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I remember quite a few times during my childhood when my brother, sister and I would run into the house, leaving the door open behind us. More than once we heard that all too familiar question escape our parents' lips, "Were you born in a barn?" In fact, none of us had been born in a barn, and even if we had been, what did that have to do with anything? ...

Despite these gentle reminders to shut the door, our house was always open...no need to even knock. It was the place to be – plenty of macaroni and cheese, swimming for hours, popsicles galore, not having to take your shoes off at the front door. Even when the kids in the neighborhood "ran away from home", they ran to our house; there was always room for one more.

Doors have become a symbol of hospitality and, here in the Philippines, they are always open. I have been privileged enough to visit a few homes during my short time here. Most of our families live in a place called Hilltop. Fittingly named, it is through the market and at the very top of the hill. The outside structure is that of any apartment building in any given city. But the inside, the inside is an unimaginable world of long days and dark nights.

The cement stairs are steep and thin; it is more like climbing a ladder than ascending a staircase. An eerie silence fills the air despite the distant cries of children. The hallways are like dark mazes that are covered with water from an unknown origin. The smell is stale and musty like a cave. Delicate rays of light manage to tear through some of the darkness from each open doorway. The source – a single light bulb hanging from the ceiling, no doubt made brighter by the hidden light that radiates from the people who inhabit the space.

Ann, my sole American companion, and I journeyed to Hilltop last week; one of the children in our program was running a high fever for days and we wanted to check on her condition. After we climbed to the third floor and felt our way down the damp, dark hallways, we finally found who we were searching for. In a space no bigger than 8'x12', this family of nine generously left the door open for two more. The woman is a high school graduate; her husband is a college graduate, and here they are, living in this dark, crowded space no larger than my bedroom with seven children. Because of a poor economy and severely limited employment, education has not been enough to save this family from the impoverished condition in which they find themselves. Selling sunglasses in the market provides them with a monthly income of \$60. Twenty-two of those dollars are used to pay rent.

Their generous hospitality began at the door and continued throughout our stay. They seemed to offer us everything they had – their only chairs, food, and drink – and even apologizing for not having more to offer us. However, it was not simply hospitality because of the tangible things they shared with us; it was our shared conversation, our shared concerns, our shared laughter, and it was the complete sharing of our lives with each other; we were no longer host and guest, but brother and sister.

As we left, I had tears in my eyes, not only because of the abject poverty I witnessed, but because I realized that I had been closer to God than ever before. God was gazing at me through their eyes, touching me with their hands, and inviting me in through their open door.