

RED JOURNAL:

Wednesday, Jan 10, 2018; Zita

Today I got peed on by a toad. Cat found this amazing little guy and was showing it to us while we were painting. I think the poor fella got a little overwhelmed with us all, he's not really used to humans.

I've been thinking a lot about how one with nature the people of Laos seem to be. There's so many lizards and toads and plants that peacefully coexist with the people here. It's astonishing how humans have inhabited the place yet there are still trees around, lizards that roam free, birds that fly all over. Even dogs seem more than independent. Discounting the number of strays, I really admire the way Lao people respect the animas' space and freedom.

Even with the construction we're doing here, we don't build in the trees' space; instead we work around them. We're building a room in a yard that's full of trees. One's "natural" instinct would be to cut down a tree and make the room bigger. This, however, does not seem to be the Lao way. The room only extends as far as the tree allows it to, both horizontally and vertically. Of course, later on, as the tree grows, the room will be in its way, but for now, the room is built in a way that doesn't invade the tree's space. (Of course, this could be totally random and they didn't actually want a big room, please don't quote me on this!!)

Apart from my nature rambling, I'm also proud of how much we've gotten done today. We scraped and painted the wall by the side of the house, did five layers of bricks for the aforementioned room and we dusted off the fence. I also loved how we rotated jobs and that we all got to contribute a little bit to each mini-project. It's amazing to see how much effort and care my fellow "service trippers" put into each and every assignment. I'll finish here, but I'll just say: I'm so proud of us all and I could not have asked for a better group to come to Laos with.

Thursday, Jan 11, 2018; Renee

Today I really got a chance to talk with Nangyai about her life, and she was able to ask me some questions. She is very shy about her English, but she is very smart. She started English in college and she is in her second year of school meaning she must have started English a year ago and she is already really good at conversations. She has mastered so much in such a short amount of time, and with little exposure to native speaking English people. It reminded me of how people in developing countries or in lower classes have to work twice as hard to achieve so much. As someone growing up speaking English I was already privileged in terms of the global world, and every time I am exposed to another culture I notice this. No one expects native English speakers to learn another language. For me it is a life goal to learn a second language because it is important for me to understand the struggles, joys, and beauty other cultures have. Also, while talking with Nangyai I was able to see more of her personality. She is a very bubbly person and smiles a lot. She likes to tease me too. She would say, "Okay now I am leaving," and I would say "No," then she would sit back down and ask me about why I decided to come to Laos. I talked with her about what she plans to do after college with business, and she seemed unsure. Which is very normal to be uncertain as a college student, but she is certain about staying in Laos. I like that she wants to stay in Laos because whatever she decided to do with her degree it will benefit Laos and push

the country forward. We exchanged Facebook information, and so I do plan to stay in contact with her. Hopefully I can come back to Laos and see her again, and see all the ways she will grow.

My goal for the rest of the trip is to learn more about the people we work with and build a connection, and not worry too much about the language barrier but work through it.

Friday, Jan 12, 2018; Lea

Today we finished construction for our time here in Laos. We did not finish the room we have been working on, but there is a clear foundation and the roof is attached now. I'm reflecting on my expectation at the start of the trip, knowing that I was hoping to leave Laos after finishing the room. I think it is important for me to re-center my perspective and realize that the purpose of our work was to contribute to the effort while building relationships with the people here.

On that train of thought, I ended up having a really nice conversation with Beverly today before dinner. I am so thankful for how patient Beverly and Emmanuel are with answering all of our questions. I spent time asking Beverly about her religion and what it means to her, considering the risks she is taking practicing it in Laos. She really believes she is needed for this work and is willing to take many of those risks for something that means a lot to her. That type of courage really inspires me, even though we are such different people with different perspectives.

I feel really happy today and I think it is because of all the warmth Beverly and Emmanuel emulate. They are such good, kind people and being in their presence is a gift.

Saturday, Jan 13, 2018; Cat

Today we were driving around Laos doing some sightseeing. We started off at an elephant sanctuary where we fed bananas to the elephants and even rode on their backs. I never thought that I'd see an elephant in person, let alone interact with them in such an intimate and up-close way.

During our sightseeing we were joined by some Lao college students and members of the church. Some of them we'd met before, but others were new to us. Everyone was so lovely and friendly. After we ate lunch they taught us a Laos game and made Ana, Buvhan, Prof. Masiki, Joseph, and Isabella do a dance called the "papaya dance." We couldn't stop laughing. It was such a joy-filled moment.

I found that so special because it was such a wonderful and genuine moment. Despite things like a language barrier and cultural differences, we were able to form meaningful connections and relationships with each other. There's just something so lovely and incredible about the human capacity to form community and connection across barriers of difference.

