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LIFESTYLE

CENTRAL FLORIDA'S PREMIER COMMUNITY MAGAZINE

JULY 2009

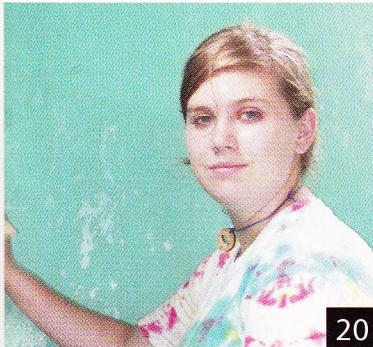
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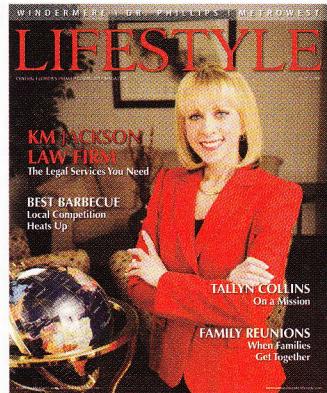
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Florida Magazine Association





On a Mission

Dr. Phillips teen **Tallyn Collins** is hooked on missions—the joy that comes from selflessly helping others as well as the life-altering experiences that come with it.

By Matt Bendell

For Dr. Phillips High School student **Tallyn Collins**, what she experienced on a mission trip last summer to Jamaica with her youth group at St. Luke's Methodist Church of Windermere, was truly life changing—not only for her, but also for the many children and families she served.

Of all the high school activities that encompass Tallyn's everyday life (including theater, acting, dancing and time spent with friends) mission work is perhaps the activity she enjoys the most. An active participant in her youth group, she says going on a mission has been a longtime interest for her, and the opportunity to serve on a mission team was a challenge she just couldn't refuse.

The trip to Jamaica was Tallyn's sec-

ond mission trip. She went to Mississippi her freshman year to help with hurricane clean-up, and since then, she has developed the desire to go farther from home and experience different cultures. "When I heard about the opportunity to go to Jamaica from the youth director at my church, I just knew it was something I wanted to be a part of," she says.

"We're surrounded by ways to help others and give back to our community, both locally and beyond," her mom **Jean** explains. "Sometimes the hardest part is choosing what we can do that utilizes our talents and gifts."

A Flexible Plan

The process involved in going on a mission is not a quick one. It involves months of meetings, preparation, fundraising activities

and the prayerful support of parents, friends and church members. Tallyn's mission team was made up of eight girls and three adults. The team partnered with the Lauriston/Davistown United Church, located in a very poor part of Jamaica, about a 45 minute drive from Ocho Rios.

The group planned to lead a Vacation Bible School (VBS) for children in Lauriston in the mornings and then paint the church's community center in the afternoons. "We were prepared to make any necessary changes in our schedule," Tallyn explains. "Our purpose was to serve God by serving others."

For many of the kids in attendance at the VBS, reading stories, singing songs, doing arts and crafts and playing games were among their favorite activities. Tallyn recalls how the first day of VBS the curriculum changed after

meeting the kids. "We just realized the kids needed love," she recalls. "We sat with them awhile to make their own nametags and read stories and played games."

A Different Culture

Each day following VBS, the team ate lunch with the kids and then sent them home. "No matter their age, in Jamaica, it's the child's responsibility to get home, and many of them would walk," Tallyn says. "It was much different than in the United States with all the rules and regulations we have in place."

Although culture shock was never really an issue, team members were surprised to see the level of excitement that the children expressed. "Just to see the joy the kids had—the huge smiles on their faces—it was just amazing," says Tallyn. "They were so happy with the little that they had in life, and it was truly life changing for me to see what really made them happy."

Keeping a detailed journal of all the activities and experiences of her trip, Tallyn shares how she and Shanique, age 11, and her brother Jaydon, who was 2, formed a special bond during the mission trip. "Shanique said she lived with her grandma, and she had a television that she got to watch sometimes, and thinking about that made me realize how much I take for granted," says Tallyn.

