

# Encuentro Dominicano

## Remember the Mission

### Life at ILAC: Top 7 Memories

By Melissa Hollabaugh and Becca Stephan

From the moment we arrived at ILAC on January 9 (and some in the wee hours of January 10), we were welcomed into the ILAC community by more than twenty cheerful and hospitable Dominican employees. Since the very first week, students and staff have lived and worked together. From morning greetings from smiling staff on the way to breakfast to late-night chats with Miguelina and on-guard security staff, the Dominicans that we've been surrounded by for the past four months at ILAC have quickly become a part of our family here. Together, we have shared countless laughs and stories, resulting in the formation of many fond memories. The students and the staff have formed a really special bond, one that not even an ocean can separate.

#### 1) First dinner/dance with *Encuentro* students and ILAC staff: January 13, 2010

This night was our first introduction to an integral part of Dominican culture: music and dance. In Spanish class with Edwin less than an hour before dinner,

we "learned" *merengue* and *bachata*, the two most prevalent Dominican dances. Practicing with *gringos* (Dominican term for Americans) proved to be much different than being flung around the dance floor by the Dominican staff. It was quite entertaining to watch each other on the dance floor for the first time.

#### 2) *Gringos vs. Dominicanos* volleyball game: March 6, 2010

On Fridays at 5 pm, the ILAC staff finishes working for the day and are often up for playing sports with the *Encuentro* students. One of our favorite afternoons was when we played volleyball with the staff. The first two

games were considered "practice," with mixed teams that each won one game. However, the final game consisted of *gringos* versus Dominicans. It was neck and neck until the end, when—embarrassingly enough—the *gringos* lost. We attribute this loss to the pouring rain.

#### Immersion in La Penda with Jota Jota: March 20-30, 2010

We spent ten days in the campo La Penda for our second immersion, in which we lived, worked, and shared our lives with the community. Juan Jose, an ILAC chauffeur more fondly known as Jota Jota ("JJ"), was able to



share in this experience with us. Not only was Jota Jota a source of entertainment and encouragement, but he proved to be a strong leader, hard worker, and good friend to all. Jota Jota's presence only further enriched our time in La Penda. As Jota would say, "Super super WOW!"

#### 4) Adventures with Antonio: Dominican tea and *babosas*

Antonio is the security guard that works the night shift (5 pm to 5 am) Monday through Saturday. Needless to say, we have spent a lot of time with him. When we come back from a night of dancing in Santiago, Antonio is always there to greet us at the front gate. When we are up late working on another one of Kyle's papers in the library and *se va la luz* (the power goes out), Antonio is always there to shine his flashlight on the stairs so we can see as we head up to our rooms for the night. When we are taking night walks on the track in the back of ILAC, Antonio is always there keeping guard, ready to jump out from behind a tree and scare us. When we leave the library late at night, we have learned to turn on the lights outside first because we can always count on Antonio leaving us a trail of *babosas* (snails) to step on. When we'd rather "build character" than study, Antonio is more than willing to share his plastic chair by the front gate so we can tell stories and listen to *bachata*. And, Antonio is always surprising us with homemade coffee and tea during our

late-night study sessions in the *comedor* (cafeteria). One night when Melissa had an attack of the *gripe* (sick, like always), Antonio insisted on making his Dominican tea remedy. After three nights of tea (as Dominican culture calls for the sick), she was feeling much better. Whether this quick recovery was attributed to the curing powers of Dominican tea or the reception of pure Dominican *cariño* (love and affection) is still to be determined. Of this we are sure, though: that Antonio has been a source of friendship, entertainment, generosity, joy, and love; an integral part of our relationship with ILAC staff.

#### 5) Group trip to Sosúa with Elfi: April 30, 2010

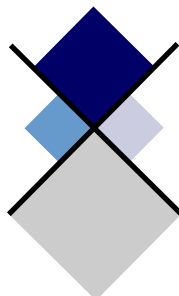
Elfi is the official Gringo Bus Chofer, the one who accompanies us on trips ranging from Centro León, a museum in Santiago, to Dajabón, a Dominican town on the border of Haiti. Due to many hours spent together on road trips, Elfi has become a really special member of our group. From putting up with GBC sing-alongs (Gringo Bus Choir) to being attacked by the three guys in our group for ocean and beach wrestling matches, Elfi is always up for having a good time with good friends.

#### 6) Learning how to make *tostones* with Cleo: May 5, 2010

All of us have come to greatly enjoy Dominican food, especially the traditional lunch meal of *arroz y habichuelas* (rice and beans). We have a few wonderful cooks who prepare all of our meals. Gracias a Dios, we have not gone hungry this semester. One night, Cleo (one of the cooks) taught us how to make *tostones*, a traditional Dominican side dish made from frying green plantains. We've really enjoyed the opportunity to learn how to make traditional Dominican dishes, including Dominican *café* (coffee), *te* (tea), and *dulce de coco* (fondly known as "coco crack"). These memories and recipes are things we will be able to bring back to the States with us and remember forever.

