



Honduras

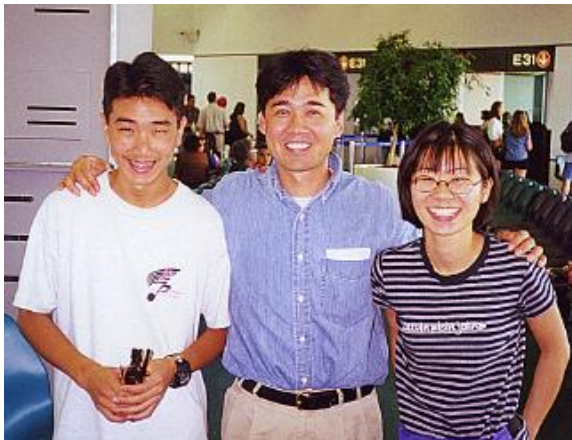
July 17-27, 1998



Meet our team



Boston team: Back row - Sonia Choe, Sylvia Sid (helped us prepare but didn't actually go), Jen Choi, Jean Kim, Janet Lee, Amy Kim, Min Kim, Julie Park, and Heather Park. Front row - Matt Blum, Andy Noh, James Bahk, Joseph Lee, and Young Jun Son.



Ohio team: Elliot Kim, David Han, and Kay Hutton.

Country of Honduras



Honduras map

Preparation... March - July

Going on missions is an adventure. Our trip would especially be a great one considering all the things we planned on doing. Our mission had two main objectives. The first was to start a Vacation Bible School program for the children there, and the other was to provide a free dental clinic to the needy people. The VBS would include praise and body worship (in Spanish, of course), drama, puppet shows, a sermon, and finally activities for the kids. The clinic provided treatment to whoever needed it. The most needed operation was to have teeth pulled, and that operation was the main focus of our clinic.

Preparing for such an endeavor was not easy. We spent many hours, days, even weeks together preparing for the work we planned on doing. We worked on memorizing the words to all the Spanish songs and the body worship, by watching the tape a million times. We worked on the skits many times, even performed them at church before we left. Finally we even practiced how we would run the activities with some of the team posing as "kids!".

Going on missions not only takes a lot of preparation, it takes money as well! For the 13 of us from St. John's, we needed about \$17,000 to go. To raise our funds we held a bike-a-thon where around 25 people went up to Cape Cod for the day to bike about 30 miles. The other major fund-raiser was a Kim-Bap (like Korean sushi) rolling party where the team woke up at 4:00 in the morning so we could finish the 300 or so rolls that had to be made by 9:00!



The bike-a-thon at Cape Cod.

We went to meetings about once a week in the beginning, and then nearly every day near the end. We performed various team-building exercises, such as communicating without speaking, building something as a team without being allowed to talk, and solving other various problems. God humbled me in many ways by showing me how much more I need to depend on Him. Near the end, we had prepared much for the trip, but we still felt so inadequate. We had to leave the rest to God...how could he show His supernatural power if we could do everything ourselves?

David Han once said that all the preparation was the actual work of the mission trip and going on the trip was a celebration! This turned out to be very true for us.

The adventure begins... July 17

Last night, I barely got an hour or two of sleep. We had much last-minute preparation to do and we were all so anxious about leaving! The time had finally come for us, after months of preparation. Most of the work was actually done! From now on it would actually feel more like a vacation! It felt in a way unreal that I would actually be in a foreign country in just a few hours!

We left around 4:30 in the morning to catch our 6 am flight to San Pedro Sula, connecting through Miami. I was so tired but yet excited for our journey was already underway. It wasn't until we were on the Airbus 300 headed for Miami that it hit me what we were really doing...we were going to Honduras! I never really processed the fact we would be thousands of miles away from home serving people in an environment that I had only read about and seen on TV...I couldn't believe it was really happening!

After a 1-hour layover in Miami, we were in a 727 bound for San Pedro Sula, the industrial capital of Honduras (Tegucigalpa is the national capital). When we reached the border of Honduras, it was unlike anything I had ever seen. The landscape consisted of mountains thousands of feet tall, dominated by palm trees, banana plants, and coconut trees.

We arrived at the mission center around two in the afternoon after a treacherous 2-hour drive through the mountains. The place was a cinder-block shell just recently completed, with a large room for the VBS and smaller rooms for us to stay in and run the dental clinic. Down a little way was the dining hall which would be usable in 2 days (they were just finishing the roof and starting the floor).



