Georgia Journal - 1

Monday, 3/14/16

Kat Miles ‘19

Today was our first day at the site! I had so much to say about today but now, after that exciting game of Mafia, I can only think of how I was so wrongly killed and unable to bring justice to my killers. But seriously, today was a very amazing day with eye opening experiences. Once again, everyone we met surprised me with their kindness and hospitality. As a group, I think we continued to grow closer, brought together by the work and just spending time together. – Kat

Tuesday, 3/15/16

Rebekah Samuels ‘17

Today consisted of a lot of food…And a lot of service work. Thank goodness we all like to eat on this trip. The floors are almost done at Stephanie’s house. Her kids really liked it and she seemed excited too. I’m sorry- I would usually write more but I’m so tired. We had Dairy Queen blizzards after work and then stuffed our faces with pizza at Pat’s. And got a free cone at Dairy Queen. Needless to say, I need a nap. Love, Rebekah.

Wednesday and Thursday, 3/16/16, 3/17/16

Ariel Li ‘19

Yesterday was a meaningful and fun day. It was the third day that we worked in Steph’s house. After two days everyone in our group knows what we were supposed to do and each of us learned some new skills. We put a lot of efforts on this service project because we wanted to help change Steph’s situation. I worked with Beza on the wood floor yesterday. Thad taught us how to do it. He was totally different from Nash. It was my first time using a “cutter” and I was sure my mom would never allow me to use it. I had a lot of fun without cutting myself. We had lunch with Reggie who was another volunteer win the Fuller Center. He told us about the selection process of all service projects. Steph’s house was the first one this year. I was so glad that our group was able to work on this project. I was impressed by the concern of later on training. Even though we fixed majority of the house we were not sure about how long it would keep that way. We hoped the new looking house could inspire Steph to treat her children better. Family always has a big impact on children. WE had best wishes to her children to change their family. Also Reggie told us a lot about the future goal of the Fuller Center, which was to spread out and inspire more people to join. I agree that providing people good housing conditions would not necessarily be the best solution, but it was the first step that we could do to help. Hopefully, in the future the poverty cycle could be changed.

Yesterday was a lot of fun. However, I can only remember those when I actually write it. Okay, now I’m going to talk a little bit about Thursday.

Thursday was the last day of working. We spend a lot of time on the project and we almost completed repairing Steph’s house. Her house looked much better than before and we hope her family can be happier than before. We worked on little things to change her life.

I painted with Beza and Ellie. It was a great experience. I tried so hard to keep myself clean while I was painting. Nash was so different from other days. Today, he did not really care about details, which was hard to believe but anyway we finished it. We also had lunch with Nash. He was very open and told us his background stories. We were honored to be his listeners. He inspired me a lot. His life was like a vicious cycle turning into a victory cycle. Now he put a lot of effort to the community and he wanted to change other’s lives. He wanted to pass the brightness to us. It’s a long way to change the world but if we keep helping others get rid of poverty, we will finally get there. Nash predicted that it would take five generations to get there. All the best wishes to who we could change in the future.

The interaction between Nash and me changed in the last day of service project. As I mentioned above I was still pretty clean after all work. However, in the end of the work, Nash came to me and he said he had a special gift for me. He asked me to close my eyes. He shaked his painted hands with me. Finally made me dirty. Thanks Nash. That was my day today. –Ariel

Friday, 3/18/16

Ellie Cosby ‘19

On Friday everyone got a well-deserved break. We started our day going to the Fuller Center and signed a bible and a picture of the group. Thad and Kirk Expressed their gratitude and we had a heart felt goodbye. Soon we were off to Koinonia farm.

* Kat, Elana, and I ate lunch with odd farmer
* Everyone got a tour from unfriendly lady
* Next, we went to see the giant peanut
* We went to an antique store then got some incredible peanut butter ice cream
* We went to Walmart to buy ingredients for our dinner
* We cooked dinner and everyone made a great team
* At reflections we did the next round of compliments

--Ellie

Georgia Journal – 2

Day 1 - Sunday 3/13/16

Elana Krapin ‘19

Dear Journal,

Today was a really awesome day overall! Even though it was raining for a brief amount of time this AM, it didn’t last for long! This morning we all met up in the Motel 6 parking lot at 8:30 (which was technically 7:30 because of daylight savings time), initially a little bit groggy after the long (but fun!) day of driving and exploring Asheville, NC on Saturday. We all drove over to Panera to grab breakfast (the cinnamon toasty crunch bagels are poppin’!) and then embarked on another long drive. From the looks of it, based off the most common responses during reflection, although we were technically driving for a long time, most people seemed to think the ride went by really quickly because it was so much fun talking to and learning about everyone.

