

Sarah Levasseur and Dan Thompson, '03  
**St. Lucia, French Antilles**



For my summer of service Dan Thompson and I spent six weeks living in the capital city of Saint Lucia, Castries, in the West Indies, in the Southern Caribbean. We lived in the Marian Home, run by the Corpus Christie Carmelite Sisters, who also run a nursing home, preschool, daycare and secondary school on the premises in Leslie Land, a very impoverished area of the city. From the moment we arrived, I knew this experience was going to be very challenging and very rewarding. Right from the first day we began adjusting to: the unbelievable hot and humid weather, the lack of hot running water, the ants and cockroaches we shared our rooms with, the slow pace of "West Indian time", the food we couldn't recognize and the extreme poverty and ignorance that plagued the people of this beautiful island.



We worked in two schools during our time there. The first was the Dunnotar school, for mentally handicapped children and adults. Dan and I worked with the lowest functioning children: none of the eight kids we worked with on a

daily basis had speech. Some were autistic, one had Down's Syndrome, and the others had other handicaps that prevented them from attending regular school. With only one teacher these children, who needed one-on-one lessons would take years to progress at all. Our presence allowed the teacher to focus more on each student and we were able to work with them by singing songs, working on puzzles and trying to teach them basic language skills. More than anything I wanted to make their lives easier, I wanted to take away the hurt and give them all the opportunities I was blessed with.



The other school we worked at was Upton Gardens Girls' Center. It is a school for girls, ages 12-16 who have been abused at home, or who are for some reason "on the verge of delinquency". At any time, around 15-20 girls attended the school, for lessons in remedial work, cooking, sewing, arts and crafts, and for counseling. Dan and I had two separate activities: I taught basic French to the girls, many of whom speak Patois (a French-Creole derivative), and Dan taught the girls self-defense. These girls opened their hearts to us and befriended us from the beginning. Although at times teaching them was a bit difficult because many of them cannot read or write, it was enjoyable being with them and learning about them and their country while telling them about ours.



My summer of service was eye-opening to say the least, and life-changing to say the most. The six weeks I spent volunteering my time to the people of Saint Lucia were just the beginning for me. This trip expanded exponentially my desire to serve and help others. I cannot imagine never doing something like this again, and I am positive that this experience will enrich my life for years to come.

I'll end with a quotation from the journal I kept while I was there:

*"I am learning. I am learning to eat whatever is in front of me, so many people have none. I am learning to watch what I say, not everyone thinks the way I do. I am learning that not all help needs to come in the form of heroic acts, the little I do here is helping. I am learning that boredom is self-inflicted and always optional, with no internet, cable TV, or malls, these people are happier than we in the states who always need more. I am learning that all aspects of life, especially comfort levels are relative. When you have to go without, you truly realize how much we think we need is actually not necessary. I am learning."*