

GROWING UP, REACHING OUT

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Imagine a place where the typical family owns a spacious house with plenty of room for themselves and all of their possessions. Someone is sleeping in his own bed in his own room. There are multiple cars sitting in the garage and driveway, and children's toys scatter the grassy yard. The oven is baking a tender roast, and the television and computer are humming, much like the person taking a nice hot shower. Welcome to America. We have everything we need and want, and I must admit I enjoy the luxuries just as much as anyone else. However, through the experiences of my life and the example of my parents I have learned that I need to use my abundant resources to reach out and help people who aren't so blessed.

Imagine a place where thousands of people, including children, are living in cardboard boxes on the streets. Some are sleeping on tattered mattresses under noisy bridges; and once they awaken, they will trudge to the nearest polluted river to bathe and get a drink. Welcome to Brazil. When I was four years old, I woke up one morning in my cozy bedroom with the choo-choo train wallpaper. The next morning I found myself immersed in the poverty of Brazil. My parents had made the decision to sacrifice our family's comfortable American life and actively help people gain a better, more hopeful life on a different continent. I made it quite clear that I was ready to leave Brazil after the first week, but I couldn't because my parents had committed us for an entire year. I had been torn away from the only culture, people, place, and lifestyle I had ever known so that my family could help people whom I had never met or even heard of. At the time I was too young to understand, but the sacrifice my parents made in order to help those who so desperately needed aid now fuels a governing principle of my life.

Imagine a place where a full meal only costs about forty cents, and there are still people starving to death. Old women slouch outside restaurants surviving on bites and nibbles from strangers. If a family is lucky, they may be able to afford one pattering motorbike that somehow manages to seat four or five. Welcome to Indonesia. When I was fifteen, my mom and I traveled through twelve time zones to volunteer at an English camp at an Indonesian school. The idea originated with my parents, but I was in support of going right away. We spent over two weeks in the country helping first through seventh graders learn our language. In order to earn a self-sustaining wage in Indonesia, people must know how to speak English. By working at the camp, we were performing essential tasks needed to give the lives of Indonesian children hope for the future. We helped make a difference in impoverished lives, and I loved every minute of reaching out to them.

Imagine a place where an entire extended family lives in a one-room shack in the middle of a sugarcane field. There is rarely electricity and never clean water. Boys under the age of ten wander the streets to wipe windshields and shine shoes for a few pesos. On dirt roads, bottle caps and dead fruit are whacked with the tree branches in innovative games of baseball. Welcome to the Dominican Republic. Last summer, I desperately wanted to go on another mission trip. An opportunity arose when my mom and I were invited to volunteer at a school in the Dominican Republic. Students of the school had previously been sitting on benches and

using their own laps as desks. My mom and I were sent to move used American furniture and lab equipment into the school so that the students' education could extend into high school, giving them the opportunity to attend college and attain a job that will keep them out of the sugarcane fields. This time, a mission trip was fueled by my desire to reach out and go.

Gradually, I have learned through the experiences of my life and my parents' actions that I need to use my abundant resources to help needy people everywhere. In Brazil, I dragged by feet as my parents set the example. In Indonesia, I discovered the joy of giving people hope for the future. In the Dominican Republic, I enthusiastically pursued serving others. In the future, I look forward to the continued pursuit of the principle that has grown as I have grown: reaching out to help the less fortunate.