#### 7) *Despedida* at Paso Fino: May 6, 2010

Since we began the semester with a big dinner/dance at ILAC, it was only fitting that we celebrated the end of the semester with a night of dinner and dancing together at Paso Fino, a Dominican restaurant and horse ranch in Santiago. It was really awesome to see how much we'd grown together, spending the night dancing *bachata*, *merengue*, and *reggaeton*, as well as free-styling to American music. It was the perfect way to the semester, surrounded by the people who have been a defining part of our experience in the Dominican Republic.



## Academics

By Kelsey Wilhelm

Although we would have sometimes liked to think otherwise, academics played a large role in our experience in this country. However, with great professors, learning was achieved through experience as well as books. In our social justice class we studied the historical, theological, cultural and economic aspects of the country. We also focused on discerning our vocations, racism, and development for countries in extreme poverty. Service learning was also a large part of our academics here. We were always incorporating our experiences outside of ILAC with what we had learned in class. Last but certainly not least, we were also required to complete a beast of a twenty-page paper. We all survived this after many late nights in the library, gracias a dios.

Spanish class with Edwin Paniagua always consisted of something different. He used a combination of techniques to improve our Spanish skills including; debates, songs, dance, videos, presentations, and writing activities. His "gringo accent" and love for the movie "sanky panky" will always bring a smile to our faces, and our Spanish improvement and inability to roll our "r" will always bring a smile to his.

An upper level micro-finance and philosophy class were offered during the first two sessions of classes as well. Juli-ann Gaspar and Jeanne Holt taught the microfinance class the first session and Eugene Selk taught philosophy the second session. They were all an integrated part of our community during their stay at ILAC.

Just to surprise Kyle, as well as Karie and the ILAC staff, this past semester our community liked to throw in some twists to the classic educational setting. About mid-way through the semester, we began to theme our classes to provide some added excitement and promote some character building. A few of these themes included blue-out, white V-neck day, I wear my sunglasses during class day, barefoot day for Tom's shoes, twin day, dress like Karie or Kyle day, and for our last hoorah during our final exam: toga day. With full class participation and a desire to keep our professor on his toes, these themes seemed to help boost moral when the classes were most difficult. Kyle absolutely loved it, even if it takes him some time to admit it.

## Comunidad Nueva

By Camille Clare & Savanna McHenry



It all started on January 9<sup>th</sup>, 2010 when our whole group, all nineteen of us, met in the Miami International Airport nervous and excited to fly to the Dominican Republic. Although we didn't know each other very well, we knew that we would be spending the next four months doing everything together.

While moving into our rooms upstairs, with the sixteen girls and three boys, we soon discovered that everything could be heard through the thin walls and open ceiling. The fact that there was absolutely no privacy broke barriers very quickly!

From there, we did everything to-

gether. We ate meals, had the same classes, and went to service sites in small groups. Some of our favorite places we went to together included: Santo Domingo, Dajabon, various beaches, out on the town in Santiago, and Jarabacoa. During our campo immersions, we each lived with different families, but all worked side by side with the Dominicans and ate our meals at the community leader's house.

Throughout the semester we saw each other at our best and worst moments and quickly learned to be honest with each other. We learned everything about each member of our community including everyone's idio-

syncrasies and passions.

One of our favorite things about our community was the bus rides with Karie, Kyle, and the one and only Elfi, who drives us everywhere. Flying through the mountains on the "gringo bus," Elfi turns on our favorite songs, one of them being "Dimelo" by Enrique Iglesias, and we are transformed into the comunidad nueva choir and dance team. These times on the bus were also good opportunities to have meaningful conversations with each other, catch up on sleep, journal, or finish class readings.

We have had a lot to process with all of the realities of poverty, unequal-



ity, oppression, sickness, and suffering. Since we experienced so much together, we became not only a support system, but like a family. We all learned in a very real way how to be more selfless, empathetic, forgiving, and fully present to each other through the ups and downs of the semester. These included the joys and suffering of the campo, our service sites, and realities of poverty in the country.

We look forward to reunions at Creighton and know that our friendships here are steadfast and life-long. We would all agree that we couldn't have grown as much personally, emotionally, or spiritually if it wasn't for the support system that we created as a community.



