

Students share their summer experiences in different countries

Carolyn Shonkwiler, Ethiopia

For some, travelling to a foreign country was a vacation. For sophomore Carolyn Shonkwiler, however, traveling to Africa was anything but a vacation as the trip was a part of her mission trip in assisting women struggling to escape prostitution.

During Shonkwiler's 10 day stay in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, she and 12 others assisted over 90 children and countless women.

"We helped with women that were at risk of prostitution or trying to get out of prostitution. We also had doctors come with us to give the women checkups," Shonkwiler said. "While the women were getting checkups we were playing with their kids, we really just played with them and just loved them."

Although the trip was short, Shonkwiler learned much more about the underlying differences between their culture and hers.

"They don't run on a schedule. They don't worry about being late. If they run into someone they'll stop to talk and listen about their lives," Shonkwiler said. "They don't worry about getting somewhere on time, but here it's all about schedules and being on time."

While Shonkwiler experienced the difference in the two cultures, she also was taught a valuable lesson.

"This really taught me more about loving people, because they loved and would give you anything even though they didn't have very much to start with," Shonkwiler said.

Margo Hunter, Nicaragua

From the United States to the mountainous community of Reina Nicaragua 1,872 miles away, junior Margo Hunter underwent the process of Spanish immersion for six weeks through the Amigos program. During her six weeks in Nicaragua, Hunter assisted the community during little camps called Campamentos, in which she taught the children about public health and leadership, but that wasn't all she did.

"We also created a theatre and dance group where at the end of the six weeks we had a big presentation where we presented the theatre and some girls danced," Hunter said. "There was also a pageant of girls that made dresses out of recycled material. It was really cute."

Although the trip taught the community of La Reina important information vital to a better standard of living, it also taught Hunter a few things about herself when she arrived back in the United States.

"The first night I was home I felt like I didn't belong here anymore. I used to take things for granted. There I washed my clothes on a washboard for six weeks," Hunter said. "Normally I would complain about the simplest things. Now I look at that and say, 'Glad I don't have to wash it on the washboard!'"

Francie Wilson, Mexico

A new country, new language and a new family. For seven weeks, junior Francie Wilson was thrown into a cultural vertigo. For her Amigos trip, she was located in the Chichan, Yucatan in Mexico where she stayed with her host family.

"I really loved being a part of a big family, they had 12 kids and it was just really cool," Wilson said.

She spent a lot of time playing with the kids and helping the host parents. When she wasn't with her host family or any of the children, she was eating huge meals, shocked by the super-sized food portions.

"I wasn't used to eating that much for every meal," Wilson said.

She also helped the community by picking up trash around the area or helping with the children. Although she had been out of the country before, this was her first time travelling alone out of the country and her first time to Mexico.

"I was kind of homesick at first, but it was such a cool experience that [my homesickness] eventually went away and I loved being there," Wilson said.