

Visit to the Everest English School

August 2010

Reflecting back on our trip to Nepal and our stay in the village of Sanitar, I now understand Troy's statement that "nothing can prepare you for the challenges and beauties of Nepal", specifically, life in the village of Sanitar.

My intention for traveling, which began in 2001, was to experience and gain an understanding about the values, beliefs and practices of those living outside of North America. Although living and working overseas allowed me the opportunity to immerse myself in the cultures of Australia, Europe and New Zealand, up until 2006 when I traveled to South East Asia, I had yet to experience my long sought- after 'culture shock'. Even there, the majority of places I visited catered to tourists and therefore had all the comforts of the western world. It makes me laugh to remember that only weeks before we left for Nepal, I ignorantly assumed that it would be somewhat like Thailand, but maybe just a bit less developed. Wow, was I wrong!

Wandering the crowded, vibrant and noisy streets of Katmandu was both exhilarating and overwhelming. Here it was, my culture shock on a platter for me to enjoy, process and learn from. Luckily I was with Troy (who has been to Nepal numerous times), and my sister Jessica. Although dodging the slow moving cars, cows, motor bikes, bicycles, rickshaws, dogs and people can be overwhelming, it didn't take long to learn that in order to maneuver safely through the crowded streets, one must not gaze in the shops, stop abruptly or try to talk to the person behind you. By our 3rd day, Jessica and I were expertly navigating the streets of Tamel (the tourist district in Kathmandu). We spent hours wandering the streets, shopping, chatting with locals and lapping up the beauty of the people and the strange calm that contradicts the hecticness of Kathmandu. This lively city is by far one of my favorites!

A different kind of culture shock awaited us in the remote village of Sanitar. I will note here that I am not a big fan of flying, actually I hate it, especially flying in small planes. Troy had prepared me for the journey months ahead of time though, so I was well aware of what getting to and from the village involved. It did make me feel more safe knowing that the plane, a Twin Otter was made in Canada and is, as my dad who is an engineer informed me, an incredibly safe and well made plane. As we ascended into the blue

cloudless sky, Troy pointed out the vast Himalayan Mountain Range in the distance. Not only was this a great distraction for me, but flying so close to these enormous and beautiful mountains was an incredible experience.

An hour later we began our descent into the village of Rumjatar. Numerous excited and curious villagers as well as teachers from the school greeted us upon arrival. I was immediately struck by the beauty and tranquility of our surroundings. The lush terraced landscape was breathtaking and the sound of car horns was replaced with the calls of cicadas. Everyone crowded around us wanting to introduce themselves, welcome Troy, and of course see who he had brought with him this trip. Because these villages are not on a trekking route, few Westerners pass through the area, so Jessica and I being fair skinned red heads were definitely a point of interest.

After a delicious lunch we casually made our way to our destination Sanitar, a 45 minute walk from Rumjatar. A number of people from both villages came to meet us or walk with us up to the Sanitar. I was instantly amazed at how many peoples names Troy remembered. He knew if their kids went to the school, who their relatives were and so on. Not only was this impressive, but it was very touching and real to watch their faces light up when Troy remembered their names and backgrounds.

Alas we arrived in Sanitar to many curious and welcoming villagers. After dropping off our bags we were hustled up to the school to greet the rest of the teachers and the 175 students that were patiently waiting. Before even reaching the school we could hear and feel the excitement and anticipation of our arrival. The next 20 minutes were by far the most heartwarming moments of my life. As we rounded the corner of the school we were greeted in unison by all of the students, who stood lined up in two rows. We were welcomed with a tika (red pigment for good luck) on our foreheads and a flower necklace around our necks. We were then ushered down the rows of children who handed us fresh flowers and individually welcomed us, in English, to their village. Words cannot describe how moving this experience was. After the last child handed me my flowers, I turned around to take it all in. To be with my sister and Troy in the presence of what he, his board members, volunteers, family, friends and donors have created and sustained was incredible.

The next 9 days were spent drinking tea, visiting with the teachers and their families, watching singing and dancing performances by the children, going

for walks with the teachers and even teaching. Jessica, Troy and I spent the week moving from classroom to classroom teaching the children about Canada. Jessica and I showed the children photos of the wildlife, landscapes and people of Canada. They were so incredibly excited to not only see the photos, but to see them on a laptop!

Leaving the village was definitely bitter sweet. On the one hand I was desperate for the comforts of the city; a hot shower, flush toilets, a room with a fan, clean clothes, various food choices (specifically pizza and green leafy vegetables). On the other hand I did not want to leave the beautiful people, children and serenity of the village. Furthermore, I did not want the rich learning and peacefulness that came with this experience to fade.

Once again we were accompanied by villagers and teachers on our journey back to Rumjatar the morning of our departure. The walk was surreal, and I struggled to take in as much as possible before getting on the plane and leaving the village... forever? Hopefully not! The most impacting statement was made by Peshel (one of the teachers) right before we made our way through the airport gates. He said to Jessica, Troy and I "Please, don't forget about us". This shocked and saddened me deeply. There is no way I could ever forget the children, teachers and families in Sanitar. Their hospitality, kindness and inner beauty has touched my soul and warmed my heart. After our experience in the village I realize why Troy is so inspired and driven to sustain and improve the Everest English school. This village is his extended family. He is one of them now and they love him deeply. But they don't just love Troy because he brought quality education and opportunity to their village. They love him because he genuinely cares about them all, regardless of whether or not their children attend the Everest English School. They love him because he laughs and jokes around. They love him because he gets involved, teaches in the classroom and interacts with the children. They love him because he never complains, (the man can eat Dal Bhat, two meals a day for months!). I would have to say though, the children love Troy the most because he loves to play soccer with them!

I don't know when I will be able to return to Sanitar . In the meantime, sharing stories, reminiscing with Troy and Jessica and looking at my photos of the children will continue to inspire me to create awareness and generate funds for the Everest English school.

Heidi