## The Batey

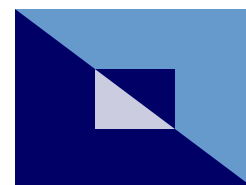
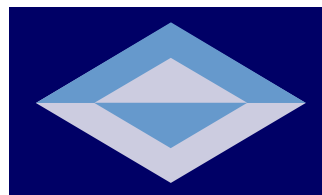
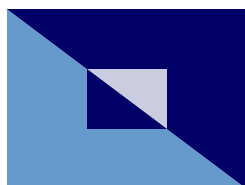
By Will Rutt

Every Monday and Wednesday, Mary, Katie S., Sarah B., and I wake up at 6:15 in the morning, usually waking up to a power outage and darkness all around. We each quickly get dressed and begin to prepare for the journey to the Batey. We walk out to the main road through Licey and get on a Licey or Moca guagua (public transportation). The guagua is usually pretty empty and goes through the streets of Santiago at an unusually fast rate because the hustle and bustle of the city has not begun. We then get off and walk to another bus which, after 45 minutes, takes us to the city of Esparanza. There we get off and begin the 2 (seemingly 3) mile walk out to the Batey. As we walk, we walk on the road that is semi-dirt, semi-paved and littered with potholes we walk through a Dominican neighborhood and the

Batey Uno. Many people are out and about doing different chores and getting ready for the day. We continue on to Batey Dos, where we assist the teachers and students at the school. The walk is so beautiful, with mountains on either side and we are surrounded by rice, banana, tobacco, and corn fields. This two-hour journey allows each of us to mentally prepare for the day ahead at the school.

As we approach, the Batey kids run at a dead sprint to meet us as soon as they can see us. I remember the first time that a boy named Marcos did this to me. He ran towards me with a huge smile across his face and when he was close enough to me he leaped right into my arms. The kids are always so happy to see us and excited that we are there. After we greet all of the kids we move into the school day,

which is about an hour and a half. Katie S. and I help out in the older kid's classroom, who range from 6-10, and Sarah and Mary in the younger kids classroom, who range from 3-5, however both of these age groups are estimated, as no one really knows how old the children are. Each day we do writing exercises that consist of writing lines of small two to three letter words. Many of the kids struggle with these exercises. One day I experienced one of my most memorable moments while I was working with one of the older boys named Bigues. Since I had started working at the Batey Bigues had never finished a writing assignment in class. One day as we were working he was extremely determined, and for the first time he finished an entire assignment! What he was writing was extremely simple;



a child with an education equal to that of general education in the United States would have been able to do what he did three or four years earlier than him. That did not matter one bit, Bigues finished and I was so proud of him for the work he had done. After finishing the writing exercises the kids color for twenty minutes or so. There are not enough coloring books so we have to trace the pages of the book for them to color on loose-leaf paper. After coloring each kid is given a snack of crackers and milk or juice. This is many times one of the two meals that each of these children receives that day. As they finish up their snacks we have recess. Recess is when all of us become human jungles gyms. Many times the kids fight for our attention and simply just want to be held. It is so much fun with all the

craziness of the kids running around and playing. The hardest part of the day is saying goodbye to the kids. After giving each of the kids a hug they wave to us as we begin the walk back to Esperanza.

Serving at the Batey is an experience that is extremely tough. The challenges that the community faces are sometimes seemingly too much to bear. The Batey is a community of Haitians that live in the Dominican Republic and work in the fields. The living conditions at the Batey are some of the worst in the country. There is no running water, most houses have dirt floors and there is no access to medicine or education. Haitians in the Dominican Republic have no rights and no access to any social services, due to the fact most of them do not

have access to their papers.

The school that is at the Batey is funded, built, and run by ILAC. If it were not for ILAC most of the children would not have the chance to attend school. The reality of life on the Batey is one that is extremely hard. Serving at the Batey has not been easy and many times felt extremely uncomfortable. It has taught me what it means to feel helpless and how amidst feeling helpless the only answer many times is to love and be present. The experience of going to the Batey is one that I will never forget. It has been one of the most rewarding, and challenging experiences that I have gone through. The faces of each of those kids and the reality of the life that they live every day will continue to affect my life, even on a daily basis.

## Caritas in Cien Fuegos

By Katie Hart & Melissa Hollabaugh

Water in Cien Fuegos tells the story of a daily reality lived by the inhabitants of this urban slum. Caritas, funded by the Archdiocese of Santiago, is an after-school program for the children of Cien Fuegos. It provides food for kids from age five to twelve whose families struggle to feed them and also offers a few educational opportunities and a place to play. This is where I spent two days a week at service.

