

I found this afternoon so powerful, because when we ran out of words, we were able to communicate through music...our ability to communicate was not hindered by our different languages, and contributed to a very special, unforgettable afternoon.

Colorado Vincentian Volunteers Immersion to the Border at El Paso, Texas February, 2011

Pedro Zaragosa, one of the wealthiest men in Mexico, built a fence around the people's community and said that he owned the land...When asked what we could do they replied, "Tell your friends and family about Zaragosa because he is an international business man and does not want others uncovering the truth." How could this happen and nobody knew about it? Why is money and power so important? As these questions were running through my head, an even harder one arose: *What was I going to do about it?*

Sr. Betty said, "Life goes on. I wouldn't think of leaving." Sr. Betty and Fr. Peter have incredible strength which they draw from their faith in God. They are not afraid of the conditions of Juarez because they have built loving relationships with the people of Juarez and want to continue accompanying them through their struggles and pain. Even amidst the devastation and violence, life does go on and hope exists in this fact. People like Sr. Betty and Fr. Peter will continue courageously serving and loving others despite the obvious dangers.



You could hear their pain in the voices and see the anger and sadness in their eyes. I remember feeling such anger toward the whole situation that I had to look at the sun to prevent from tearing up. That was the first time I felt such rage and anger that trip which was surprising since anger was not an emotion I was expecting to feel. All people have feelings and deserve dignity. I saw firsthand how many people are not receiving any dignity in our community and how they are being treated with so much injustice.



Although I had trouble understanding the mass (in Spanish), I had no trouble seeing the bond between families in the community ... The horrors that coat their lives were that much more of a shock once I saw how similar they are to me. The fact that Mary can't go visit her parents' house anymore, or that their choir director friend was shot and is in intensive care...Then today a man named Juarez came into the shelter and I quickly realized that the struggles of Juarez do reach Denver, and do reach a personal level with me.

It was hard to determine where El Paso had ended, and where Juarez began.



From that spot, the whole area was seen as one community.

Woah, was my first thought. This is really nice. ...*Woah*, was my second thought. This is a huge family. One of the women (who hosted us for lunch) hugged me and said, very genuinely, what I suspect were some of the only English words she knew. "love you." It's one of my regrets that I was too stunned to respond in Spanish. But I was; I was dumbfounded. I think I responded, "I love you, too," in English and hoped that she understood. I suspect she did. *Woah*, was my last thought.

El Paso-Juarez is a place of juxtaposition. It's a place where all the sides of a story meet in such closeness that it is sometimes impossible to differentiate where one ends and the other begins. There we were, all weekend, caught in the middle, in that space between safety and death. Between economic prosperity and cardboard houses. Between Border Patrol and loving families. Between users and cartels. Between United States and Mexico. Between questions and answers. And in the space, there sits a group of American volunteers, a fence, a river, a desert, all vibrating in the tension of uncertainty.

We touched hands. Through the \$7-million-per-mile fence, we touched hands. Through the metal with openings only large enough to slip photos through we touched hands...and through touching hands, we touched each others' hearts.



How can we judge people that do bad things when that's what they know and were developed to believe? How do we sever the roots of things that are so deeply rooted in people? We pray that their blindfolds may be undone so that they might see the grace of God and the face of Jesus in each of their victims. That their hands may be unbound from the restraints that forbid them to feel love and compassion for each and every person. That they may break through the fences that are blocking the ability to overcome injustice, greed, hypocrisy and fear.

I saw God in Emerson's passion to preserve his people's traditions, in his sorrow at all that is being left behind, in his reverence of all created things, in his extreme generosity – one month of creating a sacred structure to accommodate our group of white strangers for only 3 hours' use. I saw God in Emerson's graciousness – his bending of social and cultural rules to allow us to have that incredible and intense experience.



I was angry at being the last served at a restaurant. How can this experience help me stand in solidarity with the poor? The oppressed? This feeling of being an outsider (so visibly), ignored, mocked, served last...This is a feeling that many Native Americans are intimately familiar with...Thank you, waitresses, because you helped me realize how much I need your forgiveness for the actions of some of my ancestors. For my own actions. ... For my culture not respecting the simple, gentle beauty of your culture.

The six-year-old's toy was face down on their dirt floor in the main house (one room) which had basic electricity, sparse appliances, and a few mostly empty barrels of water. This glimpse of two different ways of life caused me to remember and reconsider my personal challenge of what "living simply" means.

Why was I so nervous to get a little dirt on my skin and on my clothes? Why was I keeping up a silly mental barrier between myself and the earth beneath me...I was struck as I realized that their house has a dirt floor...I was nervous to take off my shoes, and yet their children learn to walk and crawl in the dirt.

As Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, "A threat to human dignity somewhere is a threat to human dignity everywhere." My neutrality and indifference, reflected in my own community, makes me complicit in the threats to dignity of the Hopi and Navajo peoples... If I am to live in compassion and solidarity, I must ask myself as a witness, "What have I done to put them on the cross? What am I doing to keep them on the cross? What will I do to take them down?" How willing am I to seek out one heart, one mind, one soul?

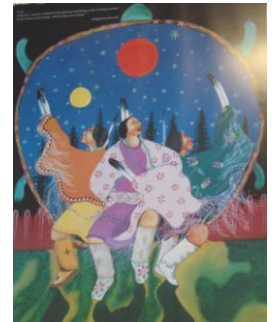
(At her birthday party) Aaliuah gave everyone of us a party favor. Who was I to be at the same level as Aaliuah's family and friends to be able to receive a gift? ... The level of poverty I saw on the reservation was much worse than the poverty I or my clients grew up in.

Oma-taki-asay "Welcome Ancestors." In that sweat lodge, every piping hot lava rock that was brought to the circle at our feet was an image of our ancestors, both long gone and not-too-long gone... it was a sacred and spiritual time, connecting everything and everyone with a bond and an energy that has been present since the very beginning of everything ... and I will continue to be a part of the connection of life long after I am gone. For one day, I will become part of the burning rocks at the feet of a new generation. *Oma-Taki-*



Colorado Vincentian Volunteers Immersion to Keams Canyon, AZ February, 2011

Most of the homes were made of stone, sharing walls with their neighbors, and very similar in size to my *bedroom* back in Denver. I wondered if they had electricity or running water. The only occasion in which I've seen similar living conditions was on commercials inviting Americans to support a child in some third world country. I cherished how the Hopi people practiced so many old traditions despite all of the modern influences and opinions held by outsiders. I did see poverty and what I think of as third world living conditions in a place closer to my home in Denver than my parents' house.



On the ride between Gallup and Keams Canyon, I noticed approximately 10 dry and barren riverbeds. The scenery was so beautiful and it's surprising that this beauty could be found without the water.

People went up to the Crow Mother, a Kachina, offering corn in exchange for a bean sprout, which gives an indication of how successful their year's harvest will be. It may have been the early hour or maybe the setting that was so foreign to me, but I felt like I wasn't even there. It was such a mystical ceremony.