

## **Michael Van Vliet and Amy Todd, '02**

*Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic*

In July of 2001, Amy Todd and myself set off for six of the most meaningful and humbling weeks of our lives. As we arrived in the capitol of the Dominican Republic, Santo Domingo, we were immediately overcome and shocked by the poverty and wretched conditions that plague such an overwhelming number of people in the third world. In that moment and the weeks to follow, it really dawned upon us just how fortunate we are for the many little things that we too often take for granted.





As we arrived at our new home, The Inn of the Good Samaritan, a number of native adults and children who had become victims of poverty and illness eagerly greeted us with warm smiles. The Inn is located in the heart of the capitol and serves as a shelter for people seeking medical attention. The majority of the patients come from the “campos” by bus, which is up to five and six hours away from the capitol. They live a life of poverty that most people in the United States will never be able to comprehend. Below are some of the life-long friends we encountered. The memories they have provided for us are priceless.



Our service to the patients of The Inn afforded us the opportunity to develop our Spanish skills, driving capabilities, and of course, patience. Our primary role was to awake at 5 a.m. and drive the patients from the Inn to medical clinics and hospitals in the capital for outpatient care. We then waited on unimaginably long lines and spent the majority of the days waiting to be seen by a sub-standard physician only to be told to return the next day. Helping the patients receive medical attention and battling the traffic and awful driving conditions became our daily missions that would leave us drained of energy by the end of the day. Shown below are snapshots of the lines and hospitals we encountered.

In addition, we were also in charge of keeping The Inn stocked with food and running smoothly. On our days off, we typically loaded up the younger patients in our car and headed for the beach, zoo, or aquarium. Events like these meant the world to these children.



In closing, I think it is important to stress just how much my Summer of Service meant to me. Having the opportunity to live with people who do not own any material possessions, yet who are so genuinely happy, has changed the way I view people and my life. First, the six weeks I spent in the DR has heightened my sympathy and compassion for all of humanity. The Siena/AMC Summer of Service has changed the way I treat people, as I am far more humanitarian. Second, and not of any less importance, my experience has amplified my appreciation for everything I currently have in my life. I am eternally indebted to all the people I encountered on my trip who have changed me in a positive way.