplish so much in one day, from 8am until midnight, but still feel as though we've missed out on something bigger, something better? My argument is this: I think we were created to experience life to the full. I think we were made to feel joy and peace and sorrow and love in their fullest forms. I think that we came from something big before we got here, and that we're going somewhere big when we leave here, and so, I think God created us to be something. When I experienced El Salvador, I didn't just think these things anymore—I knew.*

*As a junior in high school, I was presented with an opportunity to take a risk and travel to the country of El Salvador on a trip with Young Life, an international youth ministry geared towards high school kids. I had been invited to Young Life near me in Syracuse, NY, and I learned of the trip when I was 16. I had never been on a mission trip before, but I knew in my heart that I had to go. After convincing my parents and fundraising almost \$3,000 towards trip cost and projects, I hopped on a plane in frigid February with 40 of my friends from Syracuse and prepared myself for the culture shock of a lifetime. I had no idea that the real culture shock would occur on my way back into my own country.*

*We landed in the hot city of San Salvador and waited for some school buses and a big giant truck for our bags, and began the two-hour drive down dirt roads to our place of stay—Rancho Grande, El Salvador! When we arrived, it was nighttime, and a young Spanish-speaking boy grabbed my water bottle and filled it for me at the well. I remember thinking first, “what is this place?” and second, “how nice of that boy who has nothing, to make sure I wasn't thirsty.” From that moment on, I learned that the people of rural Rancho Grande were going to serve me much more than I could ever try and serve them—my friends and I were slowly but surely transformed on the inside throughout that week in 2011.*

*I quickly understood that relationships were the most important thing to the people of Rancho Grande and Taura. To forego a “hello” while walking past a neighbor in the village was considered strange. As soon as we arrived, the locals hugged and kissed us as if we were their long-lost relatives, even if we'd never been to the country before! I thought about all the times I've walked by acquaintances at school and didn't say hello, because I'd rather be staring at my cell phone screen. One day in Rancho, I made a bracelet out of string for a young girl named Andrea from Rancho Grande. All week, every day, she wore her new bracelet. As I said goodbye to her before leaving, she took off her bracelet*

*and tied it around one of my fingers, saying, “me recuerdas,” meaning, “remember me.” I will never forget Andrea and will always cherish my friendship with her. All I’d done that week for Andrea was play with her (and make her a bracelet), but my friendship meant the world to her. What if we told others, the people we love in our daily lives how much they mean to us? The people of Rancho and Taura never worried about how much work we got done, or how much supplies we brought. They were forever grateful for our gifts, of course, but their priority was to spend time with us and to share their love. What would it be like to love others here at home not because of what they’ve done for us, or how good they are at something, but just because they’re there?*

*One of my favorite things about rural El Salvador is the slow pace of a simple life. Arriving to work on a project a few minutes late is not a big deal in Taura, and neither is taking an entire hour to eat lunch. The El Salvadorans are not running at high-speed to make it to class, meetings or work on time; they are lucky enough to earn \$1.00 per day working on their family farm. They are lucky enough to find food for their families, they’re lucky enough to have one pair of shoes for their feet. They do not “need” all the things that we think we do—life goes on without the nice cars, fancy suits and iPhone 6s. These people live in shacks and their teeth are rotting, and they’re the happiest humans I’ve ever met. It was so clear to me on my trip that in all of our hustle and bustle and stress at home that we are missing something—when did performance become more important than simply being, and simply living?*

*I’d like to end with this story: About seven years ago, our doctor from Syracuse found while running the medical clinic in Rancho Grande that many of the locals were sick because they had parasites living in their intestines. He realized quickly that this was due to an unwelcome substance that they were somehow ingesting. It turns out that since the locals drank water from shallow, nearby wells, and since the bathroom system in Rancho Grande and Taura consists of simple holes in the ground, they were also drinking traces of their own fecal matter. Through broken translation, we explained this problem to the El Salvadorans. At first they were in disbelief, and once we installed clean-water wells for them, they thought the fresh water tasted “funny.” I think about this a lot in terms of faith; so many of us remain where we are simply because it’s what we know, even when we know there may be something better for us out there.*

*The locals were so hesitant to drink clean water because it was foreign to them, but once they accepted the clean water, they began to heal. The children grew noticeably taller, the adults’ skin looked healthier—it was so clear that God had brought us from the northeast to El Salvador to make a difference in a people who didn’t have the resources to do so for themselves. I think that sometimes in life, God brings people or things to us that we need. Out of His own good will and His love for us God is able to orchestrate the events in our lives to line up with the stories of others so that we are able to bless and learn from each other, and experience life to the full in His presence. It’s a risk to say yes and hop on a plane and go somewhere, and it’s an active choice to say yes and accept a gift like clean water from someone else. I wonder, though, if it’s a bigger risk not to say yes. I wonder if it’s a bigger risk to pass through life in a hurry in our “comfortable” fast-paced way, and I wonder if it’s a bigger risk to let relationships fall in importance underneath success and achievement. I wonder what our world would look like if we valued a God who created us and loves us over anything else. I wonder what our world would look like if we all lived like my friends in El Salvador.*



*Megan and Andrea*