

## Mac McReynolds - Washington DC Sermon

There were two people who influenced me more than any others during my experiences down in DC. The first was an old African-American woman I saw during my work at Capital Area Food Bank. We were working to fill bags with food to distribute to those in need, whether they were the sick, elderly, or homeless. The bags were being stuffed way beyond their capacity, so much so that we needed to triple bag them to ensure that they would not break. Since they were so overfilled they were nearly impossible to tie closed after we were finished. As I was struggling to tie a particularly large one, I barely took notice of her. The first thing that brought her to my attention was that she tied her bags in about 4 seconds versus my 4 minutes. That was impressive for anyone, let alone someone of her stature. I'm guessing she tipped the scales at around 90 pounds, and that's being generous. She was so skinny, no a better word is emaciated, that every time a can was dropped into her bag, her arms shook with strain and dropped noticeably. Her hair was very curly, with her light grey curls falling low on her forehead. She looked to be in her late seventies easily, and to be honest, it would not have been a surprise to see her being one of the recipients of the food instead of the providers. Apparently nobody had told her this though, because she was tottering around, filling and tying bags just as fast as or faster than anyone else in the room. However, the most distinguishing feature about this woman was her face. There was no vacant expression, no benign smile in her wrinkled eyes. Instead, her jaw was set and her eyes were full of determination. She was on a mission from God to help, and that is what she was going to do, whether you liked it or not. If she was able to help, then she was going to, no question about it. This thought process was really what kept me going through the rest of the week. The repetition of bagging hundreds of lunches was not the most entertaining job in the world, but every time I started to slack off, this woman came into my mind and I worked again with a renewed vigor. She set an example that we all should try to follow, helping in any way we can, as much as we can. Whether that is donating money, food, or even just your time, it all helps those in need.

The second person who influenced me more than anyone else was a man I met on the last night of the trip. We had all finished with our cleanup duties, so those who wanted to took a trip up to the CVS in Dupont Circle to buy snacks and, on the off chance that there was a homeless person there, talk with him or her, and give him some of our remaining money. I had already given away my money, so I needed twenty minutes of persuasion from my brother to want to go. And, sure enough, there was a homeless person standing at the door of the CVS. He would hold the door open for people, compliment some aspect of their clothing, and ask for change. And more often than not, be ignored completely. Therefore, my smile and simple response of "Hey, how's it going?" took him completely off guard. His face broke into a smile and he compared me to Macaulay Culkin, who I found out later was the kid in the Home Alone movies, though I was oblivious at the time. When I asked if he needed anything from CVS, he looked shocked that anyone was taking that much notice to him, and after a moment of hesitation, responded, "Maybe some Arizona?" as in the iced tea. Inside CVS, two of my companions and I pooled our money to buy him three 23 and a half ounce cans of

Arizona iced tea. When we returned outside and gave them to him, his eyes bugged out farther than you would believe. His many “thank you’s” and “God bless you’s” were not necessary at all; his expression had made us be the true recipients. As the first kids out of the CVS, we stayed and talked with him about his situation and our reason for being down in DC. His name was Steven, and his ambition was not to get off the street or get rich, it was to become the pastor of his own church. He had also received coffee and sugar from Barrack and Michelle Obama just the day before. When he took out the sugar to prove it to us, he opened his wallet and rummaged through all the little mementoes of previous experiences. There was no money in the wallet, absolutely none, yes because he had none, but also because money was not what he treasured above all else. During this time the rest of the group had trickled out of the CVS and were now huddled around Steven. When everyone was there, our chaperone Ralph Bernebei told him we had to get back and Steven asked just one more favor before we left. He asked us to pray with him. We bowed our heads and he quoted one of the psalms, I’m not sure which one. Towards the end, a man carrying a case of water came out of the CVS, and either did not notice what we were doing or did not care, so he interrupted Steven and rudely told him to get out of the way since he was blocking the sidewalk. Steven shuffled sideways, allowing the man by, and finished his prayer. He then smiled at the man who had just been so rude to him, and joked about the large case of water he was carrying. Steven then bid us on our way, just telling us to keep doing what we were doing and thanking us for the iced tea, and above all, for listening to him. The transformation of Steven is what has stayed with me the most from our trip. The shock in his eyes when we stopped to talk, and the smile that constantly played around his lips under the scraggly goatee. He left me with a new optimism about doing God’s work. This was the first time I had ever seen someone so happy and grateful for a simple act of kindness. Here in Wilton, having iced tea and people to talk to is taken for granted. It is only when you have lost these things, like Steven has, that they really matter to a person. So I leave you with one request: that you do what you can to help. The gratitude of the person in need is worth every penny or second you give away.