The missions center.

Right after noon with the sun directly overhead, it was about 85 degrees with 100 percent humidity...typical Honduran weather. After cleaning up the missions center to get it ready for VBS, we decided to take a look around a little. The first thing we noticed was a group of about ten children kicking around a ball...soccer was the national sport and the kids seemed to be born knowing how to play...and play well! The kids were so curious about us...a bunch of Asians coming from thousands of miles away. They loved trying to communicate with us, and we did the best we could to communicate back...bits of broken Spanish mixing in English and some charades!

It started getting dark early, around 6:30. There was no daylight savings time in Honduras and we were at the eastern edge of the time zone, so it felt like the days were 2 hours shorter in Honduras!

For our first dinner to Honduras we rode in the back of a pickup for what seemed to be an hour with dust blowing in our faces. We arrived in the city, San Pedro Sula, fully expecting to see real Honduran cuisine, when McDonald's, Burger King, and Wendy's signs flashed all around! I was disappointed to be eating American food at Pizza Hut...I don't really even like Pizza Hut's greasy food anyway! I was relieved however to see the Ohio team meet up with us there safely.



Andy, Jen, Heather, and Matt with some of the children.

Second day - July 18

I think few of us got much sleep last night either. With the combination of the new environment, the symphony of bugs, roosters and bullfrogs outside chirping with the sunrise at 4:30, sleep was almost out of the picture for us. After a quick breakfast of bananas and cereal with warm milk, we got started on some of the electrical work for the center. There was no source of electricity so a couple of us went to the city and bought a generator.

For lunch we had our first taste of real Honduran food...tortillas with beans, rice, and chicken. Hondurans eat most of their food inside tortillas by wrapping all the ingredients inside and eating them like a burrito. We experienced an interesting blend of Asian culture, in the way we ate the Honduran food with chopsticks! Typically, Hondurans don't use any utensils when eating, but eating their food with chopsticks was like eating sushi with a fork! Their food was actually pretty good considering the conditions.

We busied ourselves the rest of the day preparing the place for VBS and the dental clinic. We mopped the floors, finished the electrical work, and set up the puppet stage. In order to put up one of the lights, Andy stood on the top of a rickety old ladder leaned precariously against the ceiling beams, and since it wasn't quite long enough, it was sitting on a stack of cinder blocks. We all had to hold the ladder to make sure it wouldn't fall over! The team-building exercises proved to be useful after all!

After dinner, we hung out in front of the center, watching the surrealistic lightning come from over the mountains. We started playing stupid human tricks...breaking thumbs, performing finger circuses, and watching Andy fall for a trick! Jean was supposedly teaching him how it was important to be able to understand a foreign language while on missions. She repeated an example for Andy to repeat to himself: "wah-tagik-ayam." Andy sat there repeating a so-called phrase in a foreign language, "wah-tagik-ayam" at least 20-30 times when he realized long after everyone else did, that he was saying "what a geek I am!"

Sunday, July 19

I was slowly used to getting little sleep at night, with the snoring all around me and the constant chirp of roosters, crickets, and birds early in the morning. We saw some of the more interesting life forms in Honduras, especially when they decided to visit our center! After breakfast, we were greeted by a 3-inch black fuzzy caterpillar, a 4-inch moth, and a tarantula. In addition, a large bullfrog attacked Young Jun while he was going to the bathroom!



One of our many visitors...

After the sisters got over the trauma of seeing some of the creepy crawly creatures, we got ready to go to the service at the Korean church in San Pedro Sula. This church was the only Korean church in Honduras. The bus was supposed to pick us up at 9:00 but Honduran time was apparently much worse than Korean time...the bus didn't show up until after 10:00! The service started at 10 and we were supposed to perform one of our songs during the service!

We arrived halfway through the service after a long bumpy bus ride around 10:45. The service was a traditional Korean one, with the bulletin offering some Spanish translations. Missionary Park, the pastor, was the one who helped us at the mission center as well. The people were very generous at the church. They fed us Bi-Bim-Bap (rice mixed with pork and vegetables) and Kim-Chee until we couldn't eat any more and later they gave us towels!

The church was probably the most beautiful building in town...gardens all around, A/C, and excellent food!



The Korean church in San Pedro Sula.

We rode home in a pickup truck with one of the pastors in the back... this was very common in Honduras! Last night, the generator broke and we had to bring it in for repairs. We also picked up some water and ice for the team, a much desired blessing.

