

Joyce Barlin, '02
Iriga, Philippines

Growing up as a Filipino-American, I knew right away that I wanted to go to the Philippines to fulfill my summer of service. I thought it was beautiful that my first visit to the Philippines would be one of service to my Filipino people. It was a very personal experience for me, and I felt at home from the moment I arrived.



I spent my service working and living at an orphanage in Iriga, a small city in the provinces and just 7 kilometers away from where my father spent his childhood. About 100 children of all ages lived at Fatima Center, along with the Daughters of St. Augustine. The orphanage was unbelievably self-sufficient with its own school, fish pond, bakery, soap-making facilities, piggery, and farm. I spent most of my time playing and talking with the children, exchanging lessons in English for lessons in Tagalog. I also helped out in the classroom, mostly with the kindergarten, teaching them how to read and write. It was amazing to see the happiness in the children's faces and to witness the family that these orphans had formed with each other. Because I also lived at the Fatima Center, I very much became a part of that family. The children taught me how to love and how to find the happiness in life. Many of them had horrible stories of abuse or abandonment, but they grew beyond those experiences. They had tears to shed as they thought about their parents or the past, but they also had laughter and smiles to share with one another. This is the sign at the entrance to the Fatima Center. The orphanage is nestled into the woods, set back from the main road.



Below are my girls from the kindergarten class. Oh, they're all so beautiful. We were taking a break from dancing. Every Wednesday, a different grade puts on a program with dancing and skits, so these girls were practicing for their turn in the spotlight.



All of the children had chores at the orphanage. The little ones would sweep or clean the classrooms, and the older ones were responsible for cooking the meals or working at the bakery or piggery. The kids were given a small allowance for their chores so that they could take responsibility for buying items on their own.



Here I am teaching Maryvic how to write her name. Maryvic was one of the most energetic children, and although she could be a handful, she was great. She had some difficulty learning to write because she should actually be a righty. However, her right hand was burned closed with scalding water when she was a baby.



I spent a day teaching U.S. history to the 3rd and 4th year high school class. I can see how being a teacher is very rewarding. They were very interested to hear about the United States, and I answered any questions that they had for me. I played a trivia game with them at the end and introduced them to the wonderful world of Tootsie Pops as a prize.

The Daughters of St. Augustine were so sweet. Many of them were very young, from 19 to 26, and we got along very well. Sr. Rosario was my best friend there, and we still write snail mail back and forth to keep in touch and so that I can get updates on the children.

When my time at the orphanage came to a close, I was very sad to go. They had a farewell party for me, and many of the children wrote me letters asking that I remember them. How could I possibly forget those faces? These children had no parents to take care of them, but I saw hope shining in their eyes. I have grown as a person from my experience in the Philippines, and I believe my summer of service will help to shape me into a more caring physician. In fact, I plan to visit Fatima Center again this summer, and I want to return further on in the future as a physician.