

**Kelly Patterson, '12**  
*Chuuk, Federated States of Micronesia*



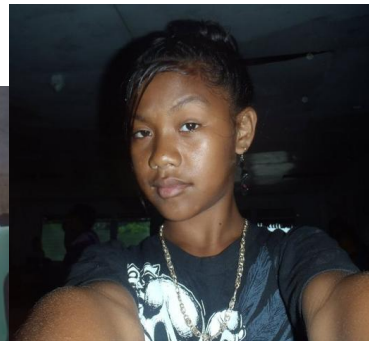
*The Welcome Sign at the Chuuk International Airport, and one of our first sunsets.*

This summer, Tara Kelly and I were fortunate enough to travel to Micronesia, a small country in the Pacific Islands. After 34 hours of travel, we finally arrived on Weno, the most populated, but also the most impoverished, island in Chuuk (the capital of Micronesia).



*My 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Class at St. Cecilia's School*

We spent our service experience teaching at St. Cecilia's, an elementary school. I taught 8<sup>th</sup> grade Grammar, Spelling, and Reading. Though the official language of Chuuk is English, in reality almost no one actually speaks it unless necessary, and even then it is very simple and broken. Instead, the people speak the native language of Chuukese, which made communication a little tricky sometimes. I taught my students nouns, verbs, and adjectives in Grammar class, and by the end of summer they could write complete sentences, and some of them full paragraphs. We read in class every single day, and the students improved their pronunciations and speaking abilities. But more importantly, the students taught me. They taught me Chuukese, and made me realize that it is difficult to switch to English, because in their language spelling does not matter, and grammar is barely present. They taught me their games, some of which I still do not understand because they were so different, but even more that I could relate to the games I used to play when I was their age. They taught me their culture, including how to eat Kool-Aid powder with just about anything, that saying less can be more, and that patience is a virtue. Words cannot describe how much I loved my students, crazy as they were. I still think of them every day.



When we were planning our trip, we were told that we would be living with a Sister in a convent. We later found out that the Sister had left, and no one would be there to teach us and help us adjust to the culture. So instead, we ended up living with two Jesuit Volunteers named Charles and Meghan from America who had been teaching in Chuuk for the past year. Though we were unsure about the circumstances, Charles and Meghan welcomed us with open arms, and helped us to learn so many things that we never would have known without them. Each of them gave us so many tips and ideas for working with the students and experiencing the culture and for that I will always be grateful.



*Tara, Me, Meghan, and Charles*



*Angela, Pastorah, Carleen, Ercy, Tara and I*

In addition to the JV's, our "host mother" Karmina took care of us. She is the assistant to Bishop Amando Samo, who presides over the entire Caroline Islands. Karmina brought us to school every morning, and always made sure that we had food and purified water so that our stomachs would not act up. Unfortunately, Karmina had to leave us early in our stay and returned only a week before we left because she was attending a conference for Bishop Samo. So she left us with her younger sister, Carleen. Carleen was incredible to us. She taught us about the Chuukese language, the culture, and made sure that we

experienced as much as possible. Because of Carleen, we were able to visit ten different Chuukese islands, each of which welcomed us with shell necklaces, flowers, and coconuts to drink. Carleen is the closest friend I made in Chuuk, as well as her family and friends, including her son KK, Karmina's adopted daughter J-me, and the other women that worked in the office with her and Karmina. We spent a lot of our time after school at the Diocese Office learning from each of them, as well as playing with J-me and KK. They were adorable, and even though they spoke hardly any English, we found ways to communicate and play together.



*KK and J-Me*

Going to different islands each week taught me so much about the rich Chuukese culture. All women in Chuuk, no matter the island, are expected to wear skirts or muumuus (long, loose dresses) that go below the knee. While men sit at a table, women are traditionally expected to eat on the floor, and are not allowed to stand while their brother(s) are still seated, thus they must move about on their knees until they are out of the room. These customs were so different than anything in the U.S., but helped me realize how unique the Chuukese culture is. One of the other biggest cultural shocks was the food:



*A traditional Chuukese feast basket of "Macaroni and Cheese," purple rice, kon, puna, spam, banana, sashimi, and another raw fish*



*A large fish cooked whole- the head, eyes and brain are considered delicacies*

The traditional Chuukese diet relies primarily on kon (pounded breadfruit) and puna (pounded taro root). A meat is also necessary, which is usually fresh fish because it is inexpensive and readily available. However, the Chuukese also eat chicken, pork, turtle, bird, and bat meat. I was afraid of eating the fish originally because it is cooked and served whole, meaning you see the eyes staring back up at you, and you need to pick through fins, scales, and bones to get to the meat. However, I learned to get over this fear pretty quick. Because of all the palm trees, the people also drink coconuts constantly! I miss drinking at least one coconut every day. More recent non-traditional diets are becoming popular in Chuuk, in which all meals include rice and spam or hot dogs, as well as ramen or Kool-Aid. The Chuukese do not drink Kool-Aid; instead, they put the powder on everything you could imagine- pineapple, cucumbers, ramen, Chuukese apples, chips, and more. The “right” way to eat Kool-Aid is to pour the packet into your hand, which leaves some pretty colorful stains.



*Tara, our friend Make and I with red Kool-Aid tongues*

*Jumping in the ocean with our Chuukese skirts- swimming in a skirt is harder than you'd think!*



Micronesia is a place that most people have probably never heard of, and many never will. The island of Weno is approximately 10 miles around, smaller than my hometown. Yet in such a small place, I learned more than I ever thought I could. I went in with the mindset of serving others, and came back feeling like I had received more than I gave. I know that this summer has motivated my dream of becoming a physician, and inspired me to serve others, both locally and abroad. All of the people I met and experiences I had are absolutely unforgettable and will always hold a special place in my heart.



*Ai tong gnaruk, Chuuk! ("I love you, Chuuk!")*