

ENCUENTRO DOMINICANO

ISSUE 1 FALL 2009

LIFE AT ILAC BY MAGGIE KENNEDY

Living with 16 people with little to no privacy is not an easy task. In the past semester, our Encuentro group has shared so much: the initial culture shock, the complicated emotions that came with our immersions, the excitement of a night on the town, and the frustrations of witnessing the reality of life on this beautiful island. We have spent hours together typing away in the library, eaten every meal together, and rode the rollercoaster of emotions and experiences that comes with spending a semester away from what we know. Our group has shared more than just rooms, living space, and classes - we have become family.

Not only has our group developed lasting relationships in the past couple months, we have had the opportunity to do it at ILAC, a place we can now call home. ILAC is a place of serenity, free from the noise and crowded streets of the city with its running track lined-

with coconut trees, its brightly colored cabanas, comfy hammock, church steeple, and beautiful foliage. We have to come to love the sound of the meal bells being rung everyday at 8am, 12:30pm, and 6pm, greeting the workers with a "Buenos Dias", and giving our dependable security guards an "Hola!" every time we walk through the front gate, entering into a place that has served as our school, home, and safe haven this past semester. The workers here watch out for us: the secretary Miguelina has acted as a motherly figure for us when we go out at night, the security guard Antonio shines his flashlight up the stairs when we walk up to our rooms in the dark of an "apagon" after a long night of studying, and our driver Elfi is always there to offer us his goofy smile and a big teddy bear hug. It is this ILAC that we have come to love and the relationships that we have built here not only in our group but also with the workers that will truly leave an impact on our hearts forever.

Our group shares many memories here spanning from the first dance with the ILAC workers, and their patience when we stepped on their feet after learning the Bachata five minutes before, to our Halloween party where we dressed up and trick or treated from room to room getting as creative as we could with our costumes. We have met many medical groups that have come in and out to work at the clinic, met each other's families who have come to visit, and seen the change that ILAC has made for so many people in the Dominican Republic. It is the community here that we will miss the most: the late night roof chats, the baking and dance parties, the warm greeting of a worker when we stumble to breakfast after getting up 5 minutes before. What were at first nuisances to us: climbing into our mosquito nets at night, the blaring Aventura music playing from the streets, the spontaneous power outages, and the barking dogs and crowing roosters at all hours, have now become the little things we will miss the most about our time here.



TOP TEN "MUSTS"

IN THE DR

According to Comunidad 8

By Kali McElroy

1. Cabarete
2. Jarabacoa
3. Samana Peninsula (La Playita and Playa Rincón)
4. Climb Pico Duarte
5. Santo Domingo (Colonial Zone)
6. Calle del Sol
7. 27 Charcos
8. Sosua (Playa Alicia)
9. La Sirena
10. Puerto Plata

INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

LIFE AT ILAC	1
CARITAS, HOSPICIO, & JARABACOA	2
PICO DUARTE &	3
HOGAR & CURRICULUM FOR LIFE	4
A VISIT TO THE BORDER	5
BREAKING BARRIERS	6
SPIRIT & STUDENT SERVICES	7
Batey Esperanza	8
Cien Fuegos & Hitting the Town	9

CARITAS IN ACTION BY MICHELLE SOUDER



Every Monday and Wednesday we catch a guagua (public transportation van) into Licy for service. When we get off the guagua, we walk down the same uneven road, Licy Arriba, to Caritas. Caritas is an after-school feeding program for underprivileged children in the neighborhood. Caritas is a global movement working in solidarity for a fairer world, inspired by the example of Christian faith and Catholic Social Teaching. It is unacceptable that

millions of people are suffering through dehumanizing poverty and social injustice and Caritas is fighting to change that.

Off to the left of Licy Arriba, we arrive at Caritas and are greeted with endless amounts of love from the children. With typical Dominican greetings, hugs and kisses on the cheek, we begin a morning filled with English lessons, games, and lunch. Most of the Caritas children are bright, vivacious and enjoy learning English. We teach them the alphabet,

numbers, the months, and themes, like Halloween and Christmas words. After English lessons we always play plenty of games to pass time, cards and singing hand-games are some favorites. To prepare for lunch, the children sit under the cabana and read the daily prayer. We serve them their meals, usually consisting of rice, beans, and a little portion of meat. After our day of service, we walk back down Licy Arriba leaving a little fraction of our hearts with the children of Caritas.