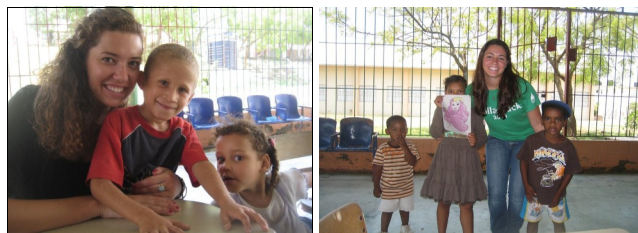
When it rains, the dirt roads in Cien Fuegos liquefy. Water fills the potholes in the street, pools in the dirt floors of the houses, and saturates the clothes of schoolchildren walking home. As we drive to Caritas, I look out the window and see men loitering outside of auto shops, watching the water collect on rusty car frames and tires. The women peer out of door-frames, attempting to sweep wet debris out of their homes. The slum sits adjacent to a trash dump, where many of the families rummage for salvage-

able items to sell or use. The rain leaves a musty stench that seems to permeate everything. Mud cakes our shoes as we trudge down the road to our destination. We are usually met with shouts and hugs, little faces eager for our attention.

After a day of playing outside or coloring pictures, hand washing is an important ritual to prepare for lunch. I observed the dirty hands and faces of the kids when I poured water to help them clean up. I encounter all different shades of brown hands with sweat and dirt-encrusted fingernails. These same hands are the hands that play with my hair, that give me hugs, and that gesture animatedly when I can't understand their Spanish. Irresistible smiles accompany these actions, and are incredibly contagious. Not only the students, but the two teachers and two cooks who work at Caritas showed their love daily through their patience and hospitality.

I don't expect water to come out of the faucet at Caritas. Instead, clean drinking water arrives in the form of bright blue jugs and plastic bags. In the blazing heat, water is rationed so there is enough for the fifty kids that eat at Caritas every day. We set the table carefully with aluminum cups, plates, spoons, and napkins. The meal consists of rice, lettuce, and beans. Sometimes, one piece of meat is added to the mix. After we eat, dishes are washed and lined up outside to dry. We started walking kids to their houses after school to help them carry the bags of water home to their families, but it soon became a part of our service that we looked forward to every week.

When it rains, when I wash my hands, and when I get a drink of clean water, I will always be reminded of Caritas—what I experienced, the incredible people I met there, and how they had such a big impact on my life.



# Carnaval

By Sarah Barnett

Carnaval in the Dominican Republic is a series of parades and parties, beginning with a celebration before Ash Wednesday, and ending on the 27<sup>th</sup> of February, which is their Independence day. Throughout the month of celebrations, every weekend Dominicans fill the streets with elaborate costumes and music. The costumes represent everything unexpected. Devils, monsters that look like walking grass, mud children, men dressing as women, and mimics of other countries. Throughout the parades music blares and observers take part by dancing on the sidelines. Observers also involuntarily take part through the vejigas and látigos, which are literally pig bladders on the end of a whip, which the costumed people use to pummel anyone and everyone in the crowd.

Some of the Comunidad Nueve community went to Carnaval the last weekend, Saturday the 27<sup>th</sup> of Febru-

ary. When we were there, the Carnaval celebrations were culminating, and this weekend everyone was putting their best into the costumes and music. All the students that went definitely encountered the látigos, with some students leaving with very severe bruising. Although most people left early in the afternoon, some stayed for a concert after the parade. Many Latino artists came to celebrate, including Tony Dize, who is now a favorite among Comunidad Nueve.

Carnaval celebrations date back to the mid 1500's, and began as a Spanish allowance for the slaves. The Spanish allowed the slaves to celebrate and dance for one day before Lent began as a way to pacify them, as well as entertain themselves. After the Dominican Republic's independence, Carnaval was expanded to include their Independence Day. The creativity in the costumes draws on Spanish, Taino, and African back-

grounds. The different costumes and mask originated in an attempt to relate to the spirit world and the world of the unknown. Today the tradition is continued, and the paraders compete for the best costume and idea, often working on their costumes with a design artist throughout the entire year.



# Santa Lucia

By Camille Clare

Twice a week Justin, Peter, Kate, and I went to an elementary school named Santa Lucia. It was located in Cien Fuegos, which is an urban slum right outside of the big city, Santiago. Every Monday and Wednesday morning we each went to our different classrooms and helped out with homework, distributed a small snack of milk and bread, which was lunch for most of the students, and ran around with the kids during recess. The class sizes were incredibly large - mine had forty-nine students with only one teacher. Needless to say, we all took on a challenge that was greater than we expected.

I have always loved children and I knew that this school would bring me joy, frustration, confusion, and most importantly, passion. Going to the

school was far different than what I expected and taught me how truly inadequate the education system is in the Dominican Republic, especially amidst the extreme poverty in Cien fuegos. The classroom was chaotic and it was a struggle to even get the students to copy down what was written on the board. The packed room with broken desks and flies swarming around spilt milk was a horrible reality, but it was the one that all these students lived daily.

Every time I walked into the classroom, the kids would give me a warm welcome by yelling my name with big smiles on their faces. That energy inspired encouraged me to be resilient in assisting them with homework and giving them the love that they deserved.

