

# Kristen S

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## Interviewer

As per your consent form, we will be using your first name and last initial during the interview. Will you please state and spell your first name and last initial?

## Kristen S

Kristen S K R I S T E N and S.

## Interviewer

Thank you so much. So, can you tell me when and where you were born and a little bit about your childhood?

## Kristen S

I was born in Tampa, Florida, United States. I was born in 2000 in June, so that's when I was born - and a little bit about my childhood. I feel like looking back on my life, I've been through a lot of different - what I say like different religious schooling or education, so like when I was in preschool, I went to a Jewish preschool, and that was fun, and then I transferred to like a Lutheran, like, kindergarten, first grade, second grade and then I went to Adventist school for a while, and then I finished off my schooling at like a Baptist place. So a lot of different, like - what can I say? Just a lot of different cultures I feel like I was exposed to - not cultures per se, but different, like, religious beliefs I definitely was, you know, around, and so that was fun for me. I have two sisters. I'm a middle child. Me and my older sister - two years apart, and we were really close growing up, and my younger sister Megan was born five years after me. And so she was a little bit behind when we were in, like, growing up and stuff. But as we got older, we got really close, and now she's actually here at Southern, and I'm so excited. She's a freshman. She's just enjoying life. Yeah...

## Interviewer

All right. Thank you so much. Okay, so you talked a little bit about how you kind of went through a bunch of different denominations for your schooling, right? So, did your parents raise you in a religious home, and did they choose these schools on purpose?

## Kristen S

They did. They had an intention to bring me up in a place that put God first, I think, and I thought that was really helpful for me growing up because I just - I've never been to public school, although my younger sister has, like for a while, she did go to public school, but you know, my, my family is pretty religious. My mom, I would consider her a quote-unquote, "Super seven" if you know what that is, like - No? Okay, maybe that's an older term, but just someone a very, very adamant about, like, the beliefs in the SDA faith, and she, you know, cooks her own granola, you know, but, you know, she - she was very, you know, she was more strict on, like,

the Sabbath rules and all that stuff. I know everyone has different beliefs about that. But um, you know, I always knew that at the end of the day, I came home to like an Adventist Home and so like, no matter where I went for like my schooling or my friends, whatever they believe, like, I knew that, like, my grounding was, like, very SDA. So that was nice for me, my parents were very good about that.

**Interviewer**

Interesting. So it must have been interesting to, like, represent SDA -

**Kristen S**

yeah,

**Interviewer**

- beliefs at these schools, right? Can you tell me about that?

**Kristen S**

Yeah, that, um, there were definitely some times some like situations where I know like, my sister - not my sister, um, my friends would host birthday parties on Friday nights and stuff and like, my mom was like, I don't feel comfortable with you going to that and that's, like, as a sixth grader, I was like, not gonna say no or anything. I was like, "Okay," so—and that happened multiple times, you know, and after a while, like people started to like, treat me a little bit differently because they were like, "Oh, that's the weird religious girl," you know, like, "she can't do stuff on Friday nights," and like, all of my friends now that I grew up with, they all drink and stuff and, like, party and I don't really do any of that. So, that's, like, kind of the differences like I never grew up in, like—I didn't go to like Adventist Academy after, like, sixth grade, right? So, like, I feel like before then, like, kids don't really care about, like, your religious beliefs. They're just kind of like, "Oh, we're in the same classroom, let's be friends," but as soon as you get to, like, hit, like, puberty and beyond, I feel like they start to become a little bit more picky. But at least that's how I experienced it, but yeah...

**Interviewer**

So you mentioned your mom a little bit. Can you tell me a little bit more about your parents and what they did?

**Kristen S**

Um, my mom was an anesthesiologist, and my dad is a pathologist, so they both went through Southern - actually, they met here, and then they went to Loma Linda together, and they got married after med school, and to pay for med school, they both went through the army, and they both got stationed at Walter Reed...? No, actually, first they went to Mayo, and they actually both got in, which is kind of crazy. And then after Mayo, they went to Walter Reed in Maryland, and they served there until their time was up, I guess, with the army, and then my dad got a job in Florida, and we just kind of stayed there ever since. So, I don't know, like, looking back. It just seems like a very stable childhood, which I'm very grateful for because I know not many people have that - or like, I don't think that it's, like, as common as it should be, sadly, and anyways, I'm

very grateful for my parents and then like they've provided, like, pretty much everything for me my whole life. I've never had to, like, worry about things like that, but - and... yeah, they're very wonderful people, I think. My - my dad's really funny, and he has a really great sense of humor, but he's a little bit more, like, slower-paced in life, and my mom was always, like, rushing around doing things like she always has, like, 1000 things to do on her to-do list but, like, she likes it that way, though. She's just very like, you know, always busy with their hands, like, she won't even sit down and watch a movie without, like, sewing or something, you know. So, that's my parents...

### **Interviewer**

Yeah, they sound awesome. And so that must have been a great - sort of - group of people to look up to, I think, yeah, so what did you want to be when you grew up when you were a child?

