

Clarity on a Bus Bench in Botswana...
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Last summer I worked in Botswana with a Canadian NGO. One afternoon I waited for a bus in a remote village, trying to get back to a nearby town. Another young woman sat next to me on the bench and we found ourselves chatting about a subject many young females can bond over – problems with our boyfriends.

A plane zoomed overhead, prompting her to lean closer to me. ‘I’ve always dreamed of flying a plane,’ she told me slowly, savouring the words, yet speaking furtively as if someone nearby might overhear and laugh. But in the next breath rushed out: “Obviously I could never do it.”

Without thinking, I blurted out, “Why not?”

Then with my face red enough to match the sand beneath my feet, I stayed silent. She stayed silent at first but then out rushed a life story of grinding poverty and heavy family obligations.

A few days later, I flew back to Ottawa – arriving just in time to start my last year of university. It was a time of both excitement and uncertainty as I prepared to end one life chapter and begin another filled with endless opportunity.

Yet, I thought often about that bench and the story of chronic hopelessness.

I finally grasped something that changed my entire perception of social justice - In a world of ‘digital divide this’, ‘income inequality that’, the opportunity gap is the most hurtful and damaging of all. Every where I now looked, I could see this demoralizing division that cut across country, colour and creed.

At first, I felt anger towards the students wandering the university campus who seemed rich with their opportunity, yet who ignored the pleas and requests of our small social justice group for an ear to listen and learn, and a signature for a petition.

But I also began to understand the greater learning process happening. When our social justice group began 3 years ago, we focused on raising money and considered our greatest

achievements to be our dollar figures. But university is a perfect place to begin understanding the structural challenges facing the world intellectually. And through our Catholic community we began to spiritually understand the true meaning of solidarity and equality – and what it means to work for peace, justice, and integrity.

It is an ongoing process for us all that required deep searching of our heart and intellect. Some of us changed our politics and our consumption habits, but none of us in the same way. I found some clarity on a bus bench. Others found it in prayer and others in a classroom.

All of us realized in one way or another that the truly sinful divisions in this world can't be healed with just money or good intentions, but that it's a long hard slog to ensure life-giving hope is not a distant dream for the majority of humanity.