That afternoon, the team split up to go into the surrounding villages to post flyers announcing the VBS, dental clinic and revival at the end of the week. We shared about our Jardín de Niños Hosana (Garden of Children, Hosanna) and how our Clínica Médica was "por gratis" (for free). The people were amazed.

We went along the main street, next to the mud houses with thatch roofs, dodging the stray pigs, dogs, and chickens in the street. The children often wandered alone in the streets with the animals while their parents were at work. Andy had the greatest time shamelessly yelling to the kids in his broken Spanish inviting them to the VBS!



On hill overlooking neighboring mountain village.

For dinner, Missionary Park and a couple others took us to Ki-Chan Korean restaurant, a small family-owned place in the city. We ate Kal-Bi (Korean beef) until we couldn't eat any more and then they gave us noodles and more rice!

VBS and dental clinic begin - Monday July 20

After breakfast, we got to work getting the dental clinic ready to start at 9:00. We got some tables ready for the patients as well as the antibiotics and dental equipment. The patients were coming right at 9:00, eager to be treated. Many people needed treatment so bad that the best operation was to remove some teeth completely. This in fact was exactly what our clinic did...it was the most needed treatment. Joseph, David, Elliot, Kay, and Min got to work immediately.

Right before lunch, we ran through a last quick practice of all the elements of VBS...the songs and body worship, drama, and the puppet show. Lunch was our first typical Honduran meal in a while, tortillas with ingredients to put inside. We had cereal for breakfast and Korean food the day before!

Long before 1:00 when VBS was supposed to start, a crowd of 20-30 children were lined up by the front door, eagerly waiting for VBS to begin. We had gotten the generator replaced, so we had lights and fans for VBS! Another unexpected blessing came around when a truckload of tables and chairs arrived from the Korean church.

When 1:00 rolled around, we got to work immediately making nametags, trying to understand their names! "Repite, por favor" and "No comprendo muy bien" became useful phrases for us! Andy Noh (Andrés) rounded up the kids and warned the kids, "Yo hablar poco poco poco Español" (I to speak little little little Spanish)! The kids caught on immediately, however, to what Andy was trying to communicate. We had to really practice using our Spanish names now (some took a little getting used to...Jen translated into María!)

We started with some praise and body worship (body motions typically accompany worship in Latin America), singing songs including "Nuestro Padre Abraham" and "Pon Tus Manos" ("Our Father Abraham" and "Put Your Hands"). The kids loved getting their whole body into the song, trying to imitate our motions!

Right after worship, we started the drama, a pantomime called "Enlarging Heart" demonstrating how God wants us

to share love with others. Next followed Andy's sermon, spoken through a translator, and finally came the puppet show. The kids really loved it! I could hear them laughing from behind the curtain!



Puppet show during VBS.

After the puppet show was crafts and activities. The kids really loved this part as well...making little books, pens with fish, paper bag puppets, and puzzles. At the end, most of the children went outside to play fútbol...they live it; they breathe it; it is an instinct! A few of the younger kids stayed inside to color though.

I got to miss the kids already after the first day. They shook hands with me saying ¡Hasta mañana! eager to come back tomorrow! The kids were very well behaved, much better than spoiled American kids. These kids had very little material wealth. They were happy with what they needed, whereas Americans are never happy even if they have all they want.

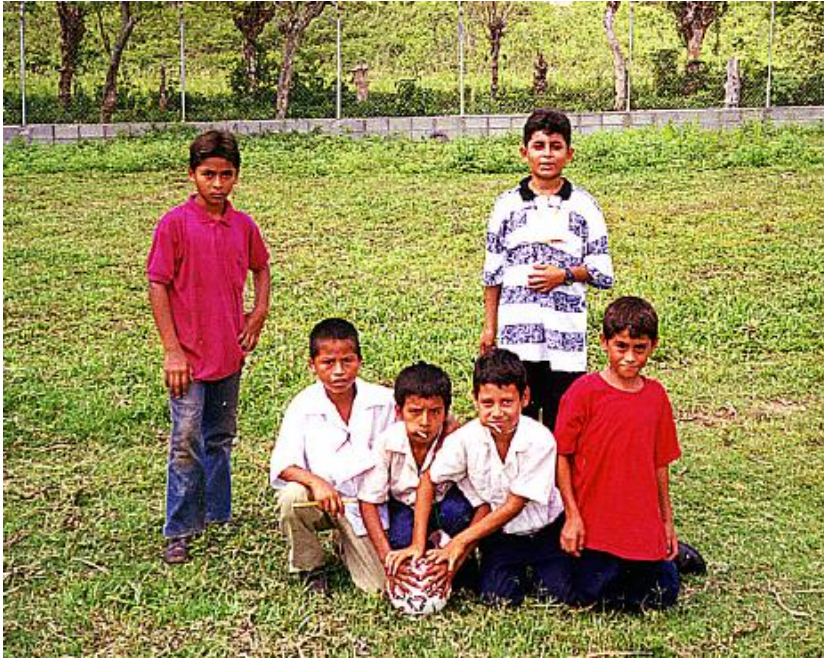
Dinner was another typical Honduran one...we were getting used to the dry tortillas by now. Dessert was special though. One of the local workers got us a bunch of coconuts and started cutting them open with his machete. The milk was delicious. One thing different about these coconuts, however was that the milk was clear, not white, and there wasn't as much meat inside.

