

# The Language of Friendship

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When I was twelve, my parents took my siblings and I on a mission trip to Vietnam. My job, along with my two siblings, was to work at the local kindergarten to befriend the children of the area.

Day one: I was hit with an intense culture shock. These children, no more than six, ate one meal a day, wore the same clothes as the three prior mornings, never tasted sugar before, and had never seen a digital camera once in their lifetime.

Day two: An hour into the school day, it was evident that regardless of the language barrier, we would be great friends. My sister and I had taught them how to braid hair, (all went home with little braids) taught them American songs, drew with them, ate with them, and took a nap with them, all without communicating a single word to another that could be understood.

Day three: My brother brought bubbles. Boy, did they love the bubbles. We spent the entire day blowing bubbles on one another, on the teachers, in the pond water watching the soapy suds float above the koi's, and most importantly, laughing so hard our lungs hurt. I still had not spoken a fluent sentence to them, yet left school that day with hugs from all of them.

Day four: I brought chalk, my sister brought beads and string to make them jewelry, for they had none, and my brother brought himself, for he planned on wrestling with the boys and teaching them kungfu. I was finally able to speak my words. I was able to draw myself holding their hands, able to draw what the United States looked like, able to teach them symbols of friendship like doves, peace signs, and hearts to show that friendship can be found in animals, their peers, and even strangers like myself.

Day five: the previous night was my siblings' tenth birthday, we had about half a cake to be eaten, so we brought it to the school. Words could not describe how joyous I felt watching them eat their first piece of cake. Their wide eyes widened my heart, revealing the purest joy—one that transcends words and differences. From that moment on, I registered that a friendship is not something spoken; it is felt. It is in the gentle gestures, shared laughter, the unspoken comprehension that we are all connected. As I hugged them goodbye, we posed for a picture, hands flashing peace signs as the teacher took a picture on my Polaroid. The image printed in seconds, but the memories would last far longer. Regardless of the 8,169 miles, a 16-hour flight, and an entire world of differences separated us, distance could never erase the bond built. It lives forever in the laughter we shared, in the warmth of a hug, and in the joys of chalk and bubbles. Then, I realized that friendship—unspoken, pure, and limitless—is the most powerful force in the world, capable of bridging any divide to unity.