### Alex Yanoff

Hi, my name is Alex Yanoff. This was my first year on the trip. This is my word portrait:

I bumped into you on the way back home. The reflectors vest you wore like a neon ribbon of prestige. You had newspapers tucked in the crease of your elbow. You hollered, “only one fifty!” at the citizens walking by in a rat race to their destination. Your cheeks drooped like stretched out gum, and your hair pushed out underneath your shredded hat like wires. You had a tall stature that was harassed by your hunch back, arched like a rainbow. Your personality flowed around you in an aura that couldn’t be overlooked, warm and charismatic. “Hello there,” you say in greeting. At first, I watched at how the city-goers strode by, either being consumed by a phone or throwing a frightened, momentary glance our way. I didn’t understand the expression on their faces at first, but when I brought my eyes back to you it finally registered. They we’re shocked as to why we would stop, and waste our time conversing with you, a homeless man. “I’m

L. Moro.” You state. I noticed your sloped smile, then, one side of your mouth was pinched as the other rose up like a ski slope. The smack of your lips in between words made choppy sentences, each word was a lone syllable and each break in words strung them together. “See that man over there? He’s got a cup. I ain’t got no cup; I ain’t shaking for no money. I believe that homelessness is a state of mind,” you begin saying. “If you’ve got your pride, your dignity, and your respect, you ain’t homeless.” You finished defiantly. This struck me, like an anvil of wisdom. I looked back at the passerbiers then, and instead of being befuddled by their reactions, I thought of the opportunity they let slip through their hands with a handful of strides and being occupied by something non-essential. They had the chance; just as we did to speak to you, to listen for a couple of minutes, to your piece of mind. I took those words then, and wondered if those people who didn’t pause to have a simple conversation, had heard what you had to say, what would they think? Would it change THEIR state of mind? I find it ironic, how the people we label with having the least in life, like you, actually have the most. The experience, the knowledge, pours out of them like a leaky sink faucet, never ending. When I left on the mission trip, I thought I’d be giving to people like you, helping. But never had I imagined that in return you’d give me something back. Something even more, L. Moro, you taught me that no matter the situation, your state of mind, your determination and fight, will pull you out of any tough circumstance. When we turned to leave, you called after us “love you all!” And, I believe you do. Because our few minute conversation was a rarity to you. I hope your fight, is a never put out, and that you continue to share your unparallel wisdom with people like me, and love abundantly. I wish you the best L.Moro, and thank you, for teaching me something that I will never forget. Never shake that cup. Thank you.

## Kailey Fellows

### Christy

Christy is one of the kids we met in Community of Hope.

The first thing I noticed about Christy was how mature she looked. At first I thought she was maybe 9 or 10 which surprised me when I found out she was actually 7. I think her eyes are what made her look more mature than she really was. They changed throughout our time together. When we talked about her many siblings they looked serious, when she was beating Alex and Adam single handedly in connect four her eyes were intense and focused, and when she was repeating French phrases from Mary Kate and Ashley Olsen’s Passport to Paris her eyes showed she was confident in the knowledge she had just received. Her hair was dark and was pulled back into cornrows. Her skin was dark too. But the one thing about Christy that struck me the most was her smile. She smiled a lot particularly when she was telling us about the little fake puppy tattoo on her right cheek and when she did the tops of her cheeks swelled up revealing perfect white teeth.