I will never forget how each day at the school one of the students, Miguel, would wave me over to help him with his math homework. He'd want me to do it all for him, so I would laugh and tell him, "No way, man!" He would smile and start, slowly making a little progress on each problem. After about five minutes he would lay his head down and tell me that his brain was tired. I would encourage him along, and once he finished, the satisfaction that filled his eyes was rewarding for both of us. Miguel and the other students in my class all deeply touched my heart. The relationships formed and the different reality that I was a part of will forever be remembered and a part of me.



# Hospicio

By Kristina Roselle

Hospicio is a nursing home run by the Sisters of Saint Vincent De Paul in Santiago and is one of the service site options for the Encuentro Program. The residents at Hospicio are typically facing financial struggle and have suffered the loss of much of their family and loved ones; they have come to Hospicio in need of shelter, medical care, and companionship. After visiting Hospicio for the first time during orientation week in January, I felt drawn to the residents and was excited to see where the experience might take me – I did not realize what a huge impact it would truly make on my life.



As a volunteer at Hospicio, I spent my time sharing and talking with the residents. Through friendly conversation and a simple hug or handshake, I grew very close with the residents and was able to build a relationship with them on many different levels. For example, on my last day of service at Hospicio, I went to visit Hilda, a female resident that I had become very close with over my four months in the Dominican Republic. We sat on her bed and she opened up her three journals, each filled with pages of historical facts, Dominican cooking recipes, the English alphabet and basic words, and short poems and stories. During my four months at Hospicio, Hilda had been eagerly trying to teach me Spanish and about the history of the Dominican Republic, while I tried to teach her basic English words and phrases. As I said goodbye to her on my final day of service, I mentioned that I had a big test the following week about the history and culture of the Dominican Republic (my final for EDP); she then proceeded to hand me one of her journals that had a few blank pages and told me to take it home with me, so that I would have something to write and study with over the weekend. With this gesture, I felt an overwhelming sense of gratitude and joy. Although the only tangi-

ble thing Hilda had given me was a simple notebook, I felt like over my time at Hospicio she had given me so much more – friendship and humor, education and insight, and a new image of strength and hope.

Throughout my time at Hospicio, the residents have helped me in so many different ways and many of them now feel like my Dominican grandparents. Through being welcoming and open, they have shown me how to become vulnerable and give myself away; through being patient and courageous, they have shown me that one must face fears and worries head on; through being hopeful and loving, they have shown me that even when situations seem frustrating and challenging one must always realize that joy can be found. I now realize how much a twenty-year-old from the United States can have in common with eighty-nine-year-olds from the Dominican Republic – we are both looking for a source of comfort and companionship, someone to share our strengths with, and someone to support us in times of difficulty. My time at Hospicio and the relationships I built with the residents are some of the most memorable and influential experiences I will take away with me from my semester in the Dominican Republic.

# Dajabon

By Jana Carson

One weekend this semester we all took a trip to Dajabón where the Dominicans open the border two times a week, allowing Haitians to enter the country to buy/sell food and other items in one giant market. The whole experience is difficult to put in words, for there are so many emotions that slap you in the face all at once, that it is exasperating to sort out upon reflection.

I would say I felt amazed, alarmed, distressed, heartbroken, flustered, ashamed, incompetent, and extremely out of my element; however, it was one of the most incredible and life-changing experiences of my entire time here.

The emotions began as we drove into Dajabón as it felt as if we had already left the Dominican Republic.

Throughout most of my time here in the Dominican Republic I have been continually frustrated by the fact that Dominicans and Haitians cannot seem to work out their conflicts and resolve them, but at that point it became very clear. While Dominicans and Haitians may live as neighbors on the same island, the people, culture, and way of life seem to be on differing ends of the

spectrum, making the situation much more complex and thorny.

These emotions continued as we squeezed through the market. After some tricky maneuvering through the masses, we arrived at the bridge that officially connects the Dominican Republic with Haiti. Looking down, you could see what was left of the diverted Massacre River, and it was eerie to think that at one point thousands of lifeless Haitian bodies floated through its rapids. Looking up, you could feel the steady drizzle hitting your face. Looking out, you could see the Haitians shuffling across the muddy bridge towards the market. I watched as those returning balanced great loads of rice, Styrofoam boxes, soda, chips and plastic chairs on their heads or pushed/pulled huge carts of rice, limes, carrots, and juice. I looked at the shoeless feet of many and saw the tired lines etched into their faces from

a life of hard work and tragedy. They were surviving but not much else.