### **Kristen S**

Well, my parents were always like, "You know, you can do whatever you want," which is good, but I remember this, like, really strange memory when I was nine - eight? Eight or nine, we're all sitting at the dinner table or something, parents were talking, and I get like a piece of paper out, and I start drawing with, like, colored pencils and stuff. And I have - I have this picture still, and I look back, and I was, like, wow, that's actually kind of good, like, dang-like, I don't know if I can do that now. But, I drew this, like, cheetah, or something on the Sahara and, like-just, like, trees and stuff. It looked very, like, you know, African vibes and stuff, and, like, my dad looked over, and he was like, "That was really good, Kristin, like, you should be a dentist," and I was like, "So weird," like, not an artist or anything, he's like, "You should be a dentist," and I think-obviously he was like trying to implant like little seeds and stuff - and job security, whatever - but yeah, and I was like, oh, okay, and then so I thought about it, and then I think later on - or maybe it was before, I can't remember; I had a dental accident when I was, like, nine years old, I was staying at - over a friend's house and his - her brother was being kind of like, I don't even know, like, what-machisto is not even the right word. But, like, he kind of wanted to, like, assert dominance, I guess, over, like... I don't know. We were kind of, like, bickering, and so he, like, took a broom pole and, like, threw it at my face, and I don't think he was, like, intending to hurt me, but he did, and he ended up, like, knocking on my two front teeth - and they were permanent. So, like, it was like a horrible accident, like, "Oh my gosh, like, what are we going to do?" We went to, like, the emergency room. Of course, my dad was out of town, and, like, it was, like, midnight, and the thing is with, like, teeth, like, if you don't get them back in at a certain time, they won't re-implant. So... that was a thing. Thankfully, we called up a dental surgeon, literally, at midnight, you know, like, doc - dentists don't do, like, on-call stuff hardly ever, like, they're always you know, like nine to five or even less like, they do, like, the bare minimum, like - no, not really, not really - not really but, like, some of them only work four days a week. You know, it's really chill, like-but this guy came in like eleven/twelve at night - opened up his office, and he basically, like, fixed my teeth for me, as a nine-year-old, and he was so nice about it, and it was basically very painless when he did it. It was really, really painful when I went to the ER because, they don't know what they're doing when it comes to, like, dental work. They're more like, you know, like, whole body, like, medical stuff. But, anyways, so that experience was, like, wow, like, that dentist really, like, made a difference in my life, and like, I was like, holy crap, like,

I want to be like that. I want to be the person that, like, goes the extra mile and opens up their office at midnight for someone that really needs it. And you know, obviously, that wasn't, like, the end of the story, for, like, my dental journey that - it's gone through, like 10 plus years of like countless appointments, exams, like, I had orthodontia, I had like a root canal, I have, like, implants, like, it's literally crazy, like, so - so much went into it after that, and I just, like, spent, like, countless hours in the chair just, like, I hate this, but here I am studying to be a dentist!

**Interviewer**

Okay, yeah, yeah. Interesting. Okay, so yeah, you said that you're studying to be a dentist. So, can you tell me about your major and your planned career path?

**Kristen S**

Um, my major; I'm studying biology right now. I'm a senior, and so I only have a... semester and a half left, I guess. I graduate in May, and I took my DHT this summer, I applied. So, I'm just waiting to hear back from some dental schools, and we'll see where God leads, honestly. And that's the plan: just get into dental school and then go from there.

**Interviewer**

Right, that's super exciting! Um, so can you tell me a little bit more about any personal interests or passions that you have?

**Kristen S**

Personal interests and passions? I love mission work. I love service, I think it's something that my mom kind of ingrained in me as a child. She made me and my sisters play, like, stringed instruments. I don't know if you ever had, like, parents that, like, paid for lessons and everything, and you go to the lessons once a week. You're like, "Mom, I don't want to play - I don't want to practice," and you know, she makes you practice and stuff. I'm really glad that she encouraged that in my life because, like, the musicality has brought in, like—I love music, too. I don't know if I mentioned that - but I play the cello and the piano, and I like, I like - I like picking up different instruments as well, but obviously not a professional at that, but, you know, like, having our family have, like, a little string quartet together has been really nice. Like, I play the cello, my sisters play the violin, my mom picked up the viola - and so we play for church like every time we're home. When I was in high school, we would go out to hospice centers, like, pretty much every week or every other week, or, like, nursing homes, and we just, like, put together programs, like Christmas programs, and giving programs - those programs, and we just play for them and it was really - really, really cool to see like the older people - I don't know I have a passion for like older people because they're so cute. Um, and, like—also, my grandmother lived with us for a while. So, like, I know what it's like to have, like, an older person living with you, and their capabilities are, like, a little bit lower than what they used to be, and so dealing with that and making accommodations for them; I think it's a beautiful thing to be able to care for someone who can't take care of themselves as much, or provide some sort of comfort. So, yeah, like, service and then coming here and being able to do student mission work has been amazing. I love music as a passion - I love, like, ceramics I've been in ceramics pretty much

every year here and, like, making pots and stuff. I don't know why those are, like—you know, I haven't perfected it yet, but we're getting there.

### **Interviewer**

Yeah, so cool. I bet that's, like, kind of a useful skill for dentistry. Right, okay, interesting. All right, so you talked a little bit about, like, your diverse educational background and religion—in regards to religion, and you also talked about being raised in a religious conflict. Can you tell me a little bit more about your walk with Jesus from your childhood to now?