Sunday, Jan 14, 2018; Isabella

I had an amazing day today. The service that we were welcomed into was very beautiful and made me feel spiritual again. The way they treat faith is much different than the way I am used to. Growing up I used to dread going to church. IN fact, my Grandma had to give my cousins and I mints

when I was younger to keep us in line. Here in Laos it's a welcoming place Uasseli (Beverly and Emmanuel's son) said he loved attending church because of the community. I never had that at church, I really didn't know anyone but a couple classmates. The way they shared their stories and felt comfortable enough to cry. I didn't even realize the mass was so long because I was so enthralled by everything that was happening. I didn't realize until then that I have been yearning for religion, more clearly faith. At night, hearing about Daniel and Asun (not sure of spelling) talked about their dreams it felt wonderful to feel as if it was talking amongst friends. Laos has reminded me that I need to discover what faith and community means to me.

Monday, Jan 15, 2018; Brigitte

We are currently on our flight to Siem Reap, Cambodia. Sitting on this plane, I am overwhelmed with emotion as I think back on the past week we have spent in Vientiane. The wonderful connections and bonds that we have made with each other and our Lao friends make goodbyes so difficult. From learning to make cement, to doing the papaya salad dance, to trying stinky fruit, to playing B.S., we have made unforgettable memories that we will cherish for the rest of our lives. One of my favorite quotes to live by is, "Everyone you meet knows something you don't; make it your job to learn from them." I have learned so much about the Lao people, and I hope to never forget it.

I kept thinking of the community song that Beverly taught us after church yesterday as we rode in the back of the truck for the last time. We all came from so many different backgrounds and hometowns, and together, this week we have built a community. We did not just build a room, we built a community and a family in Vientiane with all of the incredible people we have bonded with. I hope to never forget these memories that I have made this week.

Tuesday, Jan 16, 2018; Ana

Today we went to the temple Angkorwat and it was unbelievable. The architecture and design of the Bayon and the main temple was artistry, intelligence, and skill that is mesmerizing. The walls contained immense amount of detail of carvings and drawings. In the research I did, I learned that the entire Angkorwat temple was built by King Suryavarman II between AD 1113-1150. The Angkorwat temple complex was originally dedicated to Vishnu, a Hindi god who is known as part of a sacred trinity in Hinduism. However, the temple was used for buddhist practices, which in turn led to a construction of many Buddha statues to be built into the temples. From my experience, I only saw the figure of Vishnu two times either in carvings or designs on the wall so fthe temples. The history I learned is only a small amount and I would like to continue to educate myself a lot more about the temple. I would like to understand its history and significance on a deeper level. I think it's pretty amazing that our group got to visit one of the seven wonders of the world. The beauty of Angkorwat is stunning and I would want to learn more of how the Khemer peoples utilized and habited the temple complex. Personally, at the beginning I had a difficult time trying to connect with the wonder and sacredness of the temple because I saw thousandds of tourists—many oof whom did not respect some of the rules that we read in the pamphlet. Then, I began to zone them out and focus on my curiosity of the temple and the religions of which this temple is very important, sacred, and potentially home for some monks. I also was taken

aback by all the tourists in the city of Siemp Reap. The economic disparity and inequality was so startling as you saw Khemer people as the workers and servers to tourists—many whom were white/european. I began to think: what does it mean to live in a city that is your home, but your culture, religion, and home is put on display for foreigners? Does the tourism help the government fund programs that give Cambodian people equal access to jobs, education, and healthcare?

GREEN JOURNAL:

Wednesday, Jan 10: Patrick

Today at 8:00 we all went to the café to eat breakfast. I really enjoyed all the conversations, the jokes, and of course the iced Lao coffee!

Getting to the work-site after breakfast, we all split up into different groups. I began with putting concrete on cinderblocks and beginning to construct the wall. It was tricky and slow going at first, but Cailey and I eventually got to a pretty efficient clip. Afterwards, I went to dust and paint the fence and rock wall... It was shocking how quickly it all got done with teamwork.

My favorite part of the day was teaching English at 5:00. The student I was teaching was a 17-year-old high school girl who was still learning the alphabet. At first she was shy, but eventually began to have fun with the lesson. I think. It was fun to teach pronunciation and new words like “crow,” “crown,” “happy,” etc. I was so impressed by how progress. Overall, this experience taught me a lot about how dedicated Lao high schoolers are studious and hardworking... it was great!

Overall, I think this service group is cohesive, it is fun to see all of the different personalities mesh together.

Thursday, Jan 11: Kristina

Today we got a huge chunk of the construction done, the room looks like its almost done, I can't believe the progress we made in only the span of a few days. I feel like there is much more we could do to make an impact on this community – I think when you are working with such amazing and selfless people such as Beverly and Emanuel you just want to do more for them because they've done so much for us.

My favorite part of the day was when we all played card games together, I looked around and we were all laughing, not only us but also some of the students from Lao (Joseph and Daniel), and it just felt like home. I feel like I've been here for years, but its only been a few days.

