

## Stories from Belize - 2009



“It’s a popular tourist spot known for its beautiful beaches, marketplaces, and scenery. However this is not the Belize I visited. Our youth group took a mission trip to Belize this summer and it was, hands down, the most memorable experience of my life. Not for any of the reasons listed above, but for the people I met.

When I first heard we were going to Belize I could barely contain myself. The idea of going to a distant country with different customs and exotic surroundings was the main reason I wanted to go. I mean, I really wanted to help people, but the thought of adventure pushed all other thoughts out of my head. So it was settled, my mother, brother and I packed up and got shipped off to Belize for a week.

As soon as we stepped off the plane I got my first taste of Belize by walking square into a wall of heat. The air was so thick, hot and full of humidity I felt like I was walking through molten jello on hot coals rather than an airport tarmac. When we got to the school we were sleeping at my only consolation was a tiny fan I had brought. However, someone thought it would be fun to play basketball in the 95+ degree weather. So while we were outside I noticed a young boy watching. I didn’t think much of it at first. But after awhile I decided to invite him to play with us. Little did I know that boy and his family would totally change my view on the world.

His name was David, and he had a brother and two sisters. They were Carlos, Anita and Carla. They lived in what we would consider a concrete shack next to the school. But I don’t think they felt the same way. Whenever I saw them, even when they were covered from head to toe in dirt from working all day, they were smiling. I found this very strange. But soon I noticed it wasn’t just them, but all the kids I saw on that trip had smiles. Then it occurred to me, all kids are the same no matter where you go.

This was probably the single most important thing God showed me that week: joy. If these kids could be joyful with their conditions, I could certainly be joyful with everything God has blessed me with. I should be joyful of my family, that I have food, shelter, clothes and my loving family at Aldersgate who supported me not only financially but spiritually as well.

I came into this trip looking for adventure and fulfillment; I left knowing that I had everything I needed in front of me.”

—Will O, (Senior, Concord High School)

“What can I say about the Belize Mission trip? It was everything I expected, yet nothing that I expected. I expected to be hot, very hot, and that our accommodations would be a bit rough—and they certainly were. I expected the work to be hard and the messy, and it certainly was! I expected mosquitoes, sand fleas and all kinds of bugs, and we had plenty! We even had a gecko living in our room with us!

What I didn't expect was to make so many personal connections with the residents we were there to help. As a matter of fact, the people we met were truly amazing! I was so touched by all the children. They were more interested in playing with us and getting to know us rather than the work we were there to do.

Every day, as the Devotion Leader for my work crew, I was asked if we had any God sightings. And every day, I said yes without hesitation. The connections our teens made with the kids were truly remarkable. The ease with which they played and made friends was truly astonishing. We taught them some of our games, they taught us theirs. The smallest things meant so much to them. We had brought some bubbles to our worksite and the youngest child, Kevin, age 7, was so intrigued by them. He had never seen bubbles before, yet he did what all young children do when they first see bubbles...he ran around trying to catch and pop them! The joy he felt was contagious!

I won't ever forget the names and faces of those children. I hold them near in my heart and will pray for them always. The leaders of the work camp told us in the beginning that the people of Belize valued relationships more than the work and as the week progressed that became most evident. Everyone we were fortunate enough to encounter during our time in Belize was friendly and interested in getting to know us, no matter where we went.

The children in the Orphanage, the older citizens in the retirement home all enjoyed just sitting with us and talking. It was so important for us to hear their stories and for them to learn about us. By the end of the week, I thanked the resident of the house I worked on for allowing me to come into his home and work. They did me a favor by allowing me to be there, not the other way around. I feel honored to have been able to make this trip with our youth and to have been able to share such a wonderful experience with them.

Our young people worked hard, connected with the residents, played with the children and, I am certain, left a positive impression on all they encountered. They are an incredible group of young people and I feel confident that the experiences they shared on this trip will change them as they move through life. We can all be proud of them and their efforts.

Thank you to the people of Aldersgate for supporting us on such an incredible journey.”

—Sharon Owens (Adult Leader)

“I would have to say one of my favorite memories from Belize would be on Friday night. Friday was our last evening program, so we invited the members of the household where we were working that week. Only a handful of us could stay on the bus to go pick up the three families. I was fortunate enough to do so.

Two of the worksites were right next to each other, so the first stop had the most people and most children. As soon as we pulled up, you could just feel the excitement of everyone around. When they got on the bus you could see everyone had dressed up, but the best thing they were all wearing was a bright and beautiful smile.

The joy these people had to leave their house for a couple of hours was amazing. On the bus ride to the church they pointed out all the places they knew and the city they call home. It was an experience I'll never forget."

—Lizzie D (Freshman, Cab Calloway School)