

Oregon: Such beauty and such pain

June 19, 2015

When we arrived in Portland, it didn't take me long to realize we weren't in Texas anymore. Oregon is filled with flowing hills and trees—so many trees, and not just any trees, but really tall trees. It also didn't take long for me to fall in love with this place, just as soon as we pulled out of the airport parking garage and started down the highway.



Laura Thomas All of the hills, the trees, the green everywhere, the colorful houses built up on the hills, none of them looking quite the same—it was beautiful. I realized I loved this place, and that was even before I even met the people.

The people here are hard to describe because they are all so different. They are as colorful and different as the houses in this area. You can't really fit anyone into a stereotype, because nobody is quite the same as the person standing next to them. They are all unique and completely satisfied with being exactly who they are. As someone who has struggled with self-esteem and being comfortable in my own skin, this has inspired me in so many ways.

The people here are amazing in so many ways. But among all the quirks

and individuality, I see pain. I see people trying to find their worth in unfulfilling things and people trying to mask their pain in things that never quite get the job done. I met a 12-year-old boy so angry and confused that all he sees is darkness, and all he wants to do is end his own life. I met a man so wired and high he cannot be the father his daughter needs him to be.

I have gone on prayer walks around apartments, where all you can feel is darkness. Seeing all this pain and sadness among such beautiful people has been extremely overwhelming. At times I wonder why I am here. I wonder how I can even be used in this place. I doubt myself and I don't even know where to begin. I don't know what to do or say or how to make a difference here.

But what I do know is this: God sent me here for a purpose. I can see God moving here. I can see him in the eyes of all the children I meet. I can see him in the sunshine and the rain. I can see him in my teammates. I can see him everywhere I turn. God is so much greater than any doubt or insecurity that could possibly cross my mind. God can move mountains, and God can use anyone to do anything. I may not know what my purpose is here, but God does, and that is all that matters. I know that God will use me here, and I cannot wait to see how.

Laura Thomas, a student at Tarleton State University, is serving with [Go Now Missions](#) as part of a creative community outreach team in Beaverton, Ore.