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I recall the winter months of my senior year as I agonized over what would come of my future after graduation. I considered it to be significant that I could create goals and begin to strive to achieve them. However, there was a problem. My goals were still unclear. I found myself needing to reflect on my aspirations and capabilities. Eventually, I found myself at the door of Fr. Schell, the director of the Eight Day Retreat. In January I participated in what I consider to be one of my most significant experiences at John Carroll, eight days of silent reflection. I was able to remove myself from the confusion of everyday college life to look into my heart and recognize that one of my goals was to find continual growth through service. After the Eight Day, I applied to the Jesuit Volunteers International. A few months later, I was offered a position as a teacher on the island of Pohnpei in the Pacific Ocean. In August I was on my way to Micronesia!

Growth does not necessarily come easily especially during one's first few months in a foreign place where the prayers and support of family and friends become distant and meaningful spiritual reflection is, at times, hard to come by. Early in my experience I found dealing with a new culture, the challenges of teaching, and loneliness from missing my friends and family very frustrating. However, as in any place that becomes home, these feelings eventually faded. Community living, cold showers, and hard earned rewards of teaching, joyful frustrating moments with students, canoeing in the lagoon, struggling to relate with others in a foreign and multicultural context, being sick fairly regularly, the beautiful flowers and fresh coconuts, glasses of cold water after sunrise runs – these are just a few of the joys and challenges that filled my daily life. These experiences helped me cultivate personal growth, a personal growth that I reflected on near the end of my time:

...I know that ultimately this experience of two years is just the beginning of a much greater journey. I thank God and feel extremely blessed for all that I have experienced. I know that as others have shown me patience, compassion, and love that I too have grown in those ways. I have come to understand my own spirituality at greater lengths and have fallen in love with another part of God's creation, the people of Micronesia. Although the future is unclear, I will trust in God to know the possibilities are endless. I cannot take back my family, friends, or students to Cleveland. But, I will take back the importance of how to accompany others in their challenges of personal growth, my renewed sense of spirituality, the value of community living, and the possibilities and values of simple living. I hope to internalize these values as an inherent part of who I am, and to continue to build upon this experience so that this is not the end of something great, rather the beginning...

I have been home now for over a year, and my life has resumed. Yet, the JVI slogan “ruined for life” has been realized. I can no longer go shopping, drive a car, shower, engage in conversations, listen to the news or other daily activities in the same manner that I did before my experience. My outlook on life is more appreciative in some ways and in others more critical. I am trying to live out the values that became such an inherent part of JVI life as I teach and live in Cleveland. The memory of Micronesia has begun to fade, but the impact it has had on my life has not. I am grateful.