

Carole Usher

Mission Trip to Puerto Rico – Reflections

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Why did I do this? This was a question that I have been asked many times since returning from Puerto Rico. I have never done Habitat for Humanity work, have never been on a mission trip to New Haven (although have baked many brownies for these trips), my construction skills consist of holding and fetching materials, and I am afraid of heights. While the thought of being in warm weather in January was certainly appealing, there were 3 reasons why I did this: to make a difference with group who all had the same mission, to try something new, and to share a unique experience with my son. As a nurse, I have spent my adult life helping others. This trip presented an opportunity to help others in a much different way. Being with a team that had the same purpose magnified the effects.

As a parent, I saw my son in a different light – I saw him as a young adult. I also learned from the other young adults on this trip. We were divided into work groups for chores. The three adults in our group, Peter, Jim and I, had never been on a mission trip, but Lily, Hannah and Parker had. We knew nothing about planning a meal for 24 people, or what vespers were. Lily, Hannah and Parker did, and taught us what we needed to know.

Once people knew about this trip and what we accomplished, they wanted to know more. In fact, when my department's weekly staff meeting was cancelled, my co-workers wanted to use the time to see the pictures and hear the stories instead of using the 'bonus' time to do other work. They asked questions, and I'd like to think that they left that conference room wondering about trying something new to make a difference.

Mike and I showed my mother the pictures from the trip, and shared the stories. She asked questions, and at one point, she looked at me, and said, "We were poor, but never that poor." I also think that she gained a better understanding of her new neighbors, the Puerto Rican family that bought the house next door. They will probably get to know each other once the weather warms and yard work begins.

Finally, and most of all, I want to thank my husband, who supported us 100%, who drove us to the airport at 2am, and who kept the driveway plowed and the home fires burning.