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“La Divanna”

Climbing higher, you'd think
We'd reach heaven
But we find only despair
Stacked on disparity.

A house of cards, carefully placed
La Divanna rises up the mountain,
Stretching its filthy hands to
The sky. To God. To Hope.
Hoping not to topple today...

Heavy lungs lose the battle
To years in the heart of a maquilla.
Inside the beast they toil
Inside, dust chokes her lungs
But not her soul.

This is life.

Could there be less?
Than skin and bones,
Of heaving chest,
And gasping breath?

In the damp, dark basement
We huddle, and hover, singing
As if our white skin, our white words
Will heal

As if our presence
Will right all wrongs
Of a system perpetuating
This...

Cycle of sickness
Of destruction.

Garbage ferments along the streets
Mixing with broken glass and cigarette butts
To create a vile stew of anonymity and
Indifference.

I drink this rancid potion
As I lace up Victor's shoes
The brown leather worn and cracked
I am drunk
With this notion of immobility,
Of fate.

Poverty courses through my veins,
Shards of glass lacerate my lungs.
I cannot speak.
If I could, would anyone
Listen?

Could you translate the thunder of
My belly?
Does it speak of salvation
Or dreams?
Or of another day,
Another chance?

Tell me not of misery
And inequality.
I am this tragedy,
Both sides of it.

Laura Wagner '08
Reflective Essay

To write something meaningful, is to give life and breath to an experience. To give an experience justice, the right words must be sifted out of mind and soul, and pieced into delicious diction to satiate one's literary senses. Consequently, trying to conjure brilliance out of stirring emotions and conflicting thoughts is enough to make the writer, the poet, the artist, mad.

I cannot begin to explain the innocent intensity of Franklin's eyes – brilliant brown hues searching for something – as he begged me never to leave him. I cannot dictate the joy I felt as I cleaned the streets of Tegucigulpa with La Divanna's youth, nor the warmth of hospitality I could not help but see everywhere I looked. Do poverty, filth, and the stale scent of urine translate to paper and ink? Surely, the writer holds a great burden and a great responsibility in relaying truth and reality as it is seen. I am left with this responsibility not because I am worthy or apt to tell this tale, but because I cannot help but do so. For, in my life, I have not met people as worthy of speech as the friends I made in Honduras.

Drinking an Arnie Palmer and listening to a play list on my i-pod entitled, "A Life of Worth and Service," I find myself in the Dunn Brothers Coffee of Apple Valley, Minnesota. The decadence of my lifestyle does not escape me as I sit in this climate controlled environment tapping the keys of my computer, waiting for inspiration to strike me. I've been trying to write for some time now, but the words haven't come for days. If only I had a muse...something of worth to say...some insight to impart...

I spent twenty one days in Honduras. You'd think that would be motivation and muse enough, but I am compelled to question whether my musings are meaningless without more. I am but a young adult, by society's standards, and I often feel as though this pigeon hole confines me. I am not a scholar, and I am not a professional. I am just a kid looking for something bigger than myself in this world.

I went to Honduras with the aim of personal growth that would guide me in discovering my life's purpose and, as Parker J. Palmer would say, help me let my life speak. For surely one's vocation is a personal and intimate part of oneself.

It was not long after we landed in Tegucigulpa that I realized this mantra was a pure reflection of my US American values. As our vocational journey began, I quickly learned that walking with others through life's hard times, and being in solidarity with one another is what true service embodies. To better understand the essence of service and the role vocation plays in an individual's life, it is helpful to define what service and vocation are not.

Service is not an imperialistic venture in which the incoming party dictates, and it is not necessarily an organized, efficient, venture. Service is not a brief encounter with a known outcome, and cannot necessarily be measured or valued. Service is not mere problem solving, nor is it grandiose social change. Service is an act of reaching out to others and trying to connect on a deeper level. Service is getting to know those who are in need, and learning why this need exists. Service entails doing what is deeply needed, that which you are capable of doing, and that which both parties see as right to do.

Similarly, a vocational journey is not to be completed by an individual. Finding oneself is not about struggling in the wilderness for 40 days and 40 nights, nor rebuilding oneself. Vocation is not about pleasing others, and not about living a life you envision. Finding one's vocational calling is about recognizing self and being true to that self, regardless of social norms

or sanctions. The search for one's true vocation is established as one surrounds themselves with, what a good friend of mine refers to as, 'a community of support.'

Service and vocation first spoke to me in the sweltering city of San Pedro Sula, where we met best friends, Julio and Rolando. Working together, the two head the Lutheran Church and Lutheran Clinic in San Pedro Sula. They work with people of immense poverty in a place where it would be easy to overlook hope. Instead, these two genuine souls find strength, humor, and hope in one another as they work to create positive change in their community, and as they find themselves.

Too often, successful social change is portrayed as a large scale, individual attempt at changing the world. In reality, it is the constant effort of many that keeps hope alive in this world. This notion of being insignificant is reflected too often in the glazed eyes of our youth, who feel powerless; an irony to anyone who lacks the right to vote, the finances to survive, or the health to go on.

Tell me that the acts of an individual are worthless, and you will have lied to my face, for I have seen grace in action. I have seen the tenderness of Leticia's patience as she teaches kindergarteners in La Cañada. I have seen the light in Josephina's eyes as she speaks about the Salud para la Vida (Health for Life) program in the neighborhood of La Divanna. I have heard the passion of Honduran rock stars as they jam. I have devoured the love filled meals of Leti, and heard the uncontrollable giggles of her grandchildren as we play Mono en el medio (monkey in the middle) and other games. I have held the hand of a dying woman, and seen the heaving chest of a woman losing her life to years in a maquila. I have felt the warmth of strangers as they invite me into their homes, and I have shared a beer and conversation with a perfect stranger. Every action has a consequence, and every action has meaning whether we like to acknowledge it or not. If there is one thing that my Honduran friends have taught me, it is the value in the little things in life, and the appreciation those things deserve.

This outlook on life, while endearing and charming is not for the weak of heart, for there exists another component, which I believe often goes unspoken. To be content with the little things in life is one thing, but to be complacent and to live a life of monotony in the name of happiness is another. Underneath the powerful waves of appreciation and contentment lies an undercurrent that pulls us back out to the swelling sea of uncertainty in search of something more. It would be easy for me to live and die in the place of power I was born into. It would be easy for me to turn a blind eye to poverty and despair. It would be easy for me not to care about others. There is something, however, that won't let me forget the big brown eyes and wide smiles of the friends I made in Honduras. There is something that won't let me forget Franklin's protruding ribs, or the way he needed to be held like a young child at age nine. There is something that won't let me forget that there are a lot of individuals who need love...when I have love to give. There is something that won't let me forget that I can make a difference in the world. To me, that undying sense of responsibility to humankind and to self is the essence of a life of worth and service, and a life well spent.