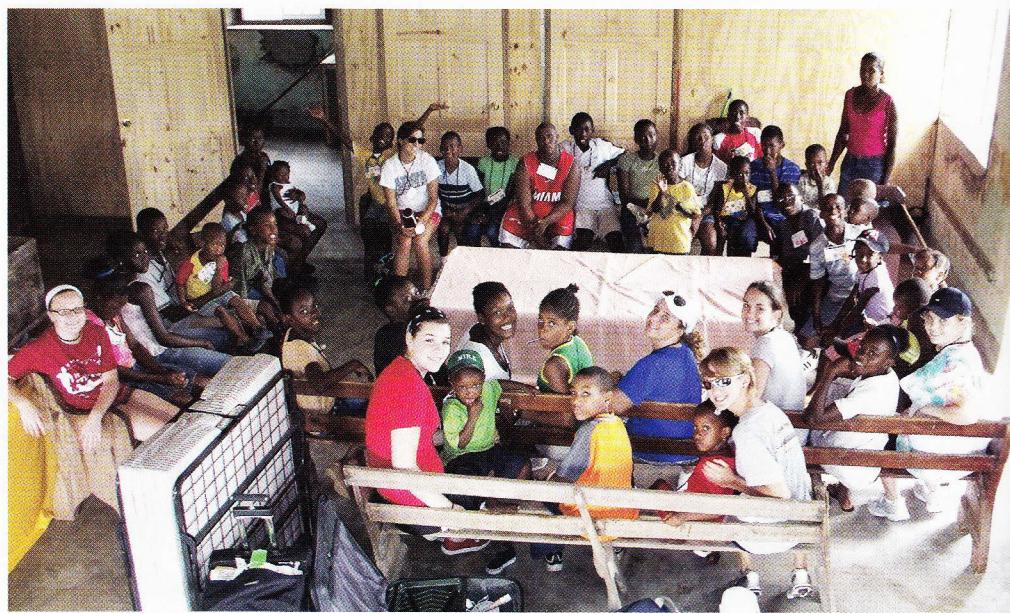
"Before I left, she gave me a note, a bracelet that she had made herself and one of her hairclips," Tallyn recalls. She says she was touched by Shanique's gesture of friendship, knowing that, of what little she had, Shanique gave her some of her own personal belongings as a remembrance of their time together.

"I tried hard to hold the tears back for her, and it was one of the hardest things I had to do," Tallyn says. "When it came time for the end of the trip, I just didn't want to leave—leave the kids, the church, Jamaica, everything."

Coming Home Changed

Tallyn recognized the lasting impact her experiences in Jamaica had on her the moment she returned to Central Florida. "On the way home from the airport, I had tears rolling down my cheeks," she recalls. "Some people just don't understand how spoiled we are living in the U.S., especially in Orlando with all the opportunities we have."

Tallyn says God really changed her while she was in Jamaica: "He really opened my eyes to see the happiness in other people. It



In Jamaica, members of the youth group from St. Luke's Methodist in Windermere spent time with local kids during Vacation Bible School.



On her second mission trip, Tallyn Collins helped paint Lauriston/Davistown United Church's community center.

doesn't have to deal with materialistic happiness, just pure genuine happiness—being content with life."

Tallyn's parents couldn't be more proud of their daughter and the sincerity she expresses in helping others. "We're so happy to see Tallyn finding her 'fit' at such an early age," Jean says. "It seems to us that, when someone finds that fit, they find a special joy in life that only comes with giving."

Although her trip to Jamaica left a lasting impression on her life, Tallyn says she's already making more plans to continue serving others in need. This summer, she'll be heading off to a mission training camp in Alabama. "I am very proud of Tallyn for stepping out of her comfort zone and into a world which most people never get to experience," says her father **Gary**. "It is truly from her heart that she is driven." **L**

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