

# OVERPROTECTED

by Lisa Boris, Casa Juan Diego, Chicago, Ill.

As I sit here and try to process what has happened to me in the past two years, I am at a loss for words (which is unusual for me). So far, I have started three reflections (all of which I don't like enough to finish), but I think that the best way to summarize my experience is to, as I did in my Confirmation classes this year, relate it to pop culture. The italicized phrases that follow are from the Britney Spears song *Overprotected*, and while I am not condoning Britney or agreeing with all of her choices, most of her songs share harsh realities and inner thoughts that others are thinking but do not dare to say. In reality, don't most Dominican Volunteers do the same thing? We understand the harsh realities of today's world and we are ones daring enough to do something about it. Our lives and actions express our desire for change and greater understanding. Maybe I am stretching this a little too far, but either way, the words to *Overprotected* really do sum up the entirety of my experience as a Dominican Volunteer; from overprotected and under experienced college graduate to now, wondering how to continue to be daring enough to do and say the things that most people won't.

I am slightly exaggerating how overprotected I was. I had been on several mission trips before, including one out of the country; I had seen people living on the streets and asking for money; I had worked on Habitat for Humanity houses; I had read books and taken classes on social justice.

However it wasn't enough to satisfy my thirst for justice and truth. Throughout my college experience, I changed my mind several times about what I wanted to do after graduation, but when it came down to it, I did not feel ready to be a youth minister yet (in part because I was so overprotected). I needed time to figure out what I wanted to do with my life, and I needed to act-to work for change, to experience different kinds of love.

Joining Dominican Volunteers was my way of saying to the world *say hello to the girl that I am... I don't wanna be so damn protected*. For some reason, even my little sister had, until this point, experienced more than I had-and this really bothered me. She had the car, the boyfriend, and the trips to Europe I never had, and I needed something to outdo her-I was, after all, the big sister. I had always been a pretty well rounded person, I was a peer leader at church, captain of the Knowledge Bowl team, on the track team and in the choir. But most (not all) of these things came easily to me, and I was never really given the chance to fail. I needed *to make mistakes just to learn who I am*, so I thought to myself, "*There must be another way...Cause I believe in taking chances...God I need some answers...What am I to do*

*with my life? How am I supposed to know what's right? I can't help the way I feel but my life has been so overprotected.*"

In order to combat this, I took the chance, put some trust in God, and picked up a Dominican Volunteers application. I convinced them to let me join by writing essays to *tell them what I like, what I want, and what I don't*. I mentioned my strengths, weaknesses, and experiences, and the fact that *I can't believe what I hear about the world...I need time, love, I need space* and opportunities to fix some of the problems I see in the world.

Another reason I wanted to join Dominican Volunteers was because none of my friends were doing this particular volunteer program. I didn't *need nobody telling me just what I wanna, what I want what what I'm gonna do about my destiny...no no...nobody's tellin me just what i wanna (do do)*. I was *so fed up with people telling me to be someone else but me* and I wanted to discover who I really was. The best way I could find to do this was to move somewhere where nobody knew me, a place where I could escape the expectations other people placed on me and just be myself. When I went off to college, 7 of my high school classmates came with me-but not this time. This time, I was the only St. Mary's student doing Dominican Volunteers and I could be whoever and whatever I wanted to be. The first 6 months out of school and away from all things familiar, I struggled to figure out who I was, how I would react to different situations, and who and what was really important to me.

So, now two years later, (and at the end of the song) *you're gonna have to see through my perspective*; my joys and sorrows, my challenges and weaknesses, my learnings and growths. My last reflection shares some of the ways I have grown this year to be the best person I can be, to break down stereotypes and see people as people. In order to do this, I had to let loose and not be so protected; the students I worked with this year taught me numerous words and phrases (which I then had to look up on [urbandictionary.com](http://urbandictionary.com)) or brought new meaning to (and thereby ruined) words I already knew (apparently "cookie jar" and "tang" both refer to (the same) female anatomy).

