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Professor King

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On the last Monday of July 2014, Franklin flashed a goofy smile before wrapping his

arms around my neck and planting a big, slobbery kiss on my cheek. On that Tuesday, Jeffrey

squatted next to me, helping plant the seeds of what would eventually become a papaya tree.

On that Wednesday, Fran helped mix cement with me, joking about how his name was actually

Frankenstein. On that Thursday, Julissa laughed with me while braiding my hair as we sat in the

grass. On that Friday, Milton serenaded me with Enrique Iglesias while I sat on the bus waiting for the

rest of the volunteers to board. On that Saturday, I prepared to return home to the United States after

a week of spending time with Hondurans during a volunteer trip I had made to the village of El

Progresso. However, it was not solely images of playing in the grass with children or having intense

tickle battles that I was coming back with. I was also coming back with reflections and stories from

people who live in one of the most dangerous countries in the world.

Two months before Franklin hugged me, he had been found abandoned in a local grocery

Store. After Jeffrey helped me plant papaya seeds, he went home and received a blow to the head

from his drunk father. While Fran laughed with me, a scar resulting from a gunshot wound peeked

out from just below his shirt sleeve. A month after Julissa braided my hair, her seven-month-old

daughter died from treatable medical complications. As Milton sang to me, an AK-47 was hidden in the

glove compartment next to him. This was the reality Hondurans were facing and something that I had

not been prepared to encounter even though I had been warned of the extreme conditions in the

country.

At the start of my freshman year of college, I knew that I wanted to become involved with

an organization that was focusing on helping people in impoverished countries. Students Helping

Honduras (SHH) was the first organization that I discovered at the freshman involvement fair, and

it was not long before I became an active member of the non-profit that is dedicated to fighting

violence and poverty in Honduras by empowering youth via education. Soon afterwards, I was

on my way down to Honduras in the summer of 2014 to help build a school that SHH had been

fundraising for. During my trip, interactions with people like the ones mentioned earlier offered me

a completely new perspective on life.

After my trip to Honduras, I felt frustrated. International aid to Central American countries

had been occurring for decades. However, here was a country that still had immense levels of political

and military corruption as well as economic and social inequalities. It seemed as if international

humanitarian efforts in the area had failed in ending what seemed like a never ending cycle of

problems. I began to wonder about the effectiveness of organizations like Students Helping Honduras

in addressing the crisis of a foreign country. I developed an interest in learning more about the causes

of the struggles and what can be done to resolve them. I became more interested in working alongside

people in communities experiencing conflict at a grassroots level. As a result, during my sophomore

year, I changed my major from Government and International Politics to Conflict Analysis and

Resolution.

One Conflict class in particular, *Community, Group, and Organizational Conflict Analysis and*

*Resolution,* refocused my interests. The class focused on the critiquing of international and third-party

Interventions, and in analyzing the limitations of such efforts, I began to realize the importance of

working within one’s own community. Honduras has a special place in my heart, but I can only do so

much to help from afar. There is so much within Northern Virginia’s own community that can be done

to help Latino immigrants. The new kid in first grade at the local school down the road who cannot

speak English is Franklin. The young woman who took my order at Starbucks and has two other part-

time jobs is Julissa. While no longer in the extreme conflict zone of Central America, Latino immigrants

to the United States still face social and economic injustices. There is a crucial issue occurring in my own

backyard, and I do not need to buy a plane ticket for it to be addressed.

After becoming more interested in Latino immigrant issues in America, I began to pick up more

on attitudes towards Latinos in America. Members of my own family went on rants about the flaws

of border control, comedians would make tasteless jokes about Latino labor workers, and politicians

condemned undocumented immigrants while calling for an increase in deportation enforcement.

Listening to these points of view, I began to wonder if there was a gap of information. Were people

aware of the corrupt and violent situations that Latino immigrants were coming from? Watching the

news, I began to notice that there would periodically be reports on bombings in Syria highlighted

by a photo of a bloodied child. Such images undoubtedly provoked a sense of anger and compassion

in Americans. However, why were there no reports on the mass waves of violence taking place in

Central American countries such as Honduras and El Salvador? Why were there no pictures of the child

who was shot in a drive-by shooting while walking to school? I became fascinated by the question of

why one narrative was being heard and another ignored.

Although I left Honduras with many thoughts and revelations, one stuck out in particular:

I can only do so much to help. I can give money, I can help build a school, I can stand in solidarity and

provide encouragement. However, the real power for change comes via the empowerment of

Hondurans. While empowerment is composed of many aspects, one of the most important parts

Is one’s own voice. The question then become how does one provide the opportunity for a narrative

to be heard? Imagine what the narratives of Hondurans and Salvadorans could do to the national

agenda and community relationships in America if only they could be heard.