

Hello, my name is Lizzie Johnson. I am a first-year PLACer in Cohort 12, and I graduated from Elon University. I am currently teaching Kindergarten at San Gabriel Mission Elementary School and I live in the St. Raymond's Community.

Welcome Principals. Welcome Carla Cotton, from the Archdiocese of Los Angeles.

PLACE Corps has changed my life. One year ago I was here in University Hall wondering what I had gotten myself into. I was in the middle of an intensive orientation weekend, jet-lagged from having flown from North Carolina, and still unsure if I would even have a PLACEMENT come the summer. Despite many reassurances that I would get a PLACEMENT and that there would be the perfect job for me, I was hesitant to become too attached to the people and the program. But PLACE Corps had a different idea, the weekend was packed with information, paperwork, and large group gatherings, and I was soon imagining my life in PLACE Corps. Upon flying back to North Carolina I couldn't imagine doing anything other than PLACE Corps after graduation.

From that point forward, every time my phone rang, I looked at the screen with nervous anticipation that the caller ID would say "Diana Murphy." I had to wait a few more weeks for that call. Finally the call came, I answered, and Diana informed me that I had a PLACEMENT, I would be teaching Kindergarten or 1<sup>st</sup> grade at..... I started crying and didn't even hear her finish the sentence. It was a quick, but life-changing phone call, I was going to be moving to Los Angeles, I was going to be a teacher. I immediately called my mom and she asked, "What school?"... but I couldn't tell her, I hadn't heard! I was just so happy to have a PLACEMENT in lower elementary that I would've been happy being placed in Timbucktoo. A few weeks later I received my first phone call from Sister Sharon, finally learning the name of the school, and all of my anticipation and worry was put to rest. Little did I know that all of the waiting would be worth it, because I had received the PERFECT PLACEMENT.

Then came graduation, moving home to Seattle for a few weeks, packing the car and driving 18 hours south, to Los Angeles. Day 2, after 18 hours, doesn't that sound like the perfect time to meet your principal for the first time? We pulled up to the school, my small sedan packed to the brim, and met Sister Sharon. I saw the school, the classrooms, and was so overwhelmed with emotion. I was excited, nervous, anxious, and terrified all at the same time. It became real; I was really about to embark on this crazy, wonderful journey known as PLACE Corps.

Later that same day I moved into LMU apartments; I would be living with three other women in the PLACE Corps. Though we hadn't spoken much before moving in together, we all had one thing in common: we were all in the PLACE Corps and had no clue what the summer would hold. The summer was a blur of education

classes, technology sessions, program time, evening activities, mass, spirituality nights, retreat, and large-group activities. We quickly became a true cohort, a group of friends, all on this journey together. The summer is designed to be busy to prepare us for the jam-packed schedule we will have once we are in the classroom, and it certainly succeeds in keeping us busy. All of a sudden, PLACE Corps became my life.

Fast-forward to August 6<sup>th</sup>, my first official day at San Gabriel Mission Elementary School. I was blessed to be walking into the first faculty meeting of the year with a roommate, and now a very close friend, MaryElizabeth Murphy. I quietly took my seat, and looked around the table. These faces would soon become more than simply co-workers, they have become friends and mentors. It became very real, spending that week cleaning, organizing, and setting-up my classroom. MY classroom. Then it was the first day of school. I had 15 students and 1 crier that first day. I still have 15 students, but since that day, even though there have been more tears and accidents, there has also been a lot of laughing and learning. As I think back to that first day of school, I think of how much my students and I have grown. We have been in this journey together and I know that this class will always hold a special place in my heart. This year has been overwhelming at times, but I couldn't have asked for a better support system.

The San Gabriel community welcomed me with open arms. This is the first year that San Gabriel Mission Elementary School has had PLACers, yet it is as if the school has had PLACers for years. We were welcomed, supported, shown the ropes, and given encouragement when we needed it the most. The collaboration and support from the teachers and Sister Sharon is incredible. I have always been encouraged to ask questions or to ask for help; the teachers are more than willing to share their ideas and their experiences with me. Without a doubt, my PLACement is a huge part of my happiness and success. When I walk into school each morning, I feel supported. My mentor teacher has been a rock for me throughout this process. Her classroom is next to mine, and you can often find us chatting, catching up, and sharing ideas or resources during recess; she is not only my mentor but she has also become a friend and a confidant. During difficult days, I know that I have many people behind me, supporting me and cheering me on, and that is what helps me through. It is hard to believe that I am almost done with my first year of teaching. I cannot imagine being PLACed anywhere but San Gabriel Mission Elementary, and I am looking forward to continuing this journey there.

However, this journey is so much more than your professional life, the PLACE community becomes your family. Each day after work, you drive home to a convent, of all places. One of the most difficult questions to answer is "Why do you and Ms. Murphy carpool?" ... Oh, because we live in a convent together.... well, that's not exactly the answer I can give, although it is the truth. Talking about why we live

together brings up the PLACE Corps, and before I know it, my answer to a simple question has become a long-winded summary of my life. My community members are my family. We have become so close in such a short period of time that it is hard to think about saying goodbye to the C11's who will be graduating. The ladies of St. Ray's have been with me during my ups and downs; there is always of chorus of "How was your day?", "How does this lesson sound?" and the ever present, "How can I help you?" These ladies are an incredible support system. My placements at San Gabriel and St. Ray's have been the perfect combination, I am happy to go school each day and I look forward to being in my community each night.

When I sat down to write this speech I was not sure exactly what I wanted to say. Although I am busy with classwork, lesson plans, TPAs, and grades, I know that I am happy. I am happy to be exactly where I am, right now. I can't imagine being anywhere else. Throughout this journey, I have often told myself and others that everything happens for a reason. When I first told friends and family that I was moving to Los Angeles, to be a teacher, many people asked how I stumbled upon that path. Teaching was nowhere related to my studies of International Studies and Political Science. All I could tell them was that I was being called to serve others as a teacher. I do not know where this journey will ultimately take me, but I know that, right now, I am doing what I am supposed to be doing. PLACE Corps has given me the tools and support I needed to take that leap of faith and to follow my calling. Through all of this, without a doubt, I know that I am in the right PLACE.

Thank you.