### **Kristen S**

My walk with Jesus... so, as I mentioned before; because I had that like really bad accident when I was nine - I feel like maybe this just is, like, my own concept or my own theory, but, like, when you go through something tough that, like, makes you rely on God a lot more, or it has the opportunity for you to rely on God that much more. And so, thankfully, my mom always encouraged, like, having my own devotional, and we would always have like, worships and stuff Friday nights and Saturday nights, and so I - I was exposed to God in that way, which I am very grateful for because some people aren't and, like, they have to find out different ways. But thankfully, like, my mom has always, like, prayed with me, she's always, like, showed me what a good example of a Christian looks like. And so, when I was going through all this tough stuff, especially because, like, there was a point in my life where I literally did not have a tooth, it was literally - this one was literally gone, there was nothing. I was like 13 or 14 going through, like, middle school and a school I just changed to in the middle of the year, which is like really bad. I was having a lot of, like, self-esteem issues. I would, like, feel really bad about my body image, like - and on top of that, I didn't even have like a tooth, like, I felt like a pirate, like, what am I doing here? So I'm like, just having all those, like, thoughts. Like, really, like, I just started reading my Bible, I started reading James, and I was just, like, "Okay, that's great," and I read through, like, most of the Old or the New Testament, and I saw this like—I remember getting baptized when I was 11, but I don't think I really understood what I was doing. I remember literally, like, being like, "Okay, if I remember this phrase that, like, God, 'Jesus has saved me by His blood,' I'll just say that when, like, the Judgment Day comes after I die, and I'd be good to go," like, that was my thought. process. I was like, "Oh, that makes sense," but then, like, as I went on, I don't think I actually fully understood that - maybe I still don't honestly, it's a mystery. Like it's, it's something that we're going to be, like, studying for the rest of eternity, but - I didn't start to understand more until I was like 14, and I was like, "I need to actually, like, rely on God like this..." So, I would say that my actual journey with God started when I was 14, and it just kept going from there, like, reading my Bible, actually praying. It took a while for me to be able to translate that into school. Does that make sense? Like, it's one thing to have a devotion at home and feel the presence of God, but then actually being like, okay, now I have to go to school, and not just leave God at home. So I distinctly remember a day where I went to school, and I was like, "I'm gonna, like, put God first today, and I'm gonna, like, keep his presence around me and invite him with me," and that was, like, an amazing day. It was an incredible day. I don't know why, like, literally nothing else changed. It was like the most normal day ever, but I just felt so much peace, and so much like, like - things were happening around me. I was like, "whatever." You know, like, friends were talking bad, friends were gossiping, it was like, it doesn't

matter to me. Yeah. So... like that - that's the kind of, like, peace I want to carry with me through every day. Obviously, it doesn't happen like that all the time, but like, being able to translate the devotions into, like, throughout every single point of your day is something that, like, I'm just still trying to work on. But yeah...

### **Interviewer**

Interesting, okay, so you talked a little bit about your passion for service and your desire to become a missionary, right? But can you tell me a little bit more about why you decided to become a missionary at Southern - did you come here knowing that you were going to go as a student missionary?

### **Kristen S**

No, my parents had not gone on missions years at all. Like - they - my dad had just done four years and then straight to med school. Actually, that's not true; he did - he did do a year, but it wasn't abroad or anything. It was a - what do you call it? Like, task force almost... but I don't even think he went through like a missionary program. He lived—he just took a year off to teach at, what was it... Highland Academy, I think, in Tennessee. So he was teaching like all the science classes there, but in my mind, that never registered as, like, a missionary because for me missionary when I was a kid—obviously now, I don't think so, but, like, when I was a kid missionary meant like going to the jungles or like, you know, Africa or like, some native tribe - anywhere, you know, that's—that's what, like, I think because like that's the stories that you get fed as a child, obviously now like, mission work can be everything, you know, mission work is like going to school and stuff like that. But yeah, so I guess I guess he didn't do that, but it didn't inspire me, that—that didn't inspire me to be a mission—student missionary because his experience is just vastly different from mine. And my mom... she went to Austria, but that was more like a, like study abroad sort of thing, you know, so I actually came here, not thinking that, I mean, it wasn't even like I wasn't thinking about it, you know, like, student missions was not anything that I was like concerned about until the Vespers that we had my freshman year. And I was like, "Whoa," you know, like, there was some sort of like fire, like, that—like, God had made it in my heart, and I was like, "I need to go like this is what I meant to do," but at the same time, I think when I was little—Sorry, I'm talking a lot, but when I was little, I had, like - my grandparents were missionaries, and my grandma, my grandma's mom, and that whole family, they actually were in the Philippines as missionaries when World War Two happened and the Japanese came and took over the island while they were there. And that was pretty bad because, like, they were like running from them for a while until they finally were like, "It's either they're gonna kill us or we should surrender." So they surrendered, and they stayed in an internment camp for, like, years while my grandma was growing up, and so I heard a lot of stories like that growing up. I was like, that's crazy. So I was like, I think part of me, I always wanted to be like a missionary, I think that, like, it was a very appealing, like, dream for me as a kid, but I kind of forgot it as I got older. And I started to focus more on, like, realistic dreams and being like, "I'm in America," you know, like, I need to, like, pick a career and stuff. So I started focusing more on, like, dentistry, and what that path would hold for me. But yeah...