Michelle Souder, Liz Kavan and Chris Randall at their service site, Caritas.

HOSPICIO BY NICK GEORGE & MISTI DAVENPORT

The Hospicio San Vicente de Paul is a place for the elderly located in Santiago. It is similar to a nursing home in the United States, but it also offers hospice care for residents who are terminally ill. At the Hospicio, there is a very dynamic group of people. From ages 50 and onward, residents wander the halls of a very tranquil place. Coming from many different many of the

backgrounds and heritages, the residents reverberate many echoes of the Dominican past.

With the help of the government, donations, and certain residents, the Hospicio is able to generate an income that sustains the organization. Unfortunately, some of the needs of the guests and employees are overlooked in the prospect of

development. For example, residents do not have shampoo or good shoes. All the while, there is construction on a new building meant to house elderly temporarily (for those families who want to go on vacation but not with grandma or grandpa). There is much disparity at the Hospicio just as there is throughout the country of the Dominican Republic.

JARABACOA BY CHRIS RANDALL



Students at waterfall in Jarabacoa.

Jarabacoa is a center of natural beauty in the Dominican Republic. It receives many tourists each year because of its reputation in the world of eco-tourism. The students of Comunidad 8 visited Jarabacoa in November 2009.

While in Jarabacoa, they were able to explore the river and

swim in a pool. Yet, the greatest adventure was the exploration of a gigantic waterfall!

Many students rode on horseback to the trail that led to the waterfall. Other students rode an all-terrain jeep to the trailhead. The short hike ended at the base of a large waterfall and a shallow pool at its bottom. Stu-

dents took the opportunity to rock climb, swim, or just wade at the base of the waterfall. The priest of the ILAC center, Padre Guillermo, chose to participate in the trip with the students. Here are his thoughts on the adventure: "This has been so fun! The students know how to have a good time and I'll definitely have to hang around them more this semester!"

PICO DUARTE BY CHRIS RANDALL

The summit of Pico Duarte is the highest point in the Caribbean. The climb ends at more than 3000 meters in elevation. In October 2009, six intrepid explorers set out to conquer this natural beast. The initial part of the trek was through humid jungle but the rapid rise in elevation soon led to alpine landscapes. Physical and mental challenges besieged the climbers as some experienced fatigue and other altitude sickness.

Challenges for the climbers capitalized on the section of the

mountain titled "Repentance." Chris Randall remembers: "Both of my legs had cramped up to the point where I could no longer walk. I had to ride the guide's mule for about 15 minutes. I never thought we'd get past this section of the climb." Yet, the trekkers found themselves at base camp that night after no less than eight straight hours of climbing. Not surprisingly, they soon fell asleep after dinner due to sheer exhaustion.

At 4am in the morning the next day, several climbers awoke

to summit the mountain. After a grueling two and a half hour climb, they reached the summit. The bronze bust of Duarte, accompanied by the silver cross and Dominican flag, marked the end of the journey. The climbers all returned to ILAC later that night after descending Pico Duarte until 4pm. Pico Duarte offered an opportunity to test the physical and mental endurance of all climbers to which the climbers responded with courage, determination, and teamwork.

FONDESA BY ZACH KESTHELY & KALI MCELROY

Encuentro Dominicano, historically a program for Arts and Sciences majors, is seeking to broaden its student demographics. Recently, the program started recruiting students from the College of Business Administration to add some variety. To capture their business oriented interests, Encuentro offered a rigorous night class on International Political Economy and a new business internship service site at FONDESA. Five business students (Misti, Liz, Joe, Kali, and Zach) were hooked and chose to embark on an experience of a lifetime.

During their time on Encuentro, each student had the opportunity to choose a service site to go to every Monday and

Wednesday. FONDESA, the business service site, caught the interest of Kali and Zach who wanted to get an insiders' perspective at the process of the microfinance industry in the Dominican Republic. They decided to take a plunge and discover the supply and demand of the savings and loan world.

FONDESA was the perfect place to open their eyes to the process of the microcredit industry. The first day of work they were given a large assignment to read through the 2008 annual report (in Spanish!) and prepare for a quiz that never actually materialized. Through this assignment from their mentor, they expanded their business Spanish vocabulary and got their first introduction to

the microfinance industry.

