Kamaile Maldonado
An Inspiring Journey

Almost eight years ago to the day, Outrigger & OHANA Hotels & Resorts and the world lost a most wonderful person when Patti Maldonado passed away. Patti started working in the Reservations department right out of high school and was with us almost three decades before she lost a long battle with cancer. The story of Patti’s life can be found in the June 5, 1999, edition of Saturday Briefing.*

Although Patti is gone, she is still with us in countless memories and through her daughter Kamaile, who just graduated from Pepperdine University and will attend University of California Berkeley’s Boalt Hall School of Law this fall.

Recently, I received a letter from Kamaile thanking others and me for the financial assistance that made possible her travel to the Dominican Republic this past spring break to work with the needy. The letter describes her experiences there. It is such a wonderful story, and it reminds me so much of the spirit of her mother, that I want to share it with our readers. Kamaile has agreed and has provided some heartwarming photos as well.

Project Serve

By Kamaile Maldonado

Recently, I went on a spring break service trip as part of a program called “Project Serve” that Pepperdine’s Volunteer Center organizes for students every year as an alternative to other spring break options. The project sends about 20 teams of about 15-20 people each to different locations all over the nation and abroad. The teams spend the week of spring break serving the communities they visit in various ways.

Some teams work through homeless shelters to feed and clothe those in poverty, others help teachers and children in inner city schools. Some teams build houses and other useful buildings for remote villages in developing countries, and one team even served as temporary nurses and physician’s aides, administering vaccinations and medical care in a developing country! My boyfriend’s team (the team I worked with last spring) went to New Orleans to continue helping in the desperately needed relief efforts, gutting ruined houses and distributing food and clothing at a relief center.

This year, I went to the Dominican Republic, and our team worked through an organization called Orphanage Outreach.

I stayed at an orphanage in Monte Cristi, which is a poor village on the coast close to the border with Haiti. I was humbled and surprised by how modestly the people lived: mostly in one-room, makeshift shacks. Dogs, goats, and children had the run of the unpaved streets of this town, and clean water was locked in cages to protect this valuable resource.

The conservation of water was tough for us Americans to adjust to at first but you get used to taking “military showers” and reminding each other, “If it’s yellow let it mellow, if it’s brown flush it down.”

The septic system there cannot handle toilet paper and the electricity blacks out 3-4 times a day on average because there is simply not enough capacity.

I’m surprised the heat didn’t kill us, reaching 95 degrees some days with 100% humidity. And, when we survived that, I’m truly surprised that our “germophobic” group didn’t cry about the eternal dirt and dust everywhere and the monumentally sized tropical bugs and mosquitoes, which forced us to sleep under nets to escape.

We worked primarily in two schools near the orphanage and gave the children a jump start on primary English skills including greetings, colors, numbers, family members, simple activities, and body parts. Since English is the key to the future for these children but the country is so poor that they cannot even afford to bring people who know how to speak English to come help, we really were opening doors for the kids even though we only had time to teach them a few phrases.

I am still surprised at how quickly I fell in love with the people and the children there. I felt like a celebrity when everywhere I went crowds followed. That was unexpected, but the people there do not have any form of mass media and are unaware of the controversies surrounding America all over the world. All they saw were volunteers coming to help their children.

The children gave me so much more than I could ever have given them. Without toys or even shoes, they were so full of joy and love completely pure and free of judgment. They were also so free from the burdens of worry and discontent, completely joyful despite the utter poverty and simplicity of their lives.

The Dominican children taught me lessons about trust, faith, joy, and love that I couldn’t have learned otherwise and will never forget. I have been truly humbled by this trip, and my life will never be the same again.

As a result of this trip, I have decided to consider not only a career in public service law but also to take that a step further.
and fight for justice internationally. This life-altering experience has shifted my path in new and exciting directions, and it’s all thanks to your generous help. I wish I could have brought you and all of my sponsors with me to meet these amazing children. Thank you eternally for helping to make it possible for me to meet them! They’ve changed my life and so have you.

* The article on Patti Maldonado is available online at http://outrigger.com/aboutus_saturday_briefing_articles.aspx?article=167&section=19