

## **“Service Above Self”**

Written by: Autumn J.V. Rivet, 143 Central Ave., Cohoes, NY 12047-4612

To serve others before myself through good deeds and acts of good will means to me to use my knowledge, compassion and expertise toward the benefit of those who are unable to help themselves. My goal is to become a physical therapist with a professional sports team. Long Island University-Brooklyn has a program through the Health Sciences degree programs, with which they go to a disadvantaged community in Central or South America, or in Africa and students are able to apply their learning toward helping others. This means I will be able to take my joy of travel, my education in health sciences/ physical therapy and put it to use in helping others heal.

When I was 11 years old, I was accepted into the People to People Student Ambassador program. Two years before, my brother had been accepted to go to China and I remember being extremely jealous and wanting to go with him, so when I was nominated I jumped on the chance for the experience. To be a part of the People to People Student Ambassador program is difficult. There are only a certain number of spots for each trip. To be accepted, I had to be interviewed and write an essay. I was overjoyed at the prospect of this opportunity. I was going to go to France and England; without my parents!

Our delegation met for several months prior to the trip. As the planning progressed each of the delegates developed a sense of the countries and places we were going to visit. During the trip, most remarkable, for me, was when, among 400 visitors, I, and another Ambassador from our delegation, was chosen to lay a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier in Normandy, France. It was an intense and surreal experience, being in France and England, fully immersed in the culture. I absolutely believe that because of that trip I caught the travel bug! I have since gone on to visit several more countries. To date I've been to 13 different countries; I plan on going to many more.

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I have been a Girl Scout for 13 years. Our Girl Scout Promise and Law espouse the importance of service to others, and having values that care for others. Through my leadership and service in Girl Scouting I have worked with Equinox, preparing their Thanksgiving meal, every year since third grade. I have collected, sorted and distributed food for the local food pantries. I have read to elementary school age children and sang to the elderly and disabled at the Eddy in Cohoes. I have participated in Beautification Day by cleaning West End and/or George Street Park, every year since kindergarten and I have participated in face painting both during the Hannaford Kidz Expo in March and National Night Out in August.

My experiences through Girl Scouts have given me opportunities to not only serve others, but develop skills that will lead me throughout my life to be a better person as well as challenge me to make the world a better place. Included in my many Girl Scout opportunities is the ability to go on Destination Adventures or Service Trips to other countries. Two memorable trips with Girl Scouts include my trips to Costa Rica and Panama, the summer after eighth grade, and to India, the summer after 10<sup>th</sup> grade. In Costa Rica and Panama, we were embedded in a small town off the coast of Bocas Del Torro. We would play soccer with local children and we were teaching them to speak English and play some American games. The children were appreciative that we spent time with them and seeing the smiles on their faces made me want to help more people. When we left, they cried, which broke our hearts because in the few days we were together they had taught us as much, if not more, as we had taught them. One lesson, which still resonates with me, was that it is okay to not have much of anything material; that the little things matter much more.

On my trip to India, I stayed at the Sangam Girl Scout World Center in Pune Province. Our group helped them install new pool ropes and re-landscaping around the Center. We also

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visited a nearby orphanage and the boys, ages six to 16 years old, who lived there. We brought them school supplies and taught them songs and games. I had such a great time learning Hindu and how to play Cricket, from them. I was surprised I was fairly decent at the game; I actually hit the ball.

In both April 2014 and February 2015, with the St. Ambrose Lifeteen Mission group, I went to West Virginia to assist in the rebuilding of a home for a family in an extremely impoverished township. As a group, we spent seven days, each working 8-10 hours a day, to assure we'd leave the family with a place to live. This February, West Virginia had the coldest weather they've had in 90 years. We were sometimes working in below zero wind chills, and each day in below freezing temperatures. I built walls from the base studs, to the sheetrock and painting. I have installed insulation, installed window frames, and put up floor joists. Each night I would go to bed aching and each morning I would wake up knowing we were helping a family to have a home. Our director, Mark Trudeau inspired and kept our focus on task. My experience was one of gaining new skills, while developing friendships, an appreciation for hard work, and an understanding of the importance of teamwork. Most of all I reminded that small acts can make gigantic differences in others' lives.

Each place I visit, I thoroughly enjoy the experience of seeing how others live their daily lives and learning about cultural differences. Oddly, I'm not spoiled by the travel, instead I am honored and humbled to have had the opportunity to go to such great places and participate with such wonderful cultures. I am honored to help others in their communities and bring the skills I learn back to help those within my own neighborhood. I will always remember each trip. I learned something new every time. These trips have helped me to mature and given me a clear

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open outlook on the world in which I live. I am proud to be a citizen of the world, rather than only my local community.

By putting the service to others above myself, I have learned first and foremost the importance of going where the need is rather than worrying about my own needs. I have come to a clearer understanding that helping others the way they need to be helped, the way they want to be helped is far more essential than helping how I think help should be given. I know my desire to help others, as well as the opportunities to do so will only expand as I enter and move through my years of college and I look forward to every moment.