

Editors Column

# A New Start in Guatemala: My Mission Trip



**Kaylyn Yu**  
Grade 11  
Chantilly High School



Every team member contributed to producing the best experience for the village children during my church's ministry, Joshua Generation, mission in Guatemala. [Source: Author, Kaylyn Yu]

What is the purpose of a mission trip? In a Christian context, many interpret short-term missions (STM) as a way to give back to the community of Christ through service and evangelism. I had also believed in this single objective until I was given a chance to go on my own mission.

In my church ministry, Joshua Generation (JG), a limited

selection for the STM team was completed by our pastor. It was a shock to many because few members were chosen despite the large number of students eager to participate. Our team would be the first team to enter Guatemala from JG.

The whole trip was expected to last one week, along with a two-day stay at our pastor's home for

intensive preparation before we headed to Guatemala. We were to host Vacation Bible School (VBS) for children from different villages, and we spent time preparing crafts, activities, body worship, and skits.

Once the group landed in Guatemala City, we lodged at a church for the night and rose early in the morning to begin a five-hour drive to a site closer to the villages we would visit. The rest of the day was spent settling at a local retreat center, where we would reside for the next few days.

On Thursday, the following day, we took an hour-long drive into the heart of Guatemala's mountains to reach the first village. Our team was very perplexed as we were faced with a large group of over 100 children waiting expectantly. Although it was awkward at first, within a short time, everyone was getting along as we played games, praised God, and listened to the message. Two more days passed in a similar arrangement as we continued serving village children with VBS. Even though we encountered some complications along the way, we handled them together as a unified team.

On Sunday morning, all of us

loaded our belongings and left the rural region of Guatemala to stop by a local church for service before the long drive back to the city. As there was no curfew on the last night, we were all thrilled to stay up late playing hide-and-seek, setting up praise-and-prayer, and watching the sunrise on the residence rooftop. As the last day was reserved for tourism, we started it by visiting an active volcano with a stunning view. Next, we explored Antigua Guatemala, looking through markets and historical buildings until we left for the airport to fly back to Virginia.

Joshua Kim, a junior in high school, shared his testimony: "I got to experience God's love on full display. Despite the culture, status, language, or background, God's love reached them. I realized that God doesn't just show love. He is love."

Through the missionaries' constant teaching, I realized that the point of STM is not to just give, but to uncover and live in the love of God in some of the most unexpected places. I was so pleased to be able to share this experience with the first Guatemala team, and am excited for JG's future with Guatemala that started with us.

Student Reporter

# Attending the Raddest Camp Ever!



**Nathan Kim**  
Grade 12  
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This summer, I had the opportunity to volunteer at Rad Camp: the largest California summer camp for individuals with developmental disabilities. Over the course of 4 days and 3 nights, I was paired up with Dalton, a shy kid who was only 11 years old. With this being his first time at camp, I knew there were many memories to be made.

Rad Camp is a place not just for buddies, but also for anyone to be themselves. The camp's mission is to create a "Heaven on Earth" where people with disabilities can feel included and safe. When I first arrived at camp, I realized that this wasn't just a place of fun—it's a place of transformation, growth, and connection.

When Dalton first arrived at camp, he was overwhelmed. His mom told me that he had a deep fear of loud music, crowds, and rowdy environments. I knew it was going to be hard, but I had to find a way to reach him. Slowly but surely, I figured out the perfect solution: food! I soon learned that Dalton loved pizza, ice cream, and candy. And while it started off as short meals together, eventually, we were sharing pizza slices and giving each other different candies. Little by little, he began to trust me. First, it was a small nod, then



Over 200 campers and 400 volunteers attend California's biggest Camp for individuals with developmental disabilities. [Source: RadCamp]

eye contact and a smile. Eventually, he was laughing and starting conversations with me. By the last day, Dalton had made countless new friends, laughing and asking if I would be back next year.

Watching a shy and introverted Dalton blossom become social and filled with joy moved me in many ways. Rad wasn't just a camp for him—it was a place where he had the freedom to be himself, a place where he was heard and seen. Similarly, Rad gave me the same opportunity, too.

To me, Rad Camp isn't just a volunteer activity—it's a calling to step out of your comfort

zone and serve a community that constantly gets overlooked. It taught me empathy, patience, and compassion. Spending nearly 72 hours with Dalton created a bond that truly connects the two of us. Because I built such a deep connection with Dalton in a short amount of time, I am really pulled to return.

Overall, this experience taught me that we should not put ourselves first all of the time. These memories and moments I shared with Dalton were all possible because I put him first. Rad camp showed me that joy doesn't come from grand achievements; it comes from the small victories



My Camper Dalton stands smiling in front of the RAD sign after spending a week at the unforgettable RAD Camp! [Source: Author, Nathan Kim]

when serving others. It comes from a nervous kid jumping up and down with the crowd. I came to this camp hoping to change someone else's life. I left realizing that someone had changed mine. Rad camp offered me something I could never find anywhere else. That unfiltered joy and authenticity, like seeing my buddy smile for the first time.

