

Andrea Whiteman

Although it has almost been 23 years since my oldest sister Kelly Virginia Whiteman passed away, the impact that she has had on the life of my family is everlasting. I find that her life has affected my own in more ways than I ever would have thought possible. Two years ago I did my senior project on Tay-Sachs disease as well as put on a Fun Run to raise money to donate to NTSAD. During this project I raised over \$1,100 that I was able to donate towards other families who had been affected by this disease.

Conducting my senior project around Tay-Sachs disease was the first time that I really had an experience with how gratifying it felt to be able to give to an organization that was in need. I found the experience of donating this money and spreading awareness so incredibly satisfying, that I wanted to seek other ways in which I could help. It made me realize that Tay-Sachs is just one of so many diseases out there that are affecting the lives of families. Educating myself about Tay-Sachs and then making an effort to help really sparked an interest in me for helping others.

This past July I traveled to the Dominican Republic with a group of people from both my hometown and other young people from New Jersey. The name of our organization was Friends Beyond Borders, which seeks to spread awareness of social equality. The experience that I had helping people in the garbage dumps, playing with the kids in the orphanage, and visiting the run down schools was one that I will never forget. While there, something in me knew that this is what I was supposed to do: help others.

After being home for a month or so and contemplating over and over how I could make a difference, I found the website of one of the schools we visited in Cabarete called the Dream Project. The Dream Project takes volunteers from the United States to work in their school for a five week period during the summer. I could hardly believe it. I am studying English and Education at Oregon State University as well as doing a minor in Spanish. This opportunity had a little bit of everything I had been looking for. Not only would I be practicing my Spanish all day every day, I would be helping children who come from some of the worst backgrounds I have seen. I will be teaching children who want more than anything for someone to teach them.

The thing that I have found to be the greatest lesson over the years is that when something happens in life, it is extremely important to look at how I can make the best of the situation. My sister Kelly's death has taught me not only to be aware of just how many diseases are affecting families all over the world, but that there is something that can be done to help each and every one of them. I've learned that it doesn't matter how much a person can help or to what specific cause they are giving their time or money. What truly matters is taking this knowledge and spreading the awareness so that others can give back as well.