

## CARP DC, Maryland and Virginia, USA: The Joy of Learning to Love

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November 23, 2023



*Photos of Espina in CARP DMV*

If someone had told me two years ago that I would travel thousands of miles away and leave my home - the place where I grew up, where I learnt everything I know today, and where all my friends and family were - I would have never believed them. And yet, that is what happened. In December 2022, I left my home in Zambia to come to the United States and join the DMV (DC, Maryland, and Virginia) CARP chapter. I hope I can return home one day, but it will probably not be the same. I will always miss my old life: my friends and family, and everything I left behind.



Why did I decide to join CARP? When I left, my father looked me in the eye and said, "Even if we have to eat one meal per day just for you to find what you're looking for, we'll gladly do it." Why did I accept his words? Why did I let my brother sacrifice his tuition to help me pay for my visa? Why did I leave while my mother lay on a hospital bed, not knowing if I will ever see her again? Why did I leave the children from my church that I love so much without even saying goodbye? Why choose to be anywhere else but home?

It's just one simple thing actually: love. Even if I try to think of all the logical reasons I could possibly be doing this, none are valid or make sense. Only love, that's the only possible reason. It was the experience of love that brought me to CARP.



I had taken a year off after high school, but about one month in I found myself tired of waking up, doing chores, eating breakfast, going to sleep again till lunch, eating lunch, dilly dallying for the rest of the day then going to sleep, only to have it all repeat the next day. I was stuck in a purposeless, unfulfilling cycle. I wanted to do something, anything really. Every night before going to sleep, I would get down on my knees on the side of my bed and pray. I told God I'm tired of living a life that feels like it has no purpose. Then slowly, doors started to open. I got out of my comfort zone and made friends at church. With strong encouragement, I volunteered as a singer for the praise team, and it made me happy to offer this small act of service.



*Espina with several volunteers from Generation Peace Academy*

One day, I met volunteers from [Generation Peace Academy](#) who came to my country as missionaries, and again, the opportunity to go out of my comfort zone was offered to me, this time to join them in their activities. I asked myself, "Why would they come thousands of miles to a place they don't know just to

volunteer?" I didn't understand but they still seemed so happy. and I was amazed that they had so much love in their hearts that they wanted to share, even with people they just met and didn't really know well. "Join the missionaries?! I don't know about all that," I thought. " But isn't that what I have been praying for this whole time, to find a purpose?" So I said, "Yes." I couldn't believe I said yes. I didn't think could do it. But after some time, I was thriving. I was the happiest I had ever been. I noticed it, the people around me noticed it and it was amazing! And what was I doing? Simply sharing God's love. I realized I had been stuck in my own head and when I stepped out of my own thoughts for a moment, I saw everything God gave me, all this love that I could share!



The day was approaching when my new friends would go back to America; sadness started to creep into the back of my mind, as well as the fear that I would fall back into a cycle of purposeless living. But unexpectedly, their team leader - who had been a member of DMV CARP - invited me to come with them to America and join CARP. I had said yes to a lot of things but this? I wasn't sure at all. Leave my home? My family? I thought I couldn't. So I prayed. I asked God, "Is this the path I must take?" "Is this the right decision?" "Is this what I have been praying for this whole time?" I had so many questions. After a lot of prayer, I felt strongly felt in my heart that this is the path God had prepared for me. This is what I had been praying for this whole time, so once again I said "Yes." I had received so much love from the missionaries, that I was determined to give it back to others through CARP.



Now, I am concluding my third semester as a part of DMV CARP. Sometimes I forget my purpose. I wonder where else I could be or what else I could be doing. But as I reach out to my fellow students at Montgomery College, though it may only be one in fifty people, I can see in their eyes the impact of the love that I give and that I have been able to truly touch their heart. This is one of the most beautiful sights in the world to me. This makes me stay, this is my why: to give people hope, to make them smile, to love them. And this is something that I feel I have been able to do in CARP.



I will always remember the CARP DMV 2023 Summer Retreat as one of my greatest learning experiences when my capacity to love people was truly tested. As team leader, it was my responsibility to look after a few of the participants. I felt like I had nothing to offer my team because they were mostly older and had more life experience than me. I was unable to give them my entire affection because of this thinking. I was afraid that they would reject it. Every day I tried to do better, but still I struggled greatly. What made it more difficult for me was that they also had different personalities. I recall sitting on the ground a few days before the retreat's conclusion, feeling defeated and as though I had failed. I felt bad for not giving it everything I had because I was afraid it wouldn't be accepted. I spent hours sitting there criticizing myself and pleading with God, saying things like, "I'm sorry I failed," and, "I'm sorry I couldn't do my best." It occurred to me at that moment: what if I just completely gave them my heart? What if I simply expressed to them how much I genuinely cared? I turned to my team when I was at my most emotional and vulnerable state. I tried to tell them exactly how I felt, but broke into

tears after a few words, then mustered the strength to go on. I felt like I had simply opened up like a book. They accepted me, which surprised me! My love was embraced by them! And for the remainder of the time, we laughed while we just talked together. This event taught me that although it's not always easy, loving people is a choice we make. If we make this choice and invest our all, then our love will undoubtedly be returned.

During my time in CARP, I have learnt to give love to others and learnt to receive love too. Through this, I have been able to see the presence of God in people. It seems like such a simple thing to do but sometimes it's really challenging. In CARP, I have made friends with many different kinds of people with different personalities including some people that are more challenging to love than others, but I am learning to love them. I believe that doing this is the true meaning of loving God. This love will be something that I will carry in me for the rest of my life.

Contributed by Espina Lupili, from DMV CARP

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