Each day of service Kali and Zach shadowed a variety of FONDESA employees to see firsthand the process of microfinance at its finest. A typical day would be putting together the "horario de calle" or the street schedule, going to meet the clients at their "empresas" or businesses, and assisting with paperwork for the approval process, collections, and client credit histories. They visited a variety of microenterprises, including colmados (small, neighborhood grocery stores), a meat processing factory, a plastic recycling center, and florists. They were given tours and explanations of how these businesses work to expand their business horizons.

HOGAR LUBY BY JOE KNAUF AND MICHAEL MELANIPHY

In Santiago, not far from the hustle and bustle of famed places, such as Calle del Sol and The Monument, there is a place where one's heart and mind can be touched and forever changed. This place is called Hogar Luby, an orphanage for people with developmental disabilities and one of the service sites offered to students of the Encuentro Dominicano program. This semester three members of the community (Joe Knauf, Jessica Gault, and Michael Melaniphy) were given the wonderful opportunity to spend nearly six hours every week with the residents, building relationships and learning about their situations while also learning about themselves.

Around fifty residents call Hogar Luby home. They come from many various backgrounds and parts of countries. They suffer from a variety of different conditions including Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, Shaken

Baby Syndrome, Downs Syndrome, and other mental and physical handicaps as the result of abuse, disease, or neglect. Some of the residents are very active and mobile, while other residents are bedridden or require the use of wheel chairs to get around. A visit to Hogar Luby would reveal a bright and colorful building, however, that is not always the case. Some of the staff often neglects the needs of the children and spend their time on their phones and texting. Many of the children suffer from serious medical conditions and physical injuries, and they are constantly in pain or ill. Hogar Luby also lacks basic childhood things such as toys and books that you would expect to find in a child's home. However, the most amazing thing about Hogar Luby is that residents never fail to smile every time they see you. So much love and warmth is exuded through their smiles and eyes in a place where you would not expect such

beautiful smiles to exist. It is truly humbling to be in the presences of these residents and to feel the love that they share with us.

For us students, we dedicated our time there to helping the residents in any way possible, from talking with them, coloring and putting together puzzles, to simply sitting with them and holding their hands and showing them all the they love that they deserve. The most meaningful times were often when we were holding a child in our arms, taking them out of their beds and letting them look out the window and see the world outside. These times were times of peace and joy, often finalized with a smile or a laugh. For everyone, we have all had experiences that have made the time there what it is, and for each of us the memory of the children will be in our minds and hearts for years to come.

CURRICULUM FOR LIFE BY LIZ KAVAN

Life during our semester in the Encuentro Dominicano Program has given us many new insights, life skills, and has left us with many new relationships that will help us as we continue our new life journeys upon arrival back in the United States. Along with weekly visits to our service sites, trips into the city for shopping and exploring, and daily life amongst our ILAC community, the curriculum during our four months abroad is another aspect of our semester that facilitates the immense growth of our knowledge about history, religion, economics, and the Spanish

language.

During the semester, a majority of the students take 15 credits that include an Encuentro Dominicano class, and Spanish. Kyle Woolley, academic director, teaches an International Political Economy class throughout the semester and Dr. Jill Brown, a Creighton psychology professor, joined us for three weeks to teach a Cultural Psychology class. Encuentro Dominicano (EDP) class met twice a week to discuss readings about Dominican history, culture, theology, and economics.

With weekly papers and reflections, one could usually find the students busy at work in the library challenging our brains and hammering out assignments. Spanish class was taught by our professor Edwin and met every Monday through Thursday. Split into three sections, we not only improved our Spanish conversation skills, we also learned how to speak like a Dominican, something that proved to be useful in making friends in our daily interactions with the people of the Dominican Republic. (Continued on page 5.)

A VISIT TO THE BORDER BY KAYLA BRIMEYER

One Friday morning amongst the aggressive bargaining and conversation, shouting and whistling, hissing and cat-calls, and pushing and shoving of the morning market, eighteen gringos could be found filing through the busy streets of Dajabon. Immersed in a collection of all different skin types with Haitians and Dominicans alike, the Americans found themselves unable to do or say much other than weave their way through the crowd one step at a time, watching the exchanges and the faces of the people they passed by. As you may have guessed, those eighteen pale gringos sticking out on the streets of Dajabon, were us, Comunidad Ocho of Encuentro Dominicano.

