

“Hoy vamos a una catarata.” My group leader Marc proceeded to give us the agenda for the rest of the day. Little did I know that the phrase ‘Today we are going to a waterfall’ would come to mean as much as does to me. When I embarked on a month long trip through a student travel agency, Walking Tree Travel, I thought that it would just be a cool way to spend my summer speaking Spanish and doing service. However what I gained from that experience was much more than that and it all began with a waterfall. But not just any waterfall, a waterfall in Costa Rica. I assumed this experience would be one that I looked back on with awe. We began the day at an ecological resort and ate breakfast and started our journey to Nicayca, the waterfall. Our driver Richard stopped the bus and we disembarked ready to see this surely magnificent sight. The journey I thought would take five minutes, perhaps ten at a maximum. But on we went, and the further I fell behind. This was not just a walk, this was a hike.

The hike to Nicayca is the most challenging event I have encountered in seventeen years of life. I was the last person in my group to reach the waterfall; it was hot and humid, I carried what felt like a dumbbell in my backpack and I sweat through my shirt. The hike there was long and exhausting, it was also the most rewarding; all the ideas and expectations about my Costa Rican waterfall were met, playing in the water, splashing around with my new friends that came from all over the United States; standing behind a waterfall, it was extraordinary. I would later call my Mom exclaiming to her, “Mom it was the hardest thing I have ever done in my life!”

But why has this touched me enough to write about it for my significant experience? Because it made me learn a lesson; that often in life the most rewarding things are the things that are the most challenging to get, the ones to work the hardest for. If I had not fought to get to the waterfall, and had, instead the leisurely walk I was expecting, I doubt I would have been as impressed as I was. It was the sweat and the “Oh I cannot do this- Oh yes you can Sarah,” thoughts that made the experience so profound.

Continuing to grow and develop once I have graduated will be the new Nicayca. Not just college but life in general. Nicayca taught me that you have to want it, it being the light at the end of the tunnel; it gave me a new perspective on adversity. Adversity doesn’t define you, it shapes you. From the hike I learned that it doesn’t matter how long it takes you to get somewhere, it’s the fact that you get there and you don’t stop and give up halfway through. So moving forward in my life, I will view any challenges the same as Nicayca tough, but I can do it.