

Faith. I don't know what I'd do without it. My faith kept me going this year when nothing else did. That faith is tied to a number of different communities of people that I tend to call my family. People who know me well would say that I'm not a city girl. I'm drawn to the more rural aspects of life like mountains, grassy fields, jeans, tshirts, boots, hats, farms, and goats. Some of this can be taken with you when you move, but not quite all of it. So instead I carried my faith with me. Faith in God, relationships, and what was to come. If I'm being honest, this was the hardest year of my life. However, I have come to realize that life is a contradiction and this was possibly the easiest year of my life as well. But, how can that be?! Well, working with people every day who had less than me, (in more ways than just material possessions) it became extremely apparent that I am privileged. Now that I have seen the effects my privilege can have on others, my faith has been awakened and turned towards the injustices of the world around me. I may have completed this year of service, but that doesn't mean it all goes away. It's time to put my faith into further action within my own community. My reflections are endless, but here is a look into what I encountered this year...

I tossed and turned in my bed all night.  
She tossed and turned in a bush all night.  
I woke up early to avoid being late to work.  
She woke up early to avoid police harassment.  
I made the breakfast I wanted to eat.  
She ate the breakfast she was served in a line.  
I rode the bus, paying with a monthly pass.  
She rode the bus, paying with the change in her pocket.  
I sat behind my desk at work.  
She sat on the corner because she couldn't find work.  
I listened to stories told by my clients.  
She shortened her story to a cardboard sign.  
I offered a smile and it was returned.  
She offered a smile and it was ignored.  
I kept my belongings at my apartment.  
She kept her belongings on her back.  
I went to the doctor for a checkup.  
She went to the doctor because she couldn't walk.  
I grieved the loss of a client.  
She grieved the loss of a friend.  
I attended a rally and march to advocate.  
She attended a rally and march to fight for her life.  
I talked to the people everyone could see.  
She talked to the people only she could see.  
I walked down the street, unaware of my skin color.  
She walked down the street, constantly reminded of her skin color.  
I had nightmares about monsters and running.  
She had nightmares about soldiers and bombing.

I told myself, "I've drank enough."  
She told herself, "I'll never drink enough."  
I was chuckled at for the accent I had.  
She was deported for the accent she had.  
I fought with words to defend myself.  
She fought with fists to defend herself.  
I was called by the name I was given at birth.  
She was called by the name she was given on the streets.  
I was respected because I was straight.  
She was disrespected because she was gay.  
I sold merchandise for a fundraiser.  
She sold merchandise for survival.  
I applied for jobs and got one like that!  
She applied for jobs and got no chance.  
I went to the library for CDs and books.  
She went to the library for dryness and warmth.  
I had unlimited minutes on my cell.  
She had 20 minutes outside of her cell.  
I set up a tent for a camping adventure.  
She set up a tent for night's shelter.  
I knew I had people I could turn to.  
She knew she had no one else she could turn to.  
I said, "There are many other options."  
She said, "This is the one and only option."

The statements I just made are real. When I used the word, "I," that was in reference to myself and many of you out there...people who are privileged, accepted, welcomed, loved, and included. When I used the word, "she," that was in reference to many of the clients I worked with in Denver, all combined into one person. This one person represents those put on the margins, abused, neglected, ignored, oppressed, discriminated, and forgotten.

This past year I was part of the Young Adult Volunteer (YAV) Program and Discovering Opportunities for Outreach and Reflections (DOOR) Program. It's a partnership between the Presbyterian Church (USA) and Mennonite Mission Network. I was placed at Senior Support Services, a drop-in day shelter for older adults 55+, who were or are experiencing homelessness. The statements included many of the reasons people find themselves in homeless situations. It's difficult to put into words what I experienced this year, but I learned so much through our four pillars of social justice, vocational discernment, spiritual formation, and community. Work greatly impacted me this year as I was able to listen to stories day in and day out. I saw how easy it is to run away from situations that make us feel uncomfortable, but how much we learn during those times. My faith deepened as I interacted with those who may or may not believe the same things that I do. I have a better understanding for who I am because of living with three other young adults. They challenged me in ways I didn't think were possible. And I realized that vocation is different for each person and is constantly evolving. I

was able to leave the comforts of home and to push myself in growing into who God has called me to truly be. And then, return home with a new sense of wonder and awareness of all that is happening around me. I have so much to tell and so I hope you will reach out to me to hear more. I found incredible value in building relationships this year, and I hope each of you do as well. Thank you all for supporting and encouraging me this year, even from so far away. I'm very glad to be continuing on my faith journey back at home in the beautiful, Shenandoah Valley of Virginia.