

As a professed lover of all things history, I always try to bring my passion of the subject to my students. One day before we were starting a new unit on Ancient Rome, I said to the class that “this is going to be a really exciting unit and is probably my favorite period in history.” They all blankly stared back, not sharing the same sense of excitement, and my resident problem child sitting in the first row said in a very dry tone, “Mr. Harty, you say that at the beginning of every unit.” Needless to say, this took the wind right out of my sails and I struggled to reassure the students that this truly was better than anything we had studied before.

I tell this story because to me it is so indicative of my past two years teaching. It highlights the challenge of education – motivating individuals. The one thought that has remained with me since the very beginning has been the acknowledgement that what I am doing impacts lives. Whether we like it or not, what we do will impact the lives of our students. The question we have to ask is, “what kind of impact do we want that to be?” Walking into teach a classroom of often times disinterested students is a challenge in and of itself. To do it consistently with enthusiasm day in and day out takes a sense of strength and resiliency unknown in many professions.

Where did I find that strength and resiliency? The chance every day to come home to a community of like-minded individuals was a saving grace for me. After a difficult day of dealing with upset parents or working late on WASC, having 8 other people who instantly could identify with the struggles you are going through is an amazing and powerful thing.

In high school a lot, and college to a lesser degree, distractions and corrupting influences can run rampant. However, the chance over the past two years to surround myself with so many selfless, faithful people has been one of the most reassuring testaments of the human spirit. And I can confidently say that my interaction with other PLACers has made me a better person.

I still remember the day I found out about PLACE Corps – it was at an on-campus recruiting fair. I said then, much like I do today, “what an amazing opportunity.” Living arrangements, a master’s degree, and I’m getting paid to talk about something I love. The opportunities have been abundant in PLACE and the challenges just as constant. I have improved in simple things, like personal organization, to the difficult tasks such as articulating myself under the scrutiny of

a parent. Through it all, I have been able to glean an array of tools that will help me in so many facets of life.

I take so much for granted in this program. It always seems that it is towards the end of things that we sit back and realize how good we really had it. So, the road is difficult and it is probably not for the timid or weak, but it is a road that is extraordinarily rewarding. In the novel the *Brothers Karamazov*, author Fyodor Dostoevsky writes, “and whether you are absorbed in the most important pursuits, reaching out for the highest honors, or struck down by the cruelest of griefs, always remember how good it felt when we were all here together, united by a good and decent feeling, which made us, for a time...better people, probably, than we would otherwise have been.”

Friends made, lessons learned, experiences gained - I am forever changed because of my PLACE corps experience.