As we left the bridge to venture through the market another time, many of us witnessed another horrible sight. Dominican soldiers caught a Haitian boy pickpocketing, and they decided to administer a punishment themselves. The soldiers tied the sixteen-year-old-seeming boy to a bench with wire hangers and electrical wire and doused him with water and trash. His futile screams for help will be forever imprinted in my mind. I watched as they hosed him off a bit more and then moved him to a more secluded spot in order to, "teach him a lesson," which I presumed involved the large sticks they were carrying. The whole ordeal was completely mortifying, unjust and degrading. I had seen things like this in movies but never in real life, and I was completely in shock. Afterwards we talked about it with Kyle, and I agree that the actions

of the soldiers just reinforce the stereotypes on both sides. The Haitians continue to fear that Dominicans will one day kill them, and as Wucker so simply puts it, Dominicans feel that, "Haitians are guilty; Haitians deserve their fate."

In conclusion, this trip was the most out of place and uncomfortable that I have ever felt in my life. The entire time I was extremely aware of myself and my surroundings. However, while the experience was extremely challenging, it was a very necessary part of our time here. Not only did it allow us to better understand the Dominican-Haitian relationships on the island, but it allowed us to experience extreme poverty. This experience was life-changing for many people on the trip, as it gave us a glimpse into the unjust lives that many people must live in this world.

## La Penda: Not Just a Campo in the Mountains

By Emily Lien

Nervous yet anxious we all boarded the gringo bus for our two hour ride through the mountains and into the beautiful campo of La Penda. I didn't know what to expect from this campo experience because I knew it would be completely different from Hato Viejo. Once again we would be living with a family for ten days that we had never met before and some of us didn't even know the language. Little did we know, we would soon be able to communicate with our families in more ways than one. By the end of our experience we found out how creative we could be with our communication skills. For example, I remember one night trying to describe what a flying squirrel was to my family. My description didn't help because my family was convinced that the animal was a bird. After getting the entire family as well as the neighbors involved in our guessing game, Claire decided that drawing a picture would be a better idea. It probably took us

twenty minutes of Pictionary and charades to finally explain what it was. In the meantime I think we all almost died of laughter. Who would have thought describing an animal would be so difficult! After getting past our initial fear of communication, we were quickly able to open up to our host families.

During the day we spent our time mixing cement, painting a tin roof, leveling hills, and moving rocks. Our final goal was to try to finish a school for the children in La Penda. This was a project that had been started six years before we had gotten there but was put on hold due to financial issues. The entire community was excited about the idea of a new school. They had been waiting so long for the school to be finished and now they were seeing progress. It was so amazing to see the excitement towards education for the children. By the end of our ten day immersion we were



seeing enormous changes in the school.

Saying goodbye to this community was extremely difficult. They taught us about their culture, how to cook and do laundry, and the importance of relationships. We built them a school and shared our own culture with them. Both communities had shared a piece of themselves. We were no longer just Americans living in a Dominican household, but we were now a part of their family.



## Hato Viejo-Old Cattle Ranch By Justin McCarthy

Names can be misleading. Hato Viejo no longer ranches cattle, today the community exists as cultivators of arroz (rice). Hato Viejo is one of the largest campos partnered with ILAC. From the windows of our Gringo bus, conditions don't seem that desperate. But, true to Dominican culture, appearances are deceiving. Hato Viejo is unordinary in its blatant disparity. While, modern spacious homes book-end their decrepit wooden shack neighbors the reality is that neither enjoy a prosperous livelihood. This intense economic disproportion contrasts neighbors vibrantly. Some enjoy a certain degree of success, while others are forced to separate from their families in a dire effort to find work and support those whom they've left behind. If beauty exists in their circumstance, it is found in the dependency and resolve that they have in God. The poor are excellent advocates of God, because when they have nothing, they still have their faith in a divine and loving omniscient power.

ILAC has a network of community ambassadors, which they call their cooperadores. When a visiting community enters a campo, the house of the cooperador serves as our headquarters of sorts. Here, we eat our meals, gather for bailes (dances), have group reflections, and meet our host families. As an elementary speaker of Spanish, a foreigner to the Dominican Republic, and someone who has only spent a month in the country living amongst a predominately English speaking community, the prospect of living with a rural Spanish speaking family caused me a lot of anxiety. Add to that the "sink or swim" auction style of the first encounter of your family, and all the sudden the program's name, Encuentro Dominicano, seems to take on a whole other level of significance. The process begins when your family's name is called and after they step forward the student's name is called. A warm, intensely awkward, embrace ensues and from there student and surrogate family depart for their future home.

As I walked alongside my mom a few feeble attempts were made at polite conversation, without success. Eventually she quit trying, partially to my dismay but partially to my relief. My family consisted of an Aunt and Uncle, four brothers, two sisters, two nieces, brother in law, mother and father. 9 of whom pack under the same roof. The language barrier would continue to hinder conversation, but affection finds ways to shine through. When there was a shortage of water, they gave me a bucketful to shower. When there was too little space in the house, they evicted an entire room so that I may have privacy. They were quick to stand up and gave me a chair whenever I came home. While they were far better equipped for the work, they handed me the hammer time and time again. Essentially, while they were poor in bread, they were rich in love and sacrifice. God dwells in that outpouring of gift.