### **Interviewer**

All right, so, what organization did you serve as a missionary under, and can you tell me where you were stationed and what your role was there?

**Kristen S**

Um, I was stationed under Familia Feliz. I don't think there's an organization above it, but I think it's related or, like, connected to... what is it called... Global Ministries. Do you know what I'm talking about? No... okay. Um, I think it's called Global Ministries, but it's not really, like—I think that's just how people donate. But, anyways, yeah, it's just like its own specific entity; it relies basically just on donations through people like there's literally no other income that keeps it running, except for, like, literally God's grace. So it's in Bolivia, it's in this really small town called Rurrenabaque which is, like, in like a very tropical part of Bolivia, and we're about 13 kilometers from the nearest town, which is Rurrenabaque, but we're kind of like out there in the jungles, and it's a really great place, I think, yeah. Wait, is that—did I answer your question?

**Interviewer**

Well, yeah... Can you tell me what role you served at Familia Feliz?

**Kristen S**

Um, at Familia Feliz, I think anyone who goes there knows that it's not just like a one-job deal. Okay. Now, like when you go there, you're going to be asked to do all sorts of different things and probably multiple things at once. And you're gonna have to be, like, very flexible. Having your plans changed, like, flip-flopped on you lots. So when I first got there, I was a house assistant, which is really nice because I didn't really know the language very well. I had spent that summer in Spain doing ACA stuff, which is really fun, but it was really also good because I was trying to study the, like, grammar and the syntax and, like, actually reading it to be able to, like, understand more and be better or be more proficient at Spanish, when I went to Bolivia. When I actually got there, it was like just completely different than - than Spain, obviously, like, different countries. And even though like the continent—or is, like, Spanish, very different Spanish, like, very different, and the accent... and so I just felt very lost in terms of, like, I can't even connect with these people because I can't talk with them, and so it was good that I had a very, like - like, lower responsibility job. So a house assistant basically just, like, helps out with the house and, like—but they're not, like, in charge of anything. So, like, you just, basically, go to the house, parent, and they're basically the head honcho of that house.

**Interviewer**

Okay, so you're saying house assistant, house parents, so what purpose does Familia Feliz serve?

**Kristen S**

So, um, throughout the years, I think the purpose has kind of changed depending on the director that it's had. Okay, so the woman that started this, she lives in Canada, and she heard about the story of this Bolivian boy and, you know, someone wrote about it, and she was so convinced about, like, that was her calling like she needed to go down there, and like—to start an orphanage...

**Interviewer**

Oh, yeah, okay.

**Kristen S**

Kinda. So, she went down there. She actually bought this huge pot of land—And... huge land, and they started from nothing. I think they were literally just, like, in tents and tarps. Right? Like no, no water—no running water, no, like, plumbing or anything, and she just started there, and maybe I'm like telling the story wrong; not doing it justice, but she just kind of like grew it up from, like, the ground up, like, they started, like... she made a school, like—they built a school, like, they built, like, houses and suddenly had this big house. And her parents came and helped with it, and she just started adopting all these children. And it's like this amazing story of like, wow, like, literally—I don't know, like, how she did it, but I think one of the main problems that she was trying to combat was that children were not being treated the way that they should be by their parents or their relatives. And so she wanted to make a safe space for them to, like, come and live apart from, like, the abusive household that they were growing up in. So that was, I think, the goal; she's told me herself—it's more, like, to have specific families on campus. She really wants house parents that are stable and, like, permanent to raise up, like, these children so that they feel like they have a home. Even when their, like, actual home that, like, biological home is falling apart or, like, is abusive in many different ways. And so that's her vision for Familia Feliz. She was in charge of Familia Feliz for a hot minute until, like, from 2006 to like 2013... somewhere in there. And there was some - some disagreements, I think, she left, and then another director came and took care of it, and then, at that point, they turned it more into like a school. And at that point, like more of the community kids would just come in and like they have day school, and then they would leave. But a year before I went there, she came back, and then the other director left, and so now it's more like family-based, oriented, and stuff. So it's not as, like, school-based, if that makes sense. So yeah, the answer that you're looking for is it depends on the director. Right now, it's definitely more like an orphanage type - or orphanage/like, school type of organization. And right... so anyways, going back to the house assistant, the house assistant just helps out with the house, and, like, the kids would basically, like, be grouped based on, like, how old they were, and their gender. So we have, like, a little girls' house and big girls' house. And with each house, you have a house assistant, and hopefully two house parents like a man and a woman who are married... they have to be married actually and they - they, like, run their own house as if it was, like, their own family so...

**Interviewer**

Interesting.

**Kristen S**

So, there's like a little boys' house and a big boys' house, and so I was house assistant my first semester, then there was a lot of kind of, like, turnover and, like, weird things happening in terms of just, like, house parents and stuff. Half of the house parents left, and then their daughter came in and, like, took over for them. So I was like, "Oh, thank goodness, I'm not a house parent," but then she left, and so then I was like, "Okay, well then I have to lead the



house.” So right around October, or like the end of September, I've been there for like maybe a month and a half, right? I was kind of just, like, put in the role of being a house parent, which was like something, looking back on, I was like—I don't think I was ready for, but it definitely grew me up a lot. And so then I was a house parent, at the same time, I was also teaching art at school and fundraising. I think that was my main job; was, like, a fundraiser. I was a house—house-parent, house assistant, and I was a teacher. Second semester, I was teaching for all of the girls in sixth grade.