* I learned Rebekah had a crazy first kiss story where the boy’s hair gel ended up ALL over her face!
* Epe met her boyfriend on Tinder
* Ariel went on a 12 day trip to Italy, France, and Switzerland
* Kat went to a really rad Waldorf school and HATES papaya
* Ellie is a swim instructor and camp counselor
* Brigitte had her first kiss when the boy told her “I think I forgot something” before leaving
* Emily played Cheers to the Governor in the woods with her friends and went to Morocco
* Zoe’s first kiss was when slow dancing at prom
* Matt’s mom allows drinking and he only ever gets drunk with family

Those are all I can think of right now, but everyone else on the trip is really awesome. Our group is really diverse and I am (and I think everyone else) is very excited for the rest of the trip!

We first stopped to go on a hike at Tallulah Falls. Which was really nice, not to mention beautiful. Great way to get a break from sitting in a car for so long. There were also a lot of great (and some embarrassing) stories shared during the ride and a lot of great music (Hannah Montana, Jesse McCartney…). In my car, specifically, we played Cheers to the Governor (great game, 10/10/ would recommend). We stopped for lunch at a subway and ate outside on picnic tables. It was nice.

After a while, we finally reached the church in Americus! We were initially greeted by Jody, who was really kind and who we’ll be working with at the fuller center this week. They graciously offered us walking tacos for dinner, after which we met Charles, who is a youth minister and extremely hospitable. He told us a funny story about his economics professor back in the day who would wear the same charcoal trill jacket and black pants EVERY day and that one day he saw the professor jogging outside in really short hot pink joggers. Jody and Charles are definitely gonna make this week great!

We set up our cots, Matt, David, and Beza went grocery shopping and when they got back everyone helped put away everything in the midst of some more fun and chatting.

-Elana

Day 2 – Monday 3/14/16

Brigitte Jacoby ‘19

Happy Pi Day and happy first day of work! After a lovely 7am wakeup, everyone packed lunches and we piled into the vans to head to the Fuller Center. There we met Kirk and Barbara. Kirk was this nice old man who told us about the history of the Fuller Center and some fun facts about Americus. Barbara is a gypsy and currently helping at the Fuller Center. Nash strolled in and told us where we’d be working today. We were helping to renovate a house for a woman named Stephanie and her three kids, one of whom is disabled (in a wheelchair) and Autistic.

Although hectic and confusing for the first hour or so, (when everyone was trying to figure out what to do) soon enough, order came. There were some people sweeping or vacuuming or scraping the floor clean or scrubbing paint off the floor. I actually felt like Cinderella scrubbing the floor, it was funny. After lunch, we all started prepping rooms to lay down flooring. Matt, Rebekah, and I put down tiles for the little girl’s room in just 3 hours. It was really rewarding to know that Steph’s daughter could sleep in a nice room. The fact that the family was living in the house during construction was (is) incredibly motivating!

After work, we showered and went to Lee’s house for dinner. He and his family were super inviting – they cooked dinner for us and the kids, Sam and Shaw, let us play 4 square with them and pokemon. Ariel is insanely good at four square and Elana is really good at teaching kids games.

I got distracted by Mafia – I was wrongly accused and killed so hey, give me a second to get my thoughts straight.

Overall, today was really rewarding. Helping the family out feels incredible and I love getting to know everyone. All the people we’ve met here, from the fuller center to the foundry to the Lee family have been really nice and welcoming.

Anyways, I think it’s about time for me to end this because I can no longer spell!

Here’s hoping the rest of the week goes as amazingly as today!

xx- Brigitte

Day 3 – Tuesday 3/15/2016

Zoe Irons ‘18

Okay, first off, this pen is really smudgy. Also my handwriting is “atrocious” sorry. DEAL WITH IT!

This entry comes in three parts:

1. I think empathy is a difficult thing to understand. We try to explain it to children by saying: “imagine you’re in the other person’s shoes”, or by putting large posters in Kindergarten classrooms with the golden rule emblazoned on it in big, appropriately golden letters. But when kids ask fir mire details and we tell them something like “imagine what the other person feels like”. But that, I think blurs the definition of empathy with sympathy. Which isn’t bad, but sympathy is easy. It’s easy to say to yourself, “I feel bad for him/her/them”.

I don’t think I really understood empathy until recently, so I understand it’s a hard thing to teach children. But the way I understand empathy is by remembering this line from A Little Princess. Sarah, the super-rich heiress says to an overworked, underfed scullery maid “it is just an accident that I am not you and you are not me”, I’ve always remembered that line and I think I finally know why. Sarah is the rare child who actually understands empathy – in a different world, a different set of circumstances, sarah would be a maid. It is truly an “accident of faith” that she is not.

Sympathy is “I can feel what you feel” because that’s impossible. Another obstacle to empathy, besides it being more difficult to understand and execute, is it is still with you, you can’t file it away like a new piece of information. Your heart breaks for the children who have to sleep on filthy mattresses in a moldy house. And you lie awake at night and try not to think about them, but you can’t. Eventually, you fall asleep in a very clean sleeping bag on a camping cot in a cool, safe basement surrounded by people who care about you. And you’ll never look at your house the same way again – your clean, mold-free, debris-free house. Once your eyes are opened to that kind of thing, I hope they never close. I hope I never forget.