Dajabon, a Dominican city lying on the northern border with Haiti, has been the setting for some of the most tragic history in the Dominican Republic. Trujillo's 1937 massacre of thousands of Haitians in Dajabon carries a solemn tone and histori-

cal racial tensions between Haitian "blacks" and lighter-skinned Dominicans into the modern day. Separated merely by the small Massacre River and a Dominican guarded gate on a bridge over the river, the stark differences between the Dominican Republic and Haiti are easily visible in a simple glance between Dajabon and its neighboring Haitian city, Ouanaminthe.

Though strongly guarded by the Dominican military, the border between Dajabon and Ouanaminthe is opened up every Monday and Friday for Haitians to come into Dajabon and buy or sell goods in a street market with the Dominicans. Given this access to goods not available to them in Haiti, many are in an aggressive hurry to buy and transport as much as they possibly can back over the border. Standing on the bridge merely people-watching, we were shocked to see how much ice was being carted over to large trucks on the Haitian

side—a commodity such as ice is valued and rare to them due to their simple lack of freezers. Additionally, we witnessed first-hand the pay-off of military officials in disputes where drugs were suspected as being illegally transported over the border. Corruption, racism, and severe poverty were all revealed to us directly in front of our eyes.



Our travel to Dajabon was a significant trip in making real the history and racial tensions we had primarily only studied up to that point in our semester. We were able to see the poverty and needs of the Dominican Republic, then take that insight even further by looking at the extreme poverty that Haiti faces, and how that has affected Dominican-Haitian relations. After the Dajabon trip, all of us were left emotional from the reality we had observed, but invigorated in our learning and privilege as young people able to take action and blessed to be witnesses.

CURRICULUM FOR LIFE (CONTINUED)

International Political Economy met once a week for three hours to discuss the relationship between politics, economics, and sociology. The five students in the class discussed current events and explored the significance of different political crises, currency devaluations, and business expansions. In Cultural Psychology, eight students went through three intense weeks of class Monday through Friday, exploring the significance of culture in a person's development. For their final project, each group

tested a hypothesis based on their knowledge of Dominican culture and presented their findings about culture patterns to the rest of the students.

Although the workload was intense during our nine weeks of class, the amount of new knowledge presented to us was extremely rewarding and useful. Everyday, each one of us could point out different happenings in our daily lives here and explain the significance in terms of sociology, economic poverty traps, and the workings

of the government. We even did pretty well conversing in Spanish like it was our own language, getting our points across and of course asking for directions when we were lost in the city. The curriculum of Encuentro Dominicano gave each one of us a base for understanding more about the world we live in. It made us more aware, challenged us think differently, and empowered us to promote change in many social justice issues.

BREAKING BARRIERS BY JESSICA GAULTER

The Encuentro Dominicano program includes two ten-day immersions in Dominican communities, also known as campos. We spent our first immersion in Rancho de los Platános, a small community in the mountains northeast of Santiago. For many of us, this was our first experience living without running water and electricity. We quickly learned how to take bucket showers and hand wash our clothes. During the day, we worked with members of the community constructing an aq-

ueduct to provide running water to nearly eighty families.

Las Canas, our second campo immersion, was a larger community southeast of Santiago. We spent the days working on various work projects including building a house, laying cement floors, and constructing latrines. At night, we enjoyed playing domino, cards, and dancing lessons from our siblings.

During the first few days of both immersions, it was difficult to communicate in

Spanish and adapt to a reality so different from our lives in the United States. Despite a language and cultural barrier, by the end of ten days, it was difficult to leave our Dominican families. We had worked together, ate together, danced together, and grew together. We gave them an aqueduct and construction projects, but they gave us a new perspective on life, love, and relationships.

PHOTO RIGHT:
LUCIA JULIAN,
MICHELLE
SOUDER, JESSICA
GAULTER, &
NICOLAS
GEORGE



PHOTO RIGHT:
NICK GEORGE,
ISABEL KAVAN,
MAGGIE
KENNEDY, &
KAYLA
BRIEMEYER



THE SPIRIT OF HOSPITALITY BY JESSICA GAULTER

The time I spent in Rancho de los Platános and Las Canas are by far my favorite experiences in the Dominican Republic. My two host families were incredibly generous, constantly sacrificing their comfort for my benefit. While I was taking my bucket shower after a long day of work, my mom, Miguelina, would often walk down to the colmado (small stores with food and basic necessities) to buy me a soda or a few mints. In the morning, she would give me a full mug of coffee, wait till I finished, and then ask me if I wanted more. She would then offer some to my brother and finally, if any remained, she would take a

small portion for herself. The first few days I felt so guilty and uncomfortable about being given so much. I was the rich American and she was the poor campesina—why was I being showered in gifts? After ten days of experiencing this



form of love, my views have changed. I now try to graciously accept what is being offered to me because the act of giving and receiving is a beautiful process. While observing my mom, I realized that it brought her great joy to be able to give to me. Miguelina has taught me a lesson that I think will stay with me the rest of my life. Whether it's making cookies for my friends at Creighton, serving others first, or giving someone the best room to sleep in when they stay at my house, I hope that this incredible spirit of hospitality is something I can improve and maintain going forward.