Kyle Woolley, the Academic Director, is fond of saying, "People helping people, it's a beautiful thing". Our objective for the campo immersion is to enter into solidarity with the community that we are serving and being served by. Solidarity is recognizing the human condition's interconnectedness, the inherent inequality of life while appreciating the injustice of this. Solidarity is sharing in moments of suffering and moments of joy. Solidarity is taking on the interests of the poor and to some extent their condition. Entering into true solidarity is arguably impossible. Simply stated we enjoy different realities. At the end of our ten days we will leave and return to our life of comfort, while our family remains ensnared by social shackles and exploiting economics. Our time in the campo is mutually beneficial. In Hato Viejo we constructed 15 latrines, 2 homes, and laid 8 cement floors. We enabled a better livelihood by providing the materials needed for improved sanitation and shelter. Try to imagine the overwhelming feeling of joy, when the feet, which used to swing out of bed

and hit dirt, now rest on concrete in the morning. In turn we garnered some of the most profound lessons and insight into making sense of this crazy thing called life. Necessities take on a whole new meaning when you live amongst the poor. From this we've learned the importance of living intentionally and as Ghandi eloquently puts it, "to live simply so that others may simply live." The purest blessing of Hato Viejo is witnessing the community. Neighbors share and take part in one another's lives to an extent that is absent in our suburban culture of the United States.

Hato Viejo truly resembles Dominican culture. In our retreat, following the campo immersion, we concluded that Hato Viejo is a community of stark contrasts. Family importance versus impermanence, luxuries versus necessities, self-centeredness versus selflessness, working hard versus not working, giving but with the expectations of receiving in return, deeply spiritual while relationally shallow. It is hard to imagine these differences till you've been immersed in them for ten days. In those ten days many of us experienced a culture and family entirely foreign to us, but a culture and family that we fell in love with. Saying goodbye several months later many things had changed; our Spanish had drastically improved, families were now living in different homes, the once green rice fields were harvested and now dry and brown. However many things remained the same; the jokes and laughter we shared, playing domino, the pack of child hoodlums still roamed the dusty street, and good byes were still tearful. A major lesson of the Encuentro program is coming to terms with our powerlessness. Any one of us would change our family's circumstance in a heartbeat if we could, but here more than anywhere our dire helplessness is emphasized. To this we respond with love; just as our families responded to us, complete strangers. Love, faith, and community are how the citizens of Hato Viejo respond to life's unalterable difficulties and so must we.

## Hato Viejo

by Katie Stockdale

### Sala de Tarea

By Lindsay McMillan

Everything at Sala de Tarea went great! I struggled a little bit in the beginning to make connections with the kids because I had such a hard time understanding them so I would get frustrated and they would get frustrated and we didn't end up getting anywhere fast. Finally, I was able connect with them and to help them with their math homework (everything from addition to long division to multiplication and geometric shapes), their English homework (in which most cases I end up spelling out the word for them and having them practice saying it), and Espanol homework (which usually consists of dividing words into syllables). Each day brought new challenges, but I really loved it and felt like I am got SO much out of it through the improvement of my Spanish, the relationships I formed, and all of the cultural knowledge I obtained.



### Microfinance and Health in Santiago

By Sara Schretenthaler

This semester our microfinance professors, Juli-Ann Gaspers and Jeanie Holt, became Julianna and Juanita. This transformation made it clear that this was not just a normal business class. We not only learned about microfinance or health impacts in developing countries, we formed our own research project investigating the links between the microfinance loans in the Dominican Republic and health impacts on a community. But before we could perform our research interviews we brushed up on our Spanish and learned the basics of microfinance loans and public health theories.

To build our research project, we interviewed in Spanish both loan recipients and loan analysts. An inter-

view that stood out to me was when Kate Dorman and I interviewed Pedro who raises animals to make sausage and meat for Colmados throughout Cien Fuegos. Pedro used his loan to buy more animals and equipment to process the meats. We interviewed him in his home and toured the small farm he ran out of his backyard. It was amazing to see how the loan impacted him and the livelihood of his family. After we finished the interview we sat with his family and chatted for about an hour about their life and our time in the Dominican Republic so far. As we were talking, his daughter came over carrying a young baby and the whole family started caring and playing with this child. When we asked if it was her child, she responded that it was a

Welcome to Mosquito City

Home of Latrines

And broken dreams

Where rice patties grow

As far as the eye can see

Broken homes house broken bones

While a plastic chair

Supports every care

Trash litters the streets

That kids run through with bare feet

Young girls become mothers

Then their men sleep with others

When school is in session

There's not much of a lesson

Slaving away in a field

Might yield enough to feed you family

Men cheer and bet as cocks fight

In a ring before the church choir sings

Birth defects are the effect of polluted water

In a country of contradictions it's hard

To make encouraging predictions

neighbor's son from down the road. The whole community was working together to raise and care for the child. This showed us how important community health development is especially in the Dominican Republic because whether you are in a campo or in the city, people work together to grow and develop.