**Interviewer**

Wow.

**Kristen S**

Like the girls. So yeah...

**Interviewer**

So, a lot of hats, too...

**Kristen S**

Yeah, it was okay.

**Interviewer**

So, you were there for a full year. Right?

**Kristen S**

Yeah. Well, like a full school year.

**Interviewer**

Right. Okay, all right. Could you describe an average day in your life?

**Kristen S**

Yeah, um, average day... so I would wake up to the sounds of, like, these, like, terrible squawking birds, but I grew accustomed to them. They're kind of fun at this point, but you know, they have these like birds that are, like, very loud in the mornings. We just kind of wake up, and it's like, it's really nice, honestly. And then also we've got, like, kids yelling and screaming. So that's fun. And when you wake up depends on, like, the house that I was in, because, like, as a house parent, my role—my day looked different than when I was a house assistant. But, I just didn't realize it. I wake up. Breakfast, obviously, we have a devotional before or after breakfast. And then the kids would be up to school. Most of the kids would go to school, but some of the younger ones would stay with us because they were too young to go to school. So, someone would usually stay home and make lunch and watch the little kids while the older kids went to school. And usually, like, there were two or three, like, adults in that house that were, like, taking care of it. Usually, a couple of them would just go off to school to teach, so you're, like, traveling with the kids to school and coming back home for lunch. After lunch, we would have different chores then we would, like, have a time where we'd go to the river and wash clothes or just play.

It'd be homework time, and... what else did we do? Then one of us would make dinner, and then we'd have dinner, and make sure, like, everything is, like, done for the day, and then we'd, like, have devotional and go to sleep. So it's pretty simple. It's pretty simple. Like... yeah.

**Interviewer**

It sounds like a lot of fun. So, could you tell me, like, some of the best and most difficult parts while being there?

**Kristen S**

Um, the best part was definitely getting to connect with the kids. I'm sure everyone says that, but it's true. Like, that's the whole point, you know? Like, if I had done everything that I did without the connection, I think I would have been really disappointed with the experience. But literally, that's what I mean that's what, like—life is for anyways, is for connection... with people. And I mean the SM year is different, like... to be able to, like, talk with someone and, like, really see them for who they are is just so beautiful. And yeah, I was, like—I was definitely wanting to, like—the best part is, like, even, like, having someone in your mind, like, change from being someone that, like, maybe you were a little bit distrustful at first or, like, you had some, like, preconceptions of them that, like, maybe you weren't, like, stellar and then, like - like, sticking with them and, like, being - being there for them when they are going through it. And like, having that, like, mindset change, like, “Oh, this person is actually not like what I thought they were...they're actually just, like, struggling with this.” And being able to be, like, wow, actually, they have so many amazing sides to them as well. And so, like, I love being able to, like, be there for that and help these kids out when they needed, like, a shoulder to cry on.

**Interviewer**

Very sweet. So, did these kids—did they speak English? Or did you learn the language while you were there?

**Kristen S**

None of them spoke English except for adopted kids.

**Interviewer**

Okay...

**Kristen S**

And so, all of her kids, but I was with... none of them. So it was all Spanish, which they used against me sometimes.

**Interviewer**

Interesting.

**Kristen S**

Yeah, but you know what, English was really handy to have, too, because then I could talk to, like, the other house parents, and they would have no clue what I'm saying. So, I could be like, "That girl over there is being a real pain today," but they would never know, right? So you'd, like, discuss how to discipline her or something, like, just, like, "What should we do?"

**Interviewer**

But were they learning English in school at all?

**Kristen S**

Yeah, they had an English class.

**Interviewer**

Okay.

**Kristen S**

Yeah, um, but I don't think they took it very seriously. They didn't really know what you're saying any of the time. Obviously, it's different taking, like, a class versus being—or, like, listening to a fluid conversation. So different, like, I know that I took Spanish classes in high school; didn't really help me when I went to Bolivia.

**Interviewer**

Yeah, interesting, okay, and I think I interrupted you. So, did you mention the most difficult parts?

**Kristen S**

Yes. The difficult parts, definitely... I think leaving - leaving was difficult. Especially, I mean, obviously, I think in every student missionary experience, you're gonna have, leaving is really hard because you've formed those connections. But I think especially with Bolivia, these kids... like, if you weren't there, like, who would be taking care of them, actually, like, when I was there, like, my house went through two different house parent sets before it got to me, and it was, like, all within, like, a month and a half. Like, I was basically the backup, and I ended up in a position where, like, I was like, "Bro, like, I need to be, like, trained for this." You know, it's like motherhood, and to be, like, their mother sort of, like, I don't even want to put myself in that position. But, like, I - I was there for them and, like, every single part of that, like, you know, like, I gave them bedtime kisses, and I read them stories and, like, I taught them, and I fed them, and I clothed them, and I bathed them, but, like, everything, you know, like especially like littler kids, the smaller kids to, like, be that parental figure in their life. And then, just, like, leaving is really hard, and it's not just because, "Oh, I'm leaving, and I'm going to miss them." It's like I'm leaving this gaping hole in their life, right? And like, of course, like, new SMs are going to try to come and try to fill it, but it's almost... it's like; it's kind of a sad prospect because it's, like, it's either this, like, where they're they have to constantly, like, you know, have a connection and bond with