STUDENT SERVICES IN THE D.R. BY KARIE KARASIAK

We have all been somewhere that will always hold a special place in our hearts. We have all done something that has affected us in such a way that our lives have never been the same. For many of us, these places and actions will always remain a part of us. From the years 2005-2007, I lived and worked in the Dominican Republic as a U.S. Peace Corps volunteer and that experience has led me to where I am today. While representing Student Services in Encuentro Dominicano, I love being able to guide students as they adapt to life on the island and help facilitate their understanding of Dominican culture. I get to see how Creighton students develop a unique community among themselves as well as integrate into the larger, Dominican society. I am also there to assist students as they come into themselves, share their talents and explore their newly found traits. During each day exists the chance for new discoveries and part of Student Services' presence in the program is to help provide those opportunities.

Recently, we went on a trip to Jarabacoa, a mountainous region in the center of the country that is well-known for its coffee and ecotourism. We spent a colorful Saturday morning riding horse-back to a hidden away waterfall, accompanied by several Dominican youth excited to reveal to us a piece of their precious countryside. For many, including myself, it was all magically therapeutic. The past couple of months have been amazing, but students had passed the last week stressing over exams and papers, feeling a little homesick, and also coping with the injustices that they see on a daily basis. Upon arriving at the river, it was like all of the rushing water washed away all of the worries in the world. It was hard not to think of the aqueduct that the students had built in collaboration with their first Dominican community where they stayed for ten days. In a country where water is scarce, the

phrase "Agua da la vida (Water gives life)" is often heard. It is true, water gives life, but what is life without love? A common idea among Creighton students when they finish the program is that they learned about a different kind of love that they had never experienced before. We will see if this semester's group draws the same conclusion, but if nothing else, they will all arrive back in Omaha knowing that the Dominican Republic will always hold a special place in their hearts and that they will never be the same.



BATEY ESPERANZA

BY JENNA BOULAS, ELIZABETH JULIAN, KAYLA BRIMEYER, & MAGGIE WEHRMANN

Nestled a little too far into the rice paddies and plantain fields of the city of Esperanza, about a two mile walk from the main street you, come across a rusted metal sign that greets “Bienvenu a Batey II”, Welcome to Batey II. A *Batey* is a camp of migrant workers, in this case illegal Haitian immigrants, who cross the border looking for work on the *fincas* (fields) in order to provide a better life for their young families. It is hard to imagine that the quality of life in the Batey is considered better than that in Haiti. They are just far enough out of reach of any medical care, proper schooling and citizenship. Weathered one room shacks constructed from corrugated sheet metal and wooden scraps cluster together leaving small walkways through which the children of the Batey run, *como chivos sin ley*, playing tag and teasing one another.

Every Monday and Wednesday the four of us walk out of ILAC in time to watch the sunrise as we get on a *gua gua* headed into Santiago, where we will switch to one that will take us to Esperanza. When we arrive, the small town is bustling, as everyone is waking up and beginning their day, but as we walk our surroundings become more serene and the fields spread out endlessly around us.

When we reach the Batey, the men and women of the community can be found sitting under the shade of the trees or playing dominoes. The children slowly emerge and gain confidence and trust, getting more rambunctious with every game that's played. We begin school when the two ILAC teachers arrive on their *moto* and unlock the two rooms where the children split up between younger and older groups. The number of children who attend school for the three hours it's held varies depending on if they have clean clothes to wear, if snacks are available afterwards, and health. We work with the children copying letters, vowels and sentences, coloring pictures, playing with legos and singing songs. As pencils are traded, erasers stolen and jokes made, their native language of Kreyol flies through the air. Most of them know some Spanish, but there are many who do not, which makes it even more difficult for them to learn and for us to teach.