After each of these interviews and mini-immersions, we would return to ILAC and discuss our findings over our favorite ice cream, Helados Bon. In class we worked together to develop a model from our findings, which our professors then transformed into two research papers- one for Public Health journals and the other for Economics journals.

# Pico Duarte

By Sarah Barnett



36 Miles. 15 Hours. 1 Mountain Conquered.

Pico Duarte, the largest mountain in the Caribbean as well as the largest Mountain east of the Mississippi in the western hemisphere, stands at 3,087 meters according to 'official' Dominican government calculations. Although is anything really 'official' in the Dominican Republic, especially the government? According to other researchers, Pico Duarte stretches another 11 meters to a total of 3,098.

At 4:30 a.m. on Friday April 16, 12 students and Kyle pulled out of ILAC with Elfie in an attempt to conquer the mountain. Arriving to the base at 7:00 a.m., Encuentro students armed themselves with chocolate, water, Gatorade powder, and somewhat inadequate hiking gear. Although the rain made the trek cooler than any part of the country, the determined students wanted to, at least, attempt to conquer the mountain.

Different groups quickly emerged as those more athletically inclined forged ahead and those with less athletic ability brought up the rear. While climbing the mountain, a heavy mist, which surrounded the hikers, made it impossible to see more than 30 feet in either direction. This worked in both a negative and posi-

tive manner; they could not appreciate the view, but they also could not see the daunting path ahead.

Throughout the path, there were several stops to recuperate and fill water from the mountain streams. As the hikers approached the last stretch of the hike, Repentance loomed ahead. Repentance, an entirely rocky, steep incline, lasts over 3 kilometers. Much like the name denotes, if the hikers had not been repenting before, they were now. After Repentance, hikers enjoyed a somewhat easier decline to the base of the summit, where they camped and enjoyed a bonfire before finishing the expedition the following morning. Despite less than comfortable sleeping conditions consisting of freezing temperatures, hardwood floors, and less than four hours of sleep, the hikers rose at 3 a.m. to finish what they started. In order to combat the freezing temperatures, one hiker wore shorts, leggings, sweatpants, two pairs of socks, undershirt, t-shirt, and a sweatshirt. The hike began under a star filled sky, expanding beyond our imaginations. By the time the hikers could see the summit, many experienced a rush of adrenaline and began the race to the top.

All thirteen climbers reached the

top in time to view one of the most magnificent sunrises. Hikers could see to the ocean, Haiti, and were far above the clouds. After spending less than 10 minutes at the top, due to the extreme wind and cold, the hikers turned to complete 18 miles back to base, Elfie, and the comforts of ILAC. After the entire group fell asleep on the bus, and struggled for more than a few minutes climbing the stairs up to the bedrooms, they decided to celebrate their accomplishment as a community at Puerta del Sol for dinner. Every community member who conquered the mountain overcame mental and physical challenges, representing some of the hardest challenges of their lives. However, reaching the top proved to be overwhelmingly rewarding, and all the hikers formed a unique bond during this 36-hour 'adventure.'

## Top 10 Cat Calls

By Lindsay McMillan

1. "I love you forever, everyday" (in Kyle's words "which is much better than only 6 days in a week")
2. "Hey Lady"
3. "Hellooooo white girls"
4. "Will you marry me?"
5. "Hello baby I love you so much"
6. "Hola Bella" (or linda or gringa or any other variation along these lines)
7. "Come over here and look at my yuka" (translated into English for the non-spanish speakers)
8. "Oh my god you are so gorgeous" (This was in reference to two men)
9. "Whats your name Mami?"
10. "Americana...ts tsss Tssss TSSSSSSSSSSSSS"







**The Understood You**  
**By Katie Stockdale**

What's the geography of your heart?  
What will be the part  
That you play?  
Will you use your voice today?  
Make a change along the way  
Take a walk in another's shoes  
Take a chance and expand your views  
It's up for you to choose  
Live in your own little world  
Or change your words from singular to plural  
Put the I back in community  
Start to think about humanity  
Suffering exists  
And we can't solve it with mere fists  
This we must come to realize  
Only then can we begin to organize  
First we must communicate  
Recognize just how much we relate  
Finally address the root of people's hate  
The reality they live is not their fate  
It's time to take a stand before it's too late