their, like, house parents and, like, with the SMs that are coming, and then they're gonna leave and it's just like this constant, like, bonding and, like, ripping away, running away. So much so that, like, kids that have been there for, like, years, are very distrustful of new missionaries coming in because they're like, "You're just gonna leave," you know, like, "You don't care about us really." And it's, like, that—that's hard to do. So it's - it's not just that I'm gonna miss them, and of course I do, but it's also like, I feel bad. I feel bad for leaving them for saying, like, "Oh, yeah, like, I love you, and, like, you're great," and, like, to build them up and to be, like, a stand-in mom for a little bit and then to leave is like so sad. Because, like, these kids, I think for - for children in order to, like, feel loved, the presence even says a lot more than even just, like, words can, you know, like, to stay means I love you, right?

**Interviewer**

Right.

**Kristen S**

But all they've had their entire life is just people leaving, people leaving, and people leaving.

**Interviewer**

But the other option is just...

**Kristen S**

The other option is that, like, they stay—they don't have a home. Some of them don't have a home. Some of them don't have, like, parents that take care of them, or they have a very abusive family. So it's like either—this is, like, I guess, the better of two evils, I suppose. But yeah, that would—that's the hardest part for me out of anything. Yeah...

**Interviewer**

Interesting, okay, yeah. So, you talked a little bit about how your roles there kind of changed very rapidly, and can you identify any people who were—who you consider essential to your success while you were there?

**Kristen S**

Essential? Oh, I would definitely say the other SMs who were with me were, like, really, really instrumental and, like, just mental sanity because, like, all day long, I would be speaking Spanish and feeling misunderstood. And especially, like, two little kids, like, they're not on the same, like, intellectual level yet, you know, they're literally, like, children. So their - their developmental stages are lower. So you have to, like, you talk to them as if they're children, right? But, like, to not be able to have, like, an adult conversation with anyone, and you're speaking Spanish, and, like, not in your native tongue. Like, all day long is, like, very taxing at the end of it. So we used to, like, meet up at night, like after the day was done, and we just talked about the day and talking about, like, how things went and, like, what then went down that stuff, and it was really great to, like, have that support system to, like, lean back on and like

all - all of us were like, just really close with each other, and so I'd definitely say that was essential.

**Interviewer**

Was there anybody else that you can identify as being important?

**Kristen S**

God? Yeah, yeah, for sure, God, I thought that was—I think it was like an understood for me, yeah. But there were so many times that God just, like, came in the most clutch, like, ever. He's just really; I don't think that you can make it through the year without him. I saw this video the other day, and this person was saying like, "God will not call you to something unless you have to rely on him for it," you know, I was like, "This kind of, like, facts," like, he won't call you to something that you will be sufficient by yourself in, and, like, you, like—because, the whole point of, like, being with God is that you, like, learn to be dependent on him, you know? Like, the second you say I don't need God, like, "I can do this by myself," is the second you're, like, stepping away from him and like you're trying to be, like, like a god. Does that make sense? It's kind of like I - I, you know, or, like, she's like, "Oh, I can be like God, like, I don't need him." And so that's the same—that's the same sort of deal. And so, like, whenever you're put into a position where you feel like, "Oh, like, I don't have all it takes, like, I literally have no clue what's going on," like, that's a perfect time for God to be, like, "But I do, and I'm going to show you how we're going to make this work." And so yeah, that was like my experience, like, every time there was like a tough situation, and I was, like, "God, what in the world do I do with this, like, kid in this situation? Like, I'm so lost, and it's different for every kid." You don't know what they're going through. Only God does. And I kid you not, every time I'm like, "God, what do I do," in that moment, He'd be like, "Do this." Like, maybe it wasn't a voice, but it was an idea. And I was like, "Okay," and then I would try it. It works, like, the kid would stop crying, or they'd be more respectful, and I was like, "Wow, this is insane." So yeah, anyway...

**Interviewer**

Very cool! So yeah, you're talking about, like, your relationship with God changing. Can you tell me a little bit more about that and how, maybe, your mission impacted your relationship with God even now?

**Kristen S**

Um, I think that the mission year definitely forced me to be, like, look more outwards instead of more inwards. I was actually kind of shocked when I came back after my student mission year; I was like, "Wow, I feel like this whole culture is so, like, inward-focused." Especially coming from, like, Bolivia, where I feel like that culture in itself is just very much more hospitable. I met so many people that, like, we're just willing to share their food or their house or, like, whatever they had with us, and I was like, "Bro, like, we're just, like, foreigners, like, why are you so nice to us?" But I'm definitely just, like, coming back. I've tried to, like, implement more of that service mindset: being willing to do whatever, like, I can to help people. Has been—has been a big difference for me in my life.

**Interviewer**

Okay, wow. So yeah, you said that it makes a big difference for you in your life now, right? So, can you tell me a little bit about, maybe, your impact on relationships with other people; so like friends or family?

