



# TANNER TRIPP

## HIGH SCHOOL JUNIOR

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**W**hen I was first told we were “going to a dump,” I had mixed emotions and didn’t know exactly what to expect. My previous understanding was that it would be a place where people dump and burn their trash. But I soon learned that it was also a place where people were living because they were poor and had nowhere else to go.

I learned, from the leaders at IncaLink, that people would live in the dump trying to find food, recyclables, or any other sellable item among the waste. Before this experience, I had never been to a dump, nor had I really even cared enough to understand how one works. I simply thought that the garbage trucks just drop all the bags at a huge property called “the dump” and just leave it there. When I was told that people try to find things in the waste, I was imagining that the situation would be similar to a homeless person searching trash cans for recyclables at home. And all of this made up my feeble understanding and expectation of what I would experience at the dump.

As our massive group got off the bus and approached the entrance to the dump, the very first thing I had to step over was a dead cat. The locals in the area weren’t even disturbed by it. There’s a dead cat laying on the ground and these people walk past without even flinching! I began to see that the conditions that these people live in are comparable to hell on earth. It broke my heart.

Next, we walked the “hundred-yard mile,” a short path that leads directly into the heart of the dump. One of the worst smells I have ever experienced surrounded our group—many of us could only describe the smell as death. When we finally made it to the entrance of the dump, there wasn’t even a moment of hesitation from anyone in our group.

From here the story begins of how my life was changed forever.

A semi-beaten path crawls across the surface of the dump. By semi beaten I mean that this trash had been walked on before so we, at least, had the hope that we would not sink into an eternal crevice of waste. Not ten yards in, I found myself stepping over another dead animal. A stray dog, probably dead for months, was nothing more than a rotting pile of flesh and bones. I saw vultures overhead by the dozens, soaring high above the ground to find their next meal.

Others perched themselves on poles and wires, staring down on us with grimacing scowls as if they were saying, “Welcome to hell on earth, we hope you enjoy your visit”. I mostly kept my head down while walking through the dump, to make sure I didn’t accidentally step in fecal matter or on a rotting carcass. We walked uphill along this beaten path for two hundred yards until we came to what I later called the “trash plateau”. A giant mound of elevated trash in the middle of the dump, large enough for eighty people to stand on top of it. This plateau provided a view of the dump, and as my head swiveled around, I found trash in every direction, vultures overhead, and more dead animals.

Our group gathered in a circle, and I found myself next to Dillon Petrarca, Steve Woodson, and my brother Tucker. I gazed down in front of my feet to find a jawbone; I was in fact, standing in animal remains for this period of time. Our guide Luke spoke about the dump, and another leader named Daniel shared his testimony as well. Daniel was born into poverty in Peru, and was saved by missionaries who came to his neighborhood.

After our sermon on the mount was finished, Luke asked us to group together and pray like we have never prayed before; to ask the Holy Spirit how we can learn from this experience; to pray for IncaLink and their leaders; and to pray for everybody in poverty that has not been reached with the irresistible love of Christ Jesus. I formed a tight circle with Dillon, Steve, and Tucker, and we began to pray. The Holy Spirit broke my heart during prayer for all that was around me that breaks His heart every day. As I struggled to get my thoughts out through tears, I contemplated my life and my circumstances. I prayed something along the lines of, “Why am I here right now? Why do I deserve to stand here, fully clothed with shoes on my feet, in a place where people lay down to sleep among feces and rotting carcasses, barely clothed, just hoping that if they wake up they will be able to find another meal? What are you trying to teach me, Lord?” I was truly made aware of how blessed we all are to have the circumstances we are given. I prayed that the people living in dumps like these can find Jesus, whether it is through missionaries reaching out, or the Lord putting events in place that allow them to know Him.

After the most powerful, most Spirit-filled prayer I have ever been a part of, song lyrics popped in to my head. The song is called “My own Little World”, by Matthew West. The opening words are, “In my own little world it hardly ever rains. I’ve never gone hungry, always felt safe. I got money in my pocket, shoes on my feet. In my own little world, population: me”. This was exactly how I felt while inside of the dump. I had been living in my own little world, completely neglecting the drastic need for missionary work around me. I encourage you, whoever you may be, to listen to this song intently and dwell on the lyrics. This song applies to all our lives because it explains how our own little world that we live in— is not about us; there is a bigger picture. There are other people, created by the Lord as masterpieces, who are living the worst lives that a human being can possibly experience. But live in poverty isn’t only experienced by the ones who live in a dump, as our guide Luke said; there are people in our own communities who don’t know the Lord, and as Caren Darrow said, their souls are in this dump, and how much worse is it if we do not reach out to them!

When we reach out to people, we expand our own little world, and by just reaching one soul, as the song says, we are in our “own little world there’s population: two”. After our prayer, we re-grouped for a worship song, and slowly began to head out of the dump. My life was changed forever inside of that dump, and I pray that although I have left and returned from Peru, I will always be able to look back and feel the emotions and the life-change that I experienced there.