**Wednesday, November 31, 2011**

After finally setting a date to come in to the shelter at night to do volunteer work, McKenzie, Joey Dei Rossi (one of two new members to the group), and I hopped on the bus to the homeless shelter. My two partners and Tyler had already gone once to log their service hours; however, they were turned away when they showed up to the shelter because other individuals had already come to do the same thing. Today was different though. This time we received an email from Della confirming available time slot to come and volunteer. We knew we could get in.

When we got off the bus and walked into the shelter’s parking lot, I drew back in order to force either Joey or McKenzie to take the lead. I was afraid and couldn’t even lead a couple of fellow students into a homeless shelter. Thankfully, McKenzie stepped up. He was our trio’s outspoken member. He walked in front of us and let our presence be known to the staff in charge. Contrary to our original belief that Della had instilled in us, we were not expected, but we were accepted all the same. We each filled out a release form, put on some food handling gloves, and set to work. For our first task, we served hot food to the women and children. They formed a line while I scooped some kind of meat, McKenzie placed potatoes, and Joey dished out salad and, what we originally believed to be, cornbread onto each plate. We passed the plate in our own hands to each other so that the client received it everything was put on. We continued to do this until everyone in line was satisfied. We did this without any problems.

All these clients eventually headed off to the overflow shelter and we headed to a table with a plate of food we had been permitted to eat. For fifteen or so minutes the place was practically deserted save for our trio and one staff member (another had been there previously, but he left to take the clients to the overflow shelter). We ate our food (not that great) and admired the picture of the actual lady, Maxine Lewis, which adorned the back wall of the fishbowl room. This was merely the calm before the storm.

The real fun began when the men showed up. The first group totally about 30, but this bunch had about 100 hungry individuals. They formed a line and the process started again. Only, this time, we did it without McKenzie. He had switched positions to take over the part of office worker who had to hand out toiletries and such to clients. This did not make me very happy. I had to start pulling double duty with the meat and the potatoes. While this may seem like an impossible feat, I still dominated the task.

The men were more outgoing and engaging and most exchanged some kind of greeting or gratitude. A few even playfully criticized my potato portioning. I gave too much to some, not enough to others. The potatoes were tricky because I never knew how much we had left (I think we started with three pans each of potatoes and meat). These pans were kept in an insulator to keep them warm so I couldn’t make out quantities available. Once we ran out of an item, we had to exchange it for one that was in the insulator. The first time we ran out of meat, I set the empty pan aside and reached for another pan in the insulator. It was very hot. Thankfully, the men were nice and knowledgeable enough to point me in the direction of the oven mitts. I reached in, oven mitts on, and pulled the meat. This didn’t come without a price, however. A few droplets of hot juice from the entrée found shelter on my sweatshirt sleeve leaving a permanent stain on my most-used jacket. However, this sweatshirt was getting old and I knew I might get dirty at the shelter (I knew what I and my sweatshirt were in for), so I did not cry. I picked myself up and moved on to the bigger and more important issues at hand.

Once everyone had gone through the line once, many came back for seconds so we loaded them up. Then, a few came back for thirds. A couple might’ve come back for fourths, but I stopped counting. After it all, we only had half a pan of meat, lots of salad, and a few pieces of cake (not cornbread as we had originally hypothesized). With these, we built three grab-n-go plates for any late comers.

Next, Bud, an older man who worked at the shelter, usually at night, drove the three of us to the overflow shelter where the women and children were staying. Each week, a different church hosted the shelter. The current host had beds set up all along their multipurpose room and a lounge/kitchen area set up in the foyer. This viewing gave us a good idea of what the overflow provided: more space, nicer conditions, and a safe place for families.

We then returned to the main shelter on Orcutt, handed out some bedding, got our service hours signed off on, walked to the bus stop, and made it home.