**Kristen S**

Yeah, I definitely feel like I'm a lot more open to just, like, helping people, like - like, on the dime, like, they'll be like, "Hey, I need help with this," and, like, my immediate reaction is like, "I got you like, for sure I'll be there." And, like, not having to think twice about it. Like, I don't know if that's, like, healthy per se, but, like, I really do believe that, like, we're put on this earth to help each other, and I think that's just—yeah, like, being in relationships with other people. I want to, like, I aspire to put their needs above mine. Sometimes, obviously, there's like a healthy boundary, but, like, to be able to say, like, "Yeah, like, in this moment, I'm gonna, like, think about what you need right now." And I think that's, like, really important for people to come to realize. Yeah, absolutely. Like, for me, too. Yeah...

**Interviewer**

So while you were there, can you tell me a little bit about, maybe, your relationship with family back home—or friends?

**Kristen S**

It was really hard because there was, like, hardly any service over there, and, like, we only got one day off a week. And that was, like, the only time for people, and maybe their schedules didn't work out when I was free. And so, like, I couldn't really call people when I was on campus, which was horrible because that's when, like, I needed the support the most, so it was hard. It was hard for a little bit, but that's how I found a lot more support and community with, like, the other SMSs that were there because you didn't have to call them they're just, like, are there, so yeah.

**Interviewer**

So, you mentioned you had one day off, right? So, can you tell me a little bit, maybe, about the different activities or different things that you did down there? And, maybe can you identify, like, any sort of specific event or time there that kind of defined your experience as a student missionary?

**Kristen S**

I'm talking about my day off or like...

**Interviewer**

Either of them, yeah, just anything.

**Kristen S**

Well, the day off—the day offs, were, like, kind of nice. We just go into town, and we just, like, relax, do nothing.

## **Interviewer**

Really, okay.

## **Kristen S**

Because the whole week we're doing something, we're always busy. And this week, or the one, like, afternoon or morning off that we'd have, we'd go into town, and we just like lay in a hammock and fall asleep, or watch a movie. There was definitely some, like, restaurants that we always went to, like, there was a smoothie place that we always went to with my friends, and definitely some restaurants that were really yummy, and then we'd go back. That's pretty much - it was really nice, it was a good break. But I'm trying to think of, like, specific events that defined my mission year. There's definitely, like—we did some fun things, like, after we left, like I climbed the mountain, like, that was there. It's like 22,000 feet or something. I literally did not make it up, but I got up, like, I gotta say 2100 feet or something. So—but right there, I was afraid that I was literally going to become, like, what's the word, like, hypoxia or something? And so, like, my brain was gonna, like, die, so I was being very careful, and I didn't want to push myself too hard, but it was very fun. But in terms of, like, when I think of my - my student mission year, I think there's definitely—there was this one kid, she is—she was nine, so now she's 10—no, she was the 10. But while I was there, she loved, just, like, she's very, like—she loves hugs. She's always hugging you. And for some reason, she's always wet; I don't know why because, like, it's very hot there. So she always, like, puts water in her face, and it gets on her hair, shirt, and she's just like, very happy, very content and like, she is just, like, so cute. Um, and I would say she was always, like—I think she was she liked me, like, a lot more than the other kids. I don't know, like... anyways, but—so, she was always coming to me and, like, I realized that a lot of the things that she would do is because she's looking for attention, which comes from a lack of attention, obviously, from, like, her parents. And you know, it is really hard to give every kid the attention that they deserve and that they need because I'm taking care of, like, 15 kids at the same time. And like they're all misbehaving. So it's like, what? So it's always like dealing with this and this, but—I - it's, it is a privilege I love - I love doing that for them. But I'm one— there's actually multiple times with me, like, where she would just be crying and crying and crying and crying. And usually, it always started with some sort of like, comment, or - or like insinuation that she wasn't good enough. Either it was from her, like, classmates or peers or something because she was a really messy kid, you know, like, her shirts were always super messy, and, like, some of the older girls would get onto her for being, like, super messy and leaving because they were sharing a room, and that would kind of trigger her and like send her into a spiral. And so sometimes I would just be walking around, I see her like in the room just crying by herself. And I was like, “Oh my gosh, like I wanted to get this—I need to get her to stop crying because like she would cry for like an hour,” you know, like, I need to help her, but like nothing I would say would seem to have any effect of her. I'm, like, “What's wrong, like, are you okay,” and she just wouldn't say anything, just keep crying, and I'd be like, “Oh, let's go get lunch.” Nothing. Like, “Let's go play,” nothing, “You want a lollipop?” Nothing, like, absolutely nothing would work. And that's, like, what I'm telling you, like, I'd be like, “God, what do I do? I tried everything I can do.” I come to the end of my rope. And He'd be like, “Tell her about me.” “Okay, so let's talk start talking about Jesus,” and I start talking about how, you know, like, all the things that she was

sad about, especially, like, her parents and stuff; I started affirming that, like, God is that—the father that, like, you want and the father that you do have and the father that you should have had in your earthly father, and talking about how, like, you know, the promises that he's shown us and, like, heaven and, like, how that's all going to work together. And, like, as soon as I started doing that, God was, like, working in her heart, and she stopped crying, and she looked up at me, and she was like, “Really?” “Yes. This is going to be like our future together.” And I'm, like—every time that worked, like, every time she was crying, I just talked about Jesus, and she would, like, stop, she'd snap out of it. And she'd just, like, go about her day. And it was, like, I definitely think about those times a lot, because it was, like, I hope that that's what I was there for, you know, to like, really tell them about God. Like really, and show them God's love, and I will say, yeah, those are definitely, like, the important times that I think of...

