



A Thank You

I recently returned from spending a week in Puerto Rico where my husband was deployed with the military for a short time. It was my first experience “*out of the country*,” and many of the things I saw will forever change my perspective on life.

Because of regulations, I wasn’t permitted to ride in any of the government vehicles that were assigned to those serving there for their transportation. So my travels beyond the hotel were done on the public transportation that was available, the bus or the ferry. Over the years, I have watched the news and have listened to many missionaries and others tell about conditions in other parts of the world, and there are places in our own country that are very poor. Yet it hits you like new news when you see it up close. I don’t think I was truly prepared for how my heart would respond when seeing the poverty and often hopelessness of ordinary people first hand. To get into the “*city*”, the bus went through impoverished neighborhoods where every window was grated and sides of buildings were often just boarded up. Graffiti seemed to be on every available surface. I watched children ride to school alongside people who seemed dazed by alcohol or some other condition. I watched hard-working men loaded down with the tools of their trade as they made their way to work. I saw the mothers picking up their children after working a long shift in one of many of the service industries. Old men were there looking worn and dirty, appearing to not have any place to go. I saw young people who put on a tough face and bullied others into submission.

I was just an observer. I had been warned about where to avoid and what times were best for travel, so I was never really in danger. It was, I believe, a God-given opportunity to experience things that I never had before and for to be taught more about myself and the much bigger world that resides outside my environment. I cannot speak Spanish so my interactions were often with a smile or gesture meant to convey my intentions. I so wanted to talk with the locals to learn about their lives, their dreams, and how they cope.

Sometimes my smiles were reciprocated and other times they were met with a look of distrust or even anger. It was an adventure trying to find directions by looking at symbols and guessing at words. There were those who tried to help this “*lost*” tourist and others who just walked away. In many ways, I was out of my comfort zone. There was so little that was familiar. At times, there was a feeling of isolation being the “*different*” one. Yet, it wasn’t really a hardship because it was just a temporary thing for me.

Which brings me to this point. During my time there, I thought about the missionaries who leave all that is familiar and immerse themselves in a new culture to bring the Good News of Christ to those who so desperately need that hope. I wondered at how often they feel isolated and alone. How do they keep encouraged when language and cultural barriers inhibit the sharing of the best news of all? What about when their best efforts are rejected for no good reason? So my intention for sharing this with you is not to make any new observances, because so many have learned this long before, but it is written to simply say THANK YOU to all who have left their comfort zones and sacrificed so much to show the love of Christ. I appreciate your willingness to say yes and to lay aside



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your wants in order to do the will of the One who sent you. To the missionaries, both short and long-term, I appreciate you. A seed has been planted in my heart, and I feel a preparation has begun for work ahead. It may not involve travel. It might just be a ministry in my own hometown. Until I know, my prayers are with you as you serve, and my heart is grateful for all you do.