After dinner we prepared for tomorrow's VBS. We sang some songs, prayed and debriefed a little. Then suddenly, the lights started getting dimmer, dimmer, and finally the generator just died! We thought we broke another one...we later realized it just ran out of gas! Nobody thought of checking how much gas was in it! We didn't have any more gas so we just shared stories and prayed in the dark.

Right before dinner, the sisters did a bunch of laundry and hung it out to dry overnight, when little did they realize that a storm was looming! It poured rain that night, rain bouncing furiously off the corrugated tin roof with lightning dancing across the sky every couple seconds! Summer is the rainy season for Honduras, and in some areas it rains every night.

Tuesday and Wednesday

When I woke up Tuesday morning, the dental team was already gone. They had gone to a mountain village about two hour drive from the mission center to serve more patients. After breakfast and a brief small group meeting, we got to work preparing for VBS as usual. We practiced some more songs, more body worship, and another skit called "Puppet." In the skit, mankind is portrayed as a puppet manipulated by Satan, and only the holy scissors of Jesus can cut the strings to set us free from the control of Satan.



Soccer was the most popular pastime.

The kids really loved to play soccer! They were also really good at it...kicking rainbows, diving headers, and faking passes! During one of the games, some of the kids took me aside and showed me some of the plays! In addition to soccer, the kids enjoyed the jump ropes. They were always eager for their turn and to hear us sing the songs (Cinderella, dressed in yellow...)

Later on, after most of the kids left, a bunch of us picked up some of the guitars and played a couple songs. A couple kids gathered around by the windows to hear us play. Janet and Sonia also jumped in, eager to learn a couple more songs on the guitar!

The shower felt so good that night...there was no hot water but it was very refreshing after I ran around with the kids for a couple hours! The sisters finally got the laundry done, and later we had dinner. Some of the members of the Korean church cooked for us again.

After dinner, the dental team got back after a long busy day. To unwind a little, we picked up some guitars again and this time, David Han showed me a couple songs. We picked around for an hour or so before we went to bed.

The next day, we had to get up early for VBS, since we were going to have both a morning and afternoon session that day. After a slightly rushed breakfast, we had some time for a quick quiet time. The dental team had left again early to go to another village like yesterday. The morning session of VBS was the same as Monday's afternoon session. There were 2 separate VBS's each with 3 sessions: M-W afternoon and W-F morning.

During the afternoon VBS we performed our third skit called "Las Manos" talking about how God created everything. He gave us hands that could be used for good things. However, man used them for evil. Jesus then gave us the opportunity to hold him with our hands for forgiveness.

After a double dose of VBS we were exhausted and very sweaty...the showers felt immensely refreshing! By this afternoon, some workers had been mowing the grass with machetes and were almost done. The machete is an all-purpose cutting tool in Honduras. Its long 3 foot blade can cut almost anything, grass, small branches, weeds, and even coconuts! I asked one of the workers if he would let me try cutting some grass, and then I realized how much work it really was! We took lawn mowers for granted way too much back in America!

After dinner, we planned on showing the Jesus film in Spanish. A bunch of us helped set up the screen and projector outside, and some others handled the speakers. A few moments later however, it started raining, and we were forced to bring everything inside. In spite of the rain though, a good crowd showed up for the movie. I could

tell how hearts were being changed. It was very encouraging!

