

My Time at Emmanuel

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Living in Korea and experiencing the kindness of its people has been something I will never forget in my lifetime. As I near the end of my 2 ½ years in this country, I look back on the times that will forever be embedded in my memory. My story starts in the fall of 2010 when I was invited by a friend to help out at a children's carnival at an orphanage in Gimcheon. I had wanted to get involved and had tried endlessly but to no avail at the orphanage in Andong. It seems that many foreigners in Korea like volunteering so they were full with volunteers. So I traveled from my home at the time, Andong, to Gimcheon for a full day of fun with the kids. We made paper flowers, did choco-pie walks, face painting and many other activities. Little did I know that I would fall in love with the staff and the children at Emmanuel. After spending time with the kids that day, they really made a big impression on me; unfortunately it was some time before I was able to return. The following summer I moved to Gumi which is much closer to Emmanuel. I got involved right away, visiting on the weekends to spend time with the children and babies. The volunteer coordinator as well as piano teacher, Kim Sujin, was beyond helpful and accommodating to me. This woman has a heart of gold and I have made a life long friend to which I am truly thankful. She spends her days helping with foreign volunteers, coordinating events, teaching piano and dance class. Therefore the kids at Emmanuel are extremely talented.



From the first day I started volunteering at Emmanuel I fell in love with a baby boy named Kim Ki-Hyun. I walked into the nursery and saw big brown eyes, a huge toothless grin and of course his famous chubby cheeks. When I first met him, he was 6months old. I have seen him grow up over the last year and a half. Sadly, he has some physical disabilities and he has trouble walking. I have confidence that



someday he will get stronger and walk on his own. Here is a photo of the first day we met. I love seeing the joy in the babies face when I visit them. Their warm smiles and laughter can heal any wound. It is very therapeutic being with them. As soon as I walk into the baby room all the babies try to come and sit on my lap. Hyun-woo always wants my attention and gets jealous when I hold the other children. I usually can't hold anyone but him when I am there. Lynn has a quirky little personality and is always smiling. All the children are unique in their own way and I can only hope that their futures are bright and they grow into wonderful human beings.



Emmanuel has about 120 children from new born too University and they live together in groups of around 10-12 in different 2-3 room houses. They each have a house mom and house dad which take amazing care of them. What made me fall in love with Emmanuel was their kindness, and acceptance of me. For them, everything is possible, and they always have a light in their eyes. What started with visiting on the weekends, turned into a full week home stay program which I attended in February of 2012. Seven other volunteers and I stayed for 1 week and taught English classes to the staff and children, played games, ate meals together, and did a talent show contest. This was by far my best memory of Korea. I grew extremely close to the children in this time. Now every time I visit I hear them shout, "Savannah Teacher!!" when I walk onto the property. It truly warms my heart.



For the past few months I started tutoring on Thursday evenings as well as visiting on the weekends. I teach English to four elementary school girls, SooBin, Sinyoung, SeungHyun, and BaDa. After teaching all day at my High School in Gumi I am usually a little tired once I arrive in Gimcheon, but as soon as I see the girls I am immediately reenergized. Their lightheartedness and joy always rub off on me. We play English games, study, and sometimes just go out and get ice cream together. They are like my little sisters in Korea. I have also grown quite close with one of the house moms Sunghee. I usually try to meet up with her on the weekends or before my class on Thursdays to chat. She is such a dedicated house mom to a group of boys that live in Hope house and is so loving to the kids. She is also a mother to her own son and extremely busy. So even though I can't see her as often as I like, I really value our conversations and helping her practice English.



Another time a few other volunteers and I decided to take some of the boys to a Samsung Baseball game in Daegu. So we all loaded the train and set out for Daegu. We enjoyed lunch together and then went to the game. The boys and the volunteers had a great time and it was nice being able to do something special for them. They also love going to Bangbang (trampoline) which is a good place for the kids to expend some of their energy. Doing activities like this with the kids is very rewarding because I can see the happiness on their face. It is nice for them to get out and about to spend one on one time with the volunteers.



I never realized how rewarding volunteering would be. The friendships I have formed with the children at Emmanuel will stay with me. I will continue to give to Emmanuel when living in America by monthly monetary sponsorship for Kim Ki-Hyun. I always knew I was meant to volunteer, and that having a high pay career was never that important to me. But the memories, the hope, and what I have learned from the children at Emmanuel have touched me so deeply and helped me to realize that I want to continue giving. I believe that my life's motivation cannot come from money, but making a difference in another persons life. Therefore this experience has inspired me to continue helping out once I move back to America. My future plans include volunteering at the local animal shelter and helping out in a community program called Big Brothers/Big Sisters.



As I look toward the future, I will continue to cherish the memories I have formed here in Korea and hope that one day I will return to Emmanuel to see the children again. I strongly urge people, no matter where you are from, to get involved in your local community. Not only can you help brighten someone's day, you can make new friends and wonderful memories in the process.