

It was a moment of utmost peace. I could feel my dark hair slowly moving around my upper torso and neck like vines in a fairytale, strands striking my skin like the soft bite of my puppy back home. I could feel the crisp, clean air brushing past my skin, creating a cool sensation like gel on my limbs where water met skin. In the background, I could hear the faint sounds of birds chirping and the shuffling of the brush nearby.

The air was calming, the scent a crisp and fresh one. Flying creatures with all sorts of colors displayed on their uniquely patterned feathers danced through the sky above like vibrant clouds. The warm yet almost mellow morning sun was in a way soft against my skin like that of a warm washcloth with no texture. The air was thick and made my skin sticky, but it wasn't particularly suffocating, more a soft push of pressure in my breathing that I did not normally feel.

As I slowly drifted along with the soft waves as my guide, I could feel my eyelashes flutter along with the wind. Despite the urge, I did not dare open my eyes, not wanting to disrupt the surreal feeling. I could feel my life jacket tugging upwards as I used my fingertips to gently pull down, the colorful fabric rough against the pads of my skin, the straps flowing aimlessly around me.

Looking back on the pictures, it was an odd scene. About twenty-five children lying with their faces to the sky, their eyes all shut as they relied on their life jackets to keep themselves comfortably afloat. Most were barefoot, some with their toes and knees peeking out of the water like crocodile heads and some having chosen to prop their legs up on their kayaks.

The kayaks themselves were strewn everywhere, most were being held in big clusters, while some were all alone, floating rhythmically with the tides. This cast a magnificent scene of bright orange, red, blue, yellow, and green stars, each in a different form of unimaginable constellations that contrasted dramatically with the steel blue current.

As I rested, I could hear our group leader's voice bounding through the air, his deep tonality making the experience of things even more peaceful, a sense that almost tempted me to sleep. I could hear water splashing softly as people adjusted themselves and the almost hollow sound of the kayaks colliding with each other.

The water itself was not particularly cold or warm; instead, remaining a constantly medium temperature, perhaps because of the thick humid air that curled my baby hairs into ringlets. However, the line that formed between the water and the air generated an almost cold feeling, not one of a miserable winter frost but of the contrast between two different worlds.

And to the thirty-one teenagers there, we were in a different world. One of fantastical flora and fauna with spiders the size of a fist and frogs the size of a pinkie nail; it was completely different from our lives back in Colorado.

In fact, that entire trip had been the introduction to a completely complex and upside-down world. Consuming gallo pinto and fresh juice every day instead of processed foods was completely unheard of to some. So was using colones instead of dollars and finding the correct transfer amount between currencies, learning how to communicate those needs with very little knowledge of the language.

We conversed with not only the local adults but several young Costa Rican children, especially during our service projects in which we repainted several walls of a school, repainted a play structure, and cleaned up a beach. The work was difficult and laborious but seeing the excited grins of the children nearby was worth every ounce of sweat and exhaustion.

Back home, our efforts were no different. The entire year leading up to and after the trip was filled with tireless efforts to better our society. As a class, we raised over five thousand dollars and two thousand pounds of cans for the Food Bank, calling on businesses and students

for donations. We orchestrated a dunk tank and pie-in-the-face contest during a school fair, raising almost two thousand dollars to donate towards ending marine pollution.

We researched world issues, attended youth breakout sessions at the nearby college, and wrote personal letters to veterans, some with cute jokes in the top corners. We also tried countless problem solving exercises with each other, causing every student in that class to form a meaningful bond.

Even though we were only eighth graders, we learned tremendous amounts of societal, cultural, and systematic knowledge. We delved in the simplicity of life and liberation from technology in such a way that we will all remember for a lifetime.