Thursday and Friday

Both days we had morning VBS starting at 8, right after breakfast. We were really tired by this point but the energy of the kids kept us going. The kids loved "Nuestro Padre Abraham"...first you raise your right hand, then left hand, right foot, left foot, head, then turn around...it was a vigorous workout! The kids kept shouting "¡Otra vez! ¡Otra vez!" (again! again!) but we were thinking "¡No más, por favor!" (no more, please!)

Later on, during the puppet show, the tape messed up and wouldn't start where it was supposed to, so Andy improvised a way to keep the attention...let's do the Cucaracha! The kids loved seeing Andy dance and make a fool of himself, as usual!

The kids loved making origami flowers, fortune-tellers, and cups during activities. It didn't matter how much pain we were in, how hot and thirsty we were, or how tired we were when we saw the smiles light up on the children's faces. It was so encouraging. That's what the mission was all about, reaching kids on their level, showing our love, and at the same time presenting them with the gospel. Around lunchtime, we got our first extended period of rest since there was no afternoon VBS any more. Thank goodness! The much needed rest was very reviving.

Right after dinner we planned on starting the revival so we got to work immediately. A bunch of us helped set up the lights, sound equipment, and seats for a couple hundred people. We did a last run-through of the body worship and of "Burden" the drama. Finally we prayed that God would really speak through the pastor, the songs and the testimony, and that He would draw many people to Himself.



Revival for the local people.

The revival started around 7:00, opening with some worship from some people from a local Honduran church. The weather had cleared up just in time for the beginning - praise God! I really enjoyed their style of worship. Most of the songs were in a minor key with an upbeat rhythm, and instead of just clapping or raising hands while singing, their whole bodies were animated, swinging to the beat.

By the end of the worship, at least 200 or 300 people had showed up! I was really uncertain how many people would actually show up since almost all the people were unreached and unchurched. Later on, Julie gave her testimony, spoken through a translator. I could see many hearts being touched...the Spirit of God was moving in a powerful way!

After the testimony we performed "Burden" depicting a character with a big load that he can't handle. He goes around asking for help, but everyone is too busy working, or too self-centered to notice. Later in his despair, Jesus comes and removes the burden. He looks around to try to find the one who took away the burden and later discovers that only Jesus could have been the one.

Following "Burden" was a little more worship by members of the Korean church, and then came the message. A pastor from a local church presented the gospel about how God opens our eyes to see Jesus and His miraculous work on the cross. He spoke with such authority that people in the front had to cover their ears! It was awesome to hear the Gospel message proclaimed in simple language that everyone could understand. Even with my broken Spanish I understood almost every word. During the final altar call, a good crowd of 30 or 40 came up front to receive Jesus as their personal Lord and Savior!

Following the revival, Young Jun was finishing up his pump, drilling the last couple holes and bolting it together. The rest of us played jumpropes, double dutch and other silly games for about an hour! Later we went outside to see the glorious Milky Way directly overhead. With no lights in Honduras to block the sky I saw the stars as I had never seen them! We even saw a few shooting stars! A bunch of us claimed stars as our own, and I remember launching an attack on David's star with plans on taking over the sky!

Friday was very similar to Thursday, with morning VBS starting at 8, and the dental team getting started at 9 (they only went to other villages Tuesday and Wednesday.) After VBS some of the kids would come up to me saying "¡foto! ¡foto!" They loved getting their picture taken!

Young Jun finished his pump and demonstrated it by squirting water all over the floor! Later on we had a celebration dinner for the local people, celebrating the beginning of a new ministry in Honduras and kicking off a new church.

The revival went well again, starting with worship, the drama "Puppet", and another testimony. The message was another powerful one, this time focusing on Acts 4:12, how Jesus is the only one who can break the chains of sin.

Tela - Saturday July 25

We had to get up really early, around 4:30 to get ready to leave. The bus was coming at 7, and we had a lot of packing to do. We had to bundle all the sleeping bags, mosquito nets, VBS materials, and all our clothes to be out of there right when the bus came. We took one last picture with some of the kids (they missed us too much to not come back to say bye!) We also included one of the guards with his AKA assault rifle...some areas were pretty dangerous and required armed guards patrolling the area!



One of the guards with his AKA assault rifle.

The bus apparently was still running on Honduran time, showing up around 8:30! We started making our way up to Tela, up on the northern coast. We planned on hanging out and relaxing on the beach to debrief from the week-long mission. We wound our way north, through the two-thousand foot mountains all around us, past the lush forests of palm trees, and through San Pedro Sula. It took 1000 lempiras (\$75) of gas to last us for the three-hour journey to the beach.