Student Reporter

# Earthwatch Girls in Science: My Experience



**Eun Soo Esther Shin**  
Grade 12  
New Covenant Academy

Researching nature hands-on has always been a dream of mine. Through Earthwatch's Girls in Science Fellowship, I finally had the chance to make that dream a reality. And while environmental science hasn't always interested me, a summer program from last year opened my eyes to the importance of biodiversity in cities. That small spark led me to start a gardening club at my school, which eventually led me to apply for this fellowship.

The Girls in Science Fellowship is a fully funded program that seeks to empower young women and encourage them to pursue STEM careers by offering hands-on research experience and mentorship from female scientists. During my time with this program, students explored what we could do for the planet through our own actions via daily learning sessions and discussions. We also had the chance to have a panel discussion with professionals to ask questions directly about research in their field.

The program lasted eight days, and this included travel to and from Reno, Nevada. I was part of Team 1, and we were made up of five girls total. We shared rooms, cooked meals together, and bonded over dinner and movie nights. Soon enough, our team became a



A student in the Girls in Science Fellowship is setting up the plots for plant identification after locating the iron rod placed before restoration efforts. [Source: Author, Eun Soo Esther Shin]

chosen family.

The research was conducted in the Sierra Nevada meadows. Restoring the meadows is important because they store a significant amount of water and carbon. This water can be transported to the city in the drier months of the year, while the stored carbon helps combat climate change. We rotated between five meadows, and our research focused on three main areas: plant identification, carbon sequestration, and hydrology.

For the first few days, we did plant identification, which included analyzing plots of land to see how much the restoration efforts had helped over the years.



A BDA (Beaver Dam Analogue) that is part of the meadow restoration effort. These are man-made structures that mimic beaver dams to bring the water levels to the surface. [Source: Author, Eun Soo Esther Shin]

The crew explained that this data would help them secure grants to fund restoration. In order to analyze the same plot of land every time, they had placed iron rods in sections throughout the meadow. We were equipped with a GPS and a metal detector to find the iron rods, and our task was to set up a plot for the scientists to analyze. We were also able to help them inspect the plants, which included estimating the vegetation, bare ground, and water, then identifying the plant species.

Carbon sequestration was also intriguing. It was very hands-on, and we got to extract the carbon through a needle from caps we put

on the ground. Hydrology included seeing the depth of water from the groundwater wells put throughout the meadow. We worked closely with the research staff from SYRCL (South Yuba River Citizens League), learning from them through real-time observation and conversation in the field.

Overall, the Girls in Science Fellowship was one of the most meaningful experiences I've had. It gave me confidence in my abilities by showing me what it's like to be a part of a team of passionate women in the STEM field, all while experiencing my dreams of hands-on nature research come true.



Student Reporter

Volunteer Awards & Emceeing Leadership



Chaewon Wi  
Grade 12  
New Covenant Academy



Receiving the California State Senate Award, which recognizes hard work and dedication to volunteer hours. [Source A: Misuk Lee]

A few weeks ago, I attended an award ceremony to receive volunteer awards and serve as the master of ceremonies. At the non-profit organization, Hope Global Outreach Foundation, I

volunteered for over 250 hours and received a service award, a congressional award, and a state senate award. These helped me realize how my best efforts brought a positive impact to the

community. I was glad to reflect on the activities my group did to serve others. It brought me pride and happiness that our work was recognized, taking us one step closer to bringing greater positivity to the world.

Additionally, being a master of ceremonies for the first time was nerve-racking, but I eventually became comfortable with my situation and concluded the ceremony successfully. It was a little bit challenging for me to be in this position since I received a notice only 2 hours before the ceremony. However, I wrote down the script and practiced for the whole car ride there. Although it was initially hard speaking in front of people that I didn't know, I started to enjoy leading the ceremony as I noticed the smiles and nods of approval I received from the audience.

After the ceremony, Hope Global Outreach Foundation had a small after-party, which brought us closer. We talked about our plan for volunteer services this year, and played a small game to get familiar with everyone. It was a new experience for us to laugh and talk, because we were usually busy discussing club activities. I realized it is really important to

build our friendship first, so that the club can be united and enjoy each other's company while serving others together. If everyone is close and having fun, we would easily overcome any activities that could be challenging. It is important to serve others, but also to take care of the people around us.

Volunteer services can open your eyes to new learning opportunities. Serving others brings you pride that you are one of the people to make your community positive. It is also a chance to build new relationships with new people. In the end, you might even receive an award that represents your dedication and commitment to bringing positivity. Sometimes, it can be tiring to show up, especially every time, but I promise you that it gives you a warm heart after seeing people happy about your work.

I am grateful to be a part of my volunteer group, Hope GOF, as it has made me realize my full potential. While serving others, I learned that I have many talents, and now, I am working to develop them further. I am so happy that I am making people smile and bringing positivity around them.