**Interviewer**

Thank you so much for sharing that. Can you tell me, maybe, how your student missionary year impacted your career goals or life outlook?

**Kristen S**

Regardless, or, like, I—look, I definitely am thinking about becoming more like a long-term missionary, but we'll see how that goes. I know there's a lot of opportunities and pathways to do that and whatnot. So—but I'm definitely thinking about it. I really love serving, but like, of course, everyone can serve in America as well, but I really like the culture there. I really like the cultural changes from America—or from the States.

**Interviewer**

So - so not necessarily Bolivia, you would go out...

**Kristen S**

Yes, I would, yeah...

**Interviewer**

Okay, very cool. All right. And then can you tell me—so, like, long-term impact from your student missionary year that you've experienced?

**Kristen S**

Long-term impact? I think about my kids pretty much every day; they called me yesterday, actually. We chatted for a little bit—it's not just, like, the fact that I was there. And, like, I definitely feel like it's translated into, like, every area of my life now, you know, and no one really knows what you've been through, and no one really knows the memories that you have running through your head as you're walking down the promenade, or throughout the halls. It's like, people just pass you, and you don't know, and they don't know, like, what the year has meant for you, and they don't know, like, what you've been through, and—but God knows, right? God knows. I would definitely say that the long-term impact of my mission year is I feel like God is closer than He was last time I feel like—or not last time. But before I went... I feel like I am much



more accustomed to leaning on him for wisdom and for grace than I was before. And I also feel like this mission year has taught me the importance of, like, caring for other people and putting them first, so yeah.

**Interviewer**

Okay, so you talked a little bit about the impact on the kids, right? Because they are experiencing, like, short-term connections that do go away. So, can you talk a little bit more about that and maybe what future student missionaries could—should consider, like when they're going out into the field? That sounded very difficult.

**Kristen S**

Yeah... I think that I wouldn't let that deter you from going down there.

**Interviewer**

Okay.

**Kristen S**

I think you should still go—if I'm speaking to a missionary that's, like, looking at this right now. I would say just go, you know, like, it's better than what they had or what they could have. Their - their own families or, like, some of them are very, like, sexually abusive. Some of them are verbally, or like all of them, and it's just...it's really messy. The stories I've been told... that's crazy. In addition, you know, like, you may not be able to carry them from, like, zero to 100. You may not be able to, like, heal their hearts and their souls, and you actually—you shouldn't even like put that burden on yourself because that's not your job. Your job is to like walk with them from point A to point B; maybe that's from five to 10 in the healing process. But don't expect yourself to be Jesus and their Savior and to, like, save them and to heal everything that's going on inside of them. But expect yourself to be used by God and be a tool for him to work through to help heal them, but definitely don't - don't try to, like, be their everything, but be there for them through everything. So, yeah, you should definitely still go, and don't don't be afraid of making connections just because it's gonna like break away, right? You're still gonna have those amazing memories of them and those experiences, like, you were there for a chapter of their life, and, like, that's never gonna go away, right? And you—and there—they were part of your story for a chapter of your life, and you both will have learned something from each other during that time. And it's not it's not worthless, it's not useless. But yeah, I would, I would just say definitely go with the expectation that you're not going to be like their lifelong mother. Because I know that can be really, really tough. I know a girl that went, and she was literally assigned, like, not assigned - but she was placed with a child like a two-year-old child, she's like, "He needs a mother figure really badly. And you're gonna have to do that for him." And when I came, like he was calling her mama, like, that was tough for me to see because she had to leave. I was like, "Wow, that's like his, like, to a two-year-old's mind. That was like his mom." She was there for, like, half of his life, basically. Anyways, so... that's tough because sometimes you will get cases like that. But in terms of my case, I had a lot of, like, older children from, like, ages. Five to 15/14 ish. They're a little older. And I wouldn't take it back; I would definitely, I would say, go—I would go again, honestly.

**Interviewer**

Yeah. So. Okay, so can you tell me, maybe, some other advice that you would have to student missionaries who are considering this path?

**Kristen S**

Other advice for other student missionaries? Planning to go to Bolivia specifically? Or just anywhere?

**Interviewer**

Yeah.

**Kristen S**

Go where God calls you, I know everyone says that. But, like, if you feel in your heart that, like, you want to go on this, like, I think it is a good thing. Make sure you're not running away from anything. But yeah, like if you feel like God is calling you to go, it will happen. It will happen, it—like, God will open the doors for you to go, but more than that, like, realize that where we're at right now, where you are, is also a missionary. And God calls us to be missionaries to our families and to our friends. And it doesn't have to be across the world in Bolivia to orphans. It can definitely just be, and it's not as glamorous; you don't get, like, the press and, you know, get interviewed by it. But yeah, like, focus on, like, where you're at right now. And if God—if you feel like God is calling you to go somewhere else, then go there. But yeah, I think it was an incredible experience. And I would suggest it for people that are in the mindset to serve because it's definitely not for everyone. That—yeah...

**Interviewer**

Well, thank you so much. Before we conclude, is there anything else that you'd want to add?

**Kristen S**

No, I think that's good.

**Interviewer**

All right. Well, thank you for taking the time to speak with me today and your willingness to participate in our oral history project.

**Kristen S**

Yes.