In Honduras, people drank Coca-Cola more than water, almost literally! Every block we would see at least one or two signs "Siempre Coca-Cola", "Disfrute Coca-Cola" (Always Coke; Enjoy Coke). The driving was terrible in Honduras! With very few traffic lights, cars jumping the median to use whatever lane available, and people driving on sidewalks, we were lucky the old clunky bus made it in one piece!

It was sad to leave the kids behind. After a week of working closely with them some of us started holding them dear to our hearts. We left knowing that many of us probably wouldn't ever see them again, but yet we touched their lives so much. Many of them asked when we were coming back!

We arrived at the beach around 11:30 and settled into the beach-house, a beautiful fully furnished house with hardwood floors, A/C, TV, great view from the deck, and best of all, beds! Yes, beds! I couldn't describe how it felt to lay down in a warm cozy bed after sleeping 10 days in our smelly sleeping bags on the hard and cold concrete floor.

The beach was beautiful, well worth the agonizing bumpy ride to get there! We sprinted for the beautiful aqua-blue Caribbean water, straight out of a dream vacation. The water was a warm 85°, the sand was smooth, and the beach was very clean.



Beach at Tela.

We picked up souvenirs on the beach, T-shirts, postcards, conch shells, and bracelets for less than half of typical American prices. The unit of currency was called lempiras and it was about 13.5 to 1 dollar. A typical T-shirt was about 90 lempiras - 7 dollars instead of the typical \$15 for a shirt in America!

After surfing in the waves, catching live sand dollars, and playing in the sand for a few hours, we were driven inside by a quick afternoon squall which soaked all our stuff immediately! We headed over to dinner at the hotel's restaurant. A live band entertained us and sometimes people would go up to the dance floor. We all enjoyed "bailando" to the upbeat songs, taking turns being in the middle, and doing the caterpillar! Between a couple birthday celebrations, the dee-jay introduced us to the local crowd.

From about 9:30 to 12:30 we had our debriefing session. Praise, prayer and communion started it off, and later on we shared our experiences. We all had so much to say - the way the kids loved us, the struggles we overcame, the joy of serving, and what we learned about ourselves. It was encouraging to hear how God worked through each one of us.

The next morning we got up early to head to San Pedro Sula, back to the Korean church. By this morning about half the team was getting sick, mostly stomach ailments. Ironically it was the food at the restaurant that made us

sick. Our team took special care to make sure our food was clean, but the restaurant didn't necessarily take those precautions. I anxiously awaited the 1 ½ hour bus ride after having several bouts of diarrhea early in the morning.

San Pedro Sula - Sunday July 26

We all survived the bus ride just fine to the Korean church, actually arriving on time this time. Missionary Park introduced us to the congregation and we performed a couple more songs after offertory. As usual, they served us lunch until we couldn't eat any more. I felt bummed not being able to enjoy the Kim-Chee and Myuk-Guk (seaweed soup) since I hadn't yet gotten over my stomach bug from the night before.

After service we headed to the Youth for Christ center center in the city. It was like a typical retreat center with decent living conditions. About half an hour later we headed to a local mall which was like an American one. We shopped around for more T-shirts, little gifts, etc. Most of the guys bought machetes and the girls got little baskets and knick-knacks! My 20" machete was in a leather sheath decorated with flowers and not quite like the ones used in the field. It was originally 175 lempiras, but we bargained down to 150 (bargaining was very common in Latin America), which translated to about \$11!

For dinner we headed back to Ki-Chan, the same Korean restaurant we went to last Sunday night. I had recovered mostly from my stomach flu and enjoyed the Kim-Chee Chi-Gae (Kimchee stew) and Pa-Jang (like omelettes with scallions and other spices in soy sauce).

The Journey Back Home - Monday July 27

We had to be up at 4:30 sharp to pack up, load all our stuff on the bus, and donate the VBS materials. Our flight left at 7:15, requiring us to be at the airport to go through customs at 6:00.



The time sure went by quickly.

Somehow Andy made it through customs with the 6 machetes he bought the day before! We were all set to go...it seemed like it went by so quickly! After a 2-hour layover in Miami, we headed back home to Boston, and we said our good-byes to the Cincinnati team. We were welcomed with a celebration back in Boston! A bunch of people volunteered to cook us a feast of Bi-Bim-Bap and sashimi (my favorite!) It was great to be back home-sweet-home, in my own bed again, pondering over my sweet memories over the last two weeks!

The End