

### Los Angeles 2010 Winter Break Reflections

*As one of three students on the trip representing Hofstra University, I think I was one of the luckiest people that were a part of it. I was completely on my own with over 50 other students and staff I didn't know. But I never felt alone on the trip. From the first time I met my fellow students at the airport, I felt like we were a close unit.*

*A week ago, we were all strangers. It's amazing to think that in only a week, such a large, diverse group of people can come together, work together, and come out as a family in the end. I've never felt so connected to a group of new friends.*

*Over the course of the week, I did so many things on the trip that I'd never done before, starting with traveling to the west coast for the first time. I painted walls, murals, weeded land, hoed land, dug holes, tutored high school students, spoke to junior high school students about college, and so much more. I visited places and attractions in California that I'd always wanted to go to. My experiences doing service taught me a lot, but I also learned so much about so many different things from my new friends and the staff we worked with.*

*Now that I'm home in New York, my biggest problem (besides readjusting to cold weather) is this: how do I describe what I did in Los Angeles to my friends and family here? It's impossible. I can't explain how I felt when I helped make the Boys & Girls Club in Santa Monica or the YMCA of Malibu & the Palisades better. I can't express the sights I saw such as the Santa Monica pier, Venice Beach, or Hollywood.*

*Everyone has been asking, and will continue to ask, how the trip went. And every time, I have trouble answering. There's so much to say and it's so hard to articulate everything. But once I get started, it's hard to stop talking. It's just one of those things where "you had to be there."*

*The one thing I do know is that this trip and opportunity I had been of immeasurable value. I'm so grateful that I was fortunate enough to be a part of this trip and this particular group. Thanks to Hillel, City Year, the staff on the trip, and all of my new friends from other colleges around the east coast.*

**-Lili Sajecki**

*Over the past few days we have had many speakers and although they were all meaningful in their own ways, Wayne Firestone inspired me. He didn't inspire me because he is father of three daughters (just like my father) or because he is the president of Hillel. Although it is admirable that he is such a successful man, what is more admirable is the lesson he portrayed through his words. Furthermore, he inspired me to realize that it is a mitzvah to give back, but in order to give back successfully we must understand ourselves as not only Jewish people, but as individuals. In short, he underscored an important lesson being that personal reflection is essential to not only help others, but ourselves as well. In the long run, if we establish values that reflect not only Jewish tradition but our personal beliefs as well, the world will one day become a better place. Thanks, Mr. Firestone.*

**-Amanda Dryer**

*"Oooh, we're halfway there!" Literally. As we're sitting on the bus this morning on our way to the YMCA with Bon Jovi blaring through the speakers, we are taking the time to reflect on the presentation Janice Kaminir-Reznick gave us last night. She is a representative of Jewish World Watch, an organization designed to educate, advocate, and provide relief for genocides occurring around the world. She taught us a lot about the conflict minerals and the horrible situation in the Democratic Republic of Congo. We were shocked to hear the extensive crimes, particularly the brutal gang raping of Congonese females as young as five years old. It was especially moving and touching to hear one woman's personal story about how she was raped by five different men in front of her children and then had to escape from her burning home.*

*The presentation was last night after three days of strenuous service and volunteer work. It's remarkable that after three days' hard work, we saw the Boys & Girls Club of Santa Monica transformed. Yet later that night, we heard about problems and situations that desperately need our attention. It just goes to show you that no matter how much time and effort you put in at one place, there is still so much more to be done. Ms. Kaminir-Reznick provided us pamphlets and fliers with information about where to go next and what we can do. Anyone can contribute their time to help make the world a better place.*

**-Jennie Brill and Lili Sajecki**