

Erica Troy, '09
Kigali, Rwanda

Stepping off the plane in Kigali, Rwanda felt like a dream. Here we were in this country that is so different from the United States, and this was to be our home for the next seven weeks. I was in awe of "the land of a thousand hills" with gorgeous scenery. But even the panoramas do not let you forget where you are, the hills are lined with tiny shacks and dirt roads. There are reminders of the genocide of 1994 all over the country mixed in with the community, reminding you not only of all the horrors that had occurred only 14 years prior but also that Rwanda is moving on and thriving despite the genocide.



During our stay in Rwanda, we spent the majority of our time at the Home of Hope Orphanage, run by Missionaries of Charity. The Home of Hope houses children ages two weeks to five years. We moved between the three oldest groups of children, who ranged from 6 months to five years. Our responsibilities including helping to feed the kids, change "diapers," get the kids to bed, but mostly to play with them and give them the attention that they desperately craved. Simple things like being held and tossing kids up in the air would make their day. We got such gratification from their smiles the day we did face-painting with them; I think they were more excited to have one on one attention given to them than the actual face-paint.





Despite a difficult language barrier, the workers at the orphanage tried to make us feel at home there. We especially bonded with the employees of the baby room. They would laugh with us and try to teach us words of kinyarwanda. Their overall friendly demeanor made the baby room one of my favorite places.



When we were not in the orphanage, we went to CPAJ, a Presbyterian run center for street teenagers. There we taught an English class three afternoons a week. Our class would range from 20-40 students who were all approximately the same age as us. Each class we taught a verb lesson, vocabulary, and some kind of song or game under one theme. For example, we did a day on health and after teaching body part vocabulary, we taught the class the song "Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes."



Those seven weeks in Rwanda flew by in the blink of an eye. I felt like we had just gotten there and it was time to leave. Saying goodbye to

everyone in the orphanage was especially difficult because we had bonded with the children so much. Rwanda has changed my life and I miss being there everyday.