In addition to my understanding of certain words and phrases changing in the past two years, my perspective on life has changed. One of the earliest examples I can remember of this occurred on my way to Amityville (New York) for my first Orientation retreat. The excitement and independence I had felt upon leaving Minneapolis had, in the course of the 60 minute flight to Chicago, changed to fear, anxiety, panic, and crankiness. During my layover, I bought a newspaper to distract myself from wanting to go

back home. It was here, in the midst of all these feelings, in the middle of Midway airport, that my perspective changed for the first time as a DV. When I had left Minnesota, the bridge collapse that had occurred 3 days earlier still covered the front page of every newspaper; however when I arrived in Chicago, it took up only about one-sixth of the front page. I then realized how one's perspective and what is important to people can change so drastically, so quickly. I grew up 6 miles from that bridge; it had taken me to the Metrodome, the airport, and my sister's college, so of course it was important to me, but to people in Chicago, 356 miles away from the bridge, and other parts of the country, it was just another tragic thing that happened. Wars in other places were killing more people, so why did this bridge collapse matter to them?

Even if it hadn't mattered to others, it still mattered to me. But then again, lots of things that matter to me are unimportant to other people. A better example, something I have in common with Britney Spears, is the desire to find out who I am and to figure out what I am supposed to do with my life.

The best way I can describe that at this point is through the words of a wonderful woman named... (haha, you thought I was going to say Britney again)... St. Catherine of Siena. St. Catherine once said that "to the servant of God . . . every place is the right place, and every time is the right time."

For me, the time has always been right-my parents and Catholic school education instilled in me a desire to serve from an early age. For me, the right place was the Bronx for a year, and then Chicago for year. But my time as a volunteer is ending, and I wonder what's next for me. *What am I to do with my life? How am I supposed to know what's right?* At this point, I do not know what to do with my life, but I do have a pretty good understanding of what is right. The simple answer is, as St. Catherine of Siena would say, "to be of service wherever you are." It doesn't matter if I stay in Chicago or move back home, as long as I find a way to serve others. My experience as a volunteer has taught me to always be open and creative in order to do that. I was a pastoral/youth ministry major in college, and after 4 years of studying, I felt prepared and trained (but not really wanting) to do youth ministry in wealthy, suburban parishes; I aspired to do something else. I wanted to do some type of "non-traditional" youth ministry, like ministry with people with disabilities or spending two years as a volunteer. As a volunteer, I managed to do youth ministry (as an adult volunteer in the Bronx and the Coordinator of Youth Ministry at St. Pius); however not in the wealthy parishes I was trained to minister in. Ministry is never easy; however it is a lot easier when there is funding and volunteers, and those are the conditions that most people choose to live and minister in. But as Britney says, sometimes *you just gotta do*

*it your way*. I have met many people who are taking this phrase to heart; the other Dominican Volunteers, or the other youth ministers in the Pilsen area are doing just that-doing service, not in the traditional way, but in their way, using their gifts and talents and finding ways to serve in whatever unexpected situations we are given.

Granted, it was a difficult adjustment. I struggled to learn how to live in and get around in a new city, a new way of life, how to live and work with different people, how to not be in school anymore, how to live in one of the most expensive cities in the nation on a limited income (and knowing that I was doing it out of choice, while my neighbors were doing it out of necessity). It was a humbling experience to move from a private school environment I had grown up in, where most people had much more money than I did, to neighborhoods where our household income (as volunteers and Sisters) was comparable, if not greater than, that of our neighbors.

The pressure of trying to teach preschoolers and high-schoolers has caused me to laugh, cry, make mistakes, and learn more about my own strengths and weaknesses. I have cried tears of anger at not being able to find a doctor, tears of frustration because of the unfamiliarity of this new way of life and because of my ministry sites and communities, tears of sadness at the sudden death of my student's little brother or co-worker's miscarriage, tears of joy because of powerful prayer experiences with my Confirmation students, learned through trial and error exactly how short of an attention span my students have, and learned that I tell awesome jokes.

Jokes aside, my understanding of myself and my thoughts on life have changed drastically in the past two years. Participating in St. Dominic's Home events or St. Pius V marches, dinners, or fundraisers has helped me to once again, as I did during my Orientation layover, expand my perspective and my thinking and to look beyond the stereotypes and differences and to see the person underneath.

I leave Dominican Volunteers with a new understanding of city living, community living, being of service, and ministry. I have educated preschoolers and high-schoolers, worked for systemic change, laughed, cried, spent a ridiculous amount of time in planes, trains, and buses, traveling between the easy and familiar life I left in Minnesota and the new experiences and ministries that awaited me in New York and Chicago. And yet, at the end of it all, not knowing for sure what the next step will be, I find myself still trying to answer the question *what am I to do with my life?*

And I hear God responding, through a voice that sounds a lot like Britney Spears *you'll find it out don't worry!*