While tears are shed over legos and tops being grabbed, notebooks being hidden or even the occasional punch, when their snack of cookies and *listamilk* is distributed you can watch Elise pour the rest of his milk into his younger sisters cup. Wandeley and Santa will offer you some of their cookies, and sometimes you can even persuade them to throw their trash away.

Our last day at the Batey was spent in good spirits, enjoying a party with the kids and teachers. It is so difficult to leave the relationships that we have built and not be able to watch each of them grow up and do everything that we can to keep them healthy and safe, to leave not knowing if we will ever see them again. Our world views have been altered by the love of these children and they will stay in our hearts forever. Knowing that in a month there will be a couple more students who will learn to love this experience and these children as much as we do gives us some peace of mind.



Cien Fuegos By Amanda Rupiper

Maggie Kennedy and I were fortunate enough this past semester to have the experience of volunteering twice a week at the Santa Lucia School in Cien Fuegos. Cien Fuegos, a poverty stricken city that lies just outside of Santiago, became for us an adventure in which we never quite knew what to expect. After our guagua (public bus) ride we would transfer over to an 'F' car to take us into the city. Half the adventure was just seeing what the 'car' would consist of. More than once we rode without a dashboard, doors that did not work and floors through which we could see the road moving beneath our feet. Perhaps more interesting were the passengers that rode the F car for which words cannot do justice.



We would then proceed by foot to walk up the small hill leading to the school. In streets lined with trash and houses piled almost one on top of the other we would receive hisses, random English phrases, and the occasional laugh when we saw a t-shirt that said something so ridiculous in English you could only hope the wearer had no idea of the significance. Before reaching the school we could hear the hum of voices coming from the classes and we would prepare ourselves for what lay ahead.

We spent our time at the school in our individual classrooms in which we managed chaos, tutored reading, attempted discipline, taught a class, and made many small friends. We were challenged, made uncomfortable, and our patience tried.

After passing out bread and milk to these children, that for some would be their only reliable meal, we would attend recess with them. In the shadow of the wooden skeletons of houses and the looming trash behind the dump these kids played, proving that no matter what their reality, children all around the world are still only kids who want to have fun.

As we made our journey back to ILAC each time we walked away with something more than when we arrived. In our challenges we grew, in their suffering we learned about compassion and life, and in their laughter we learned hope and love.

Hitting the Town By Amanda Rupiper

As night hits full swing in Santiago, the live music begins to play at all the restaurants, dancing begins, people come out, and the Encuentro students show up in their guagua taxi dressed up and ready for a good time. After four months here in the Dominican Republic students had established their favorite places. A popular destination was the monument, which stands high above the city and can be seen for miles around. Students enjoyed their nights walking around the monument stopping at favorite restaurants like La Brasa for food or dancing, and enjoying pizza empanadas from little stands on the street corners while chilling in plastic chairs.

During the day the city is transformed into a bustling market, with vendors lining the streets selling music, movies, Dominican souvenirs, fruit, and hats. If one were to walk down Calle del Sol they could find the market in which many students have bought presents for people back home, such as larimar, cigars, and dominoes. The experience would not be complete, however, without bargaining over how many pesos they were willing to part with. Just across the street is La Sirena, the Target of the Dominican Republic. A perfect stop to meet almost any need, from machetes, to pictures, to rum, you name it, the students have gotten it there.

If on a shopping excursion or if just passing through for service the perfect way to quench your thirst and seek relief from the heat is the skim ice vendor that can be seen on every street in downtown Santiago. Chinola (passionfruit), a favorite flavor of Comunidad Ocho, will never let you down. If the skim ice itself is not enough there is always the uniform you can try to get the vendor to part with.

No matter what the reason for hitting the city the students always seem to enjoy themselves and the people that they meet while exploring Santiago.



ENCUENTRO
DOMINICANO

"Love, like truth and beauty, is concrete...Love is active, effective, a matter of making reciprocal and mutually beneficial relation with one's friends and enemies...Love creates righteousness, or justice, here on earth...For this reason loving involves commitment...Love does not just happen. We are not love machines, puppets on the strings of a deity called "love." Love is a choice -- not simply, or necessarily, a rational choice, but rather a willingness to be present to others without pretense or guile. Love is a conversion to humanity -- a willingness to participate with others in the healing of a broken world and broken lives. Love is the choice to experience life as a member of the human family, a partner in the dance of life." -Carter Heyward
(Quote submitted by Jenna Boulas)