2. Tiarah was mean to a lot of us today. Not me – personally, I had an okay time with her, letting her watch me caulk baseboard, but Rebekah got pretty salty, and she really upset Epe, which was awful. But I thought about this scene from the “Once and Future King” by T.H. White where Morgana’s and sons on into town and find an old donkey and decide to whip it and drive it around, torturing it for fun. But the way it’s written I don’t hate the children. I just feel sad, because they were not taught compassion.

I’m not saying Stephanie is a neglectful mother – not at all – I’m just trying to explain that I don’t blame Tiarah for her actions, and I don’t hold them against her. Maybe I’m too nice, but working with her, she was eager learn and do things herself. I did my best not to let her push me around, and I tried to teach her manners, sort of. I had her look Rebekah in the eyes and thank her for working in the room. I tried to always say “please” and “thank you” around her, to lead by example. When Becca asked “what’s the magic word?” she began to count from 5, like I’m sure she’s heard her mother do in the past. It made me grateful for my parents, whom I think did their best job to teach me like that, too. That they had the time, and energy for that.

But, Tiarah is still young and she’ll grow up. I only hope she has a better life. I couldn’t bear to believe otherwise. I hope they all have better lives when they grow up, or by the time they grow up.

3. On a happier note, I enjoyed the “Touchy-Feely Game” (It’s a Matt thing) we played tonight. Thank you to all who tapped my shoulder. I’m so happy I inspire you, and surprise you, and make you laugh, and am able to teach you things. I have learned a lot from you all everyday and everyone inspires me, and makes me laugh. Also, thanks to everyone for letting me lead mafia. It was so much fun making up stories about everyone and seeing David’s sign!

Wow, that was long, my hand is starting to cramp. I hope it’s mostly legible,

-Zoe

Day 4/5 – Wednesday and Thursday 3/16/2016-3/17/2016

Allison Boni ‘18

Happy St. Patrick’s Day, everyone! Today was the last day of work at Steph’s house. I can’t believe it has already ended, it seemed so short. Over those four days, our group accomplished an incredible amount of work. Each person has worked so hard to make the house livable for the family. We have met a variety of people from all walks of life in Americus who have touched our hearts.

We began our day at the headquarters for the fuller center – Well, attempted to, because Matt never knows where we are going, yet we always let him lead in the toaster. After a few wrong turns, we got to meet Sharon and some other nice people. It’s always nice meeting people who devote their lives to service and helping other people. Hearing their stories and what they do motivates me even more. We learned about the bike adventure, during which you travel almost 75 miles a day to different locations throughout the country with stops to build houses. THAT IS INSANE! I can’t imagine doing that, so snaps to the amazing people who do.

Right when we got to the house, we went straight to work. Everyone broke into tea,s to start their project. Finishing the flooring was a very satisfying feeling for the whole group, because it was such a super-long process. Ellie and Elana did such a great job on the kitchen cabinets, but I have to hand it to Emily and Rebekah for dealing with the cockroaches. David helped too, but screamed in a high pitched voice constantly- hopefully he is starting to get rid of his fear of bugs. Kat, Brigitte, Zoe, and I put down so many tiles that we are basically professional scrappers – tiling and getting paint off the finished floor. Matt was busy doing nothing. Just kidding, Matt helped everyone and basically put the whole living room floor down with Rebekah.

At the end of the day, everyone, including the kids, Steph, and Nash signed a piece of wood and added our hand prints to it. It was nice to have a moment like that with everyone together.

Besides the work we have all done, there are other aspects of the trip that need to be addressed. Steph is a unique case for the fuller center because of the situation she is in with her children. She has 5 kids, one is disabled. She does have outside care from different agencies but I think we are all wondering if that will be enough to raise her kids in the best way. One moment that really sticks in my mind, and I’m sure for others as well, is when Thad called most of the group over in the living room to have Steph talk to us. Steph said that if the house wasn’t finished / up to a certain standard then she could lose custody of her kids. I’m not sure why Thad wanted to do that, because we were all working SO hard. In the car ride back to the church, my car talked about that for most of the way. Someone prompted the question “would it be better if the kids didn’t live with her in that house?” That made me think about the situation differently. At reflection, Matt told us that she passed the “test” and her kids can live with her. Our reaction said a lot about how we felt about that. Everyone was silent with a blank expression on their faces. I think we are all confused about it and don’t know what is best for Steph or her kids. We just have to hope that their lives only get better from here.

On a brighter note: we got to know Nash a little bit more. He really opened up to us at lunch, which shows us how much he respected us. It’s incredible how inspiring he is and how passionate he is about what he does. Everyone we met has been so welcoming, even after the experience with Penn State. That says a lot about the Americus community. I think we may have redeemed service trips here.

It is sad that our trip is coming to an end. Everyone has worked so well together and I’ve really enjoyed getting to know each person while working. I have soooooooo much work to do for Monday, but I don’t want to do it and miss out on hanging out with everyone. This trip has been wonderful and thank you Matt and David for allowing me to have this opportunity!!

* Allison