Student Reporter

Summer with Complexions Contemporary Ballet



Alexis Choi  
Grade 11  
The Nueva School

Walking into the bright, sunlit studios at the Gloria Kaufman International Dance Center never got old. Throughout the day, the studios buzzed with dance students at the barre, stretching in the hallways, and rehearsing repertoire. These two weeks that I spent at the University of Southern California were made all the more memorable by training with talented dancers under esteemed faculty.

The Complexions Company was founded in 1994 by Dwight Rhoden and Desmond Richardson, former dancers at the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater. The two created the ballet technique NIQUE, which draws inspiration from modern and commercial dance. From my experience at the intensive, NIQUE incorporates much more upper torso movement and rotation, adding fluidity and emotion to classical ballet.

During my time at Complexions, I danced in various styles from morning to afternoon. Each day we had NIQUE or ballet technique class, masterclasses (in Horton modern, Commercial, and Jazz), and repertory. We danced for 6 hours a day—and while the training was intense, I had the opportunity to learn from accomplished professionals and learn



Students at the Complexions company spend mornings warming up the Gloria Kaufman dance studios. [Source: Author, Alexis Choi]

repertoire (choreography) that the Complexions company actually performs.

The group learned almost ten different segments of repertoire from Complexions ballets, such

as Rise, Gutter Glitter, Bach 25, and Star Dust. Our ballet teacher stitched these segments together to create a final piece, like a collage of Complexions repertoire. In addition to our piece, we re-

hearsed two standard NIQUE phrases as well as a jazz piece to perform for our showcase.

Before the group's final showcase, all of the dancers and faculty (including Dwight Rhoden himself!) joined hands in a circle to declare together, "Nothing to prove, and everything to share"—just as the Complexions Company does before every show. In those final moments, I felt inspired and grateful for the amazing people I had met.

As someone sharing dorms with other dancers, I felt fully immersed in the community that Complexions fostered. Dancers from all over the country were there to dance and meet others who shared the same passion. Over the course of the intensive, we bonded while reviewing choreography, shared foam rollers and yoga mats, and did late-night pilates together in the dorms. On the last day, we reminisced about leaving what had quickly felt like a second home.

At Complexions, not only was I pushed to improve my technique and artistry in contemporary ballet, but I also learned to lead with an open heart in my movement and in life. The most important lesson I learned was to embrace being a student, friend, and artist.

Student Reporter

Behind the Scenes of the New York City Orchestra Trip



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Grade 10  
Crean Lutheran High School

Earlier this year, Crean Lutheran High School Orchestra visited New York for a performance at Carnegie Hall, one of the most prestigious concert venues for both classical and popular music. Carnegie Hall features the Stern Auditorium, Zankel Hall, and Weill Recital Hall. The trip lasted four days and five nights, and my group's performance was on the third day. We performed Arturo Márquez's Danzón No.2, Elliot Bark's Mercy, and ended the program with Mussorgsky's Pictures at an Exhibition. We showcased our pieces in the Stern Auditorium, with a capacity of 2,804 seats.

It took a solid four months to prepare for this spectacular event. We dedicated hours to make an impeccable show, ensuring every aspect of each piece was perfect: melody, dynamics, harmony, pitch, tempo, and even texture.

After all of the students unpacked their luggage in the hotel, we had the opportunity to explore New York City. Our first stop was Times Square. There were tons of crowds and cars honking everywhere, but the only thing that caught my eye was the

breathtaking view of the city. The second day was a full-time tourist day for us. My friends and I visited the 9/11 Memorial and headed to Soho for a quick shopping spree. After dinner, we, as an orchestra, gathered to watch Hades Town in the Walter Kerr Theatre. We were able to have a short Q&A session briefly after the show. It was such an honorable experience, as enthusiastic musicians, to interact with the Broadway stars in person. On the third day, we had a short rehearsal period at nine in the morning, and then headed to the Empire State Building. After taking in the iconic, bustling view from 1,250 feet above the ground, we ended our night with a cruise dinner overlooking the city.

On the fourth day, also the group's performance day, we all headed to Carnegie Hall at eleven in the morning for rehearsal. Everyone was rushing in their black dresses, hustling with their instruments in the subways of New York. This was the moment when it truly dawned on me that I would be performing. We sounded great during the rehearsal, bringing all the hours of dedica-



Crean Lutheran High School Orchestra performed at the Stern Auditorium in Carnegie Hall. [Source: Crean Lutheran SmugMug]

tion and effort to light.

Fifteen minutes before the actual performance, the group entered the stage, took photos, and sat in their seats, facing the colossal hall. We saw our parents, seated prior to the performance, cheering us up for the show.

Danzon No. 2 opened the performance. The hall was soon filled with our vibrant notes with a hint of Mexican style. Our dedication really shone throughout the con-

cert: the orchestra stayed in sync, and the transitions were flawless. We moved on to the next two pieces, and as the last note echoed in the giant hall, the audience stood up and applauded.

Overall, this was an amazing experience that I'm proud to have been a part of. I look forward to more experiences like this in the future, and encourage everyone to visit Carnegie Hall at least once in their life.