Friday, Jan 12: Wallis

Today was our last day of construction, a bittersweet feeling I came to realize over the day. There's something about not being able to finish the project fully and see the final, completed room that leaves me feeling incomplete. While I'm sure we would've been of use if we were here helping for longer, logically it would not have made sense, as to finish we would need more construction experience than we all have. I toiled with this feeling of incompleteness, not feeling like we helped to our fullest

potential, until the end of the day, after the construction & dinner during game night. The whole group of us, plus Joseph, Daniel and Em were playing games in the big classroom, all laughing and participating. Sitting back, I felt a part of something special, a feeling that has not gone away, a part of a community of many types of people and backgrounds, customs and cultures. Through a short amount of time, all of us have become so close, creating something of importance, adding to one big multifaceted shared experience. I have learned so much from Em and Beverly, they have treated us so kindly, shown me what passion and dedication looks like, have shown me that laughter is the best tasting medicine. Daniel has taught me to step outside of my bubble and look around at the world, his personal drive to learn English + create/build new things has pushed me to evaluate what I deem important in my own personal life + beyond. Joseph has opened up to all of us and become a true friend. Many others whom I have not mentioned are affecting me, those are just to name a few.

I think what I'm trying to formulate into words is that this service trip has been rewarding in so many ways. I am honored to serve and help others in life and on this trip, but I did not realize how much culture I would see and experience, how many laughs and crazy stories, how many wonderful people I would get to meet. It's astounding how one small moment or feeling can mean so much and it did for me.

Saturday, Jan 13: HoAn

Today we went to visit 3 amazing places. We went to an elephant sanctuary, a flower farm, and buddha park. We also enjoyed an amazing lunch, followed by singing, dancing, and playing games with the Lao people.

The best part of the day for me was the elephant sanctuary and the meal. Elephants are my favorite animals and I was overwhelmed by the opportunity to feed the elephants bananas. At lunch it was a wonderful chance to talk to the Lao people. We learned the papaya salad dance- a simple but pure memory to have for a lifetime.

Today, I found myself reflecting on global medicine and what that concept embodies and means for different people in different cultures. I was very curious about how mental health is dealt with in Laos so I asked Daniel & Bailey to help provide some insight into this question. Daniel, a Lao young man said that people with/struggling with mental illnesses are sent to a place to deal with them. He also mentioned that the view of mental illness in the culture was neutral. However, Bailey said that she was unsure, but her guess would be that people with mental illnesses would not receive or seek medical help. In their culture people do not like to ask for help because its seen as a burden. These two views embody two different understandings and I think it's interesting to think about how/why these differing perspectives developed. Moreover, this reflection really helped me solidify what I want to do in medicine. I want to be a part of programs that demonstrate and teach the importance of global medicine where we are not seen as superheroes but rather develop an equal balance in global communities in areas of healthcare and medicine.

Overall, I have really enjoyed my time here in Laos and I have developed a better sense of the direction I want to pursue in my life.

Sunday, Jan 14: Zita

Today was tough. People often say goodbyes are hard but, I think the day before goodbyes is much harder. The thought of leaving lingers, seeping through and into each action you do, each step you take, each word you say.

We started the day by going to church with everyone. It was the first time we were all together. Church here is different from that in the US. More vibrant and happy. At the same time people are also more vulnerable. They share stories of events that strengthened their faith, some miraculous other regular stories of life and hardship. It was also an amazing touch that while the service was in Lao, they took time to translate things into English so we felt included as well. While it added about an hour to the service, no one snickered or made a face. The kindness and acceptance of the Lao people showed itself once again by their patience towards us, even in their most sacred places.

We spent some time playing games with the students after lunch and then headed back to the school for reflections. I know my task is to give you an overview of how things went but I'm not sure I can adequately recreate that special moment. Scratch that; I know I cannot. People spoke about the appreciation they felt when we approached them and tried to converse with them even though we didn't speak each others' language. Others said they thought of us as family. A big pile of brothers and sisters working together in peace. Em talked about how he always wanted a daughter and that through our group he was able to experience at least some aspect of having such a bond.

I never realized the impact we've had on this community. I know that during the six days I've come to love our rides and conversations with Joseph, laying bricks and doubling checking our work together, mixing cement (or pizza dough as he called it) with Em, but I never quite realized that the feelings and emotions I was feeling, they were experiencing too. I never, until tonight, realized that they got attached to us as well, that their shy smiles were small signs of love and that their shadow of sadness in their eyes at night was the same melancholy I was feeling each time the thought of leaving crept into my head.

Goodbyes are hard, but the day before is always harder. You're not quite ready to get on that flight or train but you and them both know that the time to let go has come. You desperately try to hold on to each moment of the day, each smile and kind word, each eye contact you've shared, each conversation you've had. Today, the thought of leaving is gut wrenching. I can only hope that those we're leaving behind know the impact they've had and the special gift they've given to us during the past six days. "Kap cha" and let's hope we see each other soon. For now, goodbye.

Monday, Jan 15: Renee

Today we had to leave Laos. Although it was a sad feeling, I will see them again. Seeing Em, Joseph, Beverly, and Asun wait for us to go through our gate at the hotel really showed how impactful our interactions were. We only stayed in Laos for a short amount of time but, I was so touched by everyone. While waiting for a room at our hotel in Cambodia, I cried. Everything just got to me. I have been on service trips in the past, but this one felt different, and special. Things became more clarified. Like the importance of human connection was re-enforced for me during this service trip. Also, I think I am going to come back and work in Laos. I was not sure where in Asia would be best for me to work in the future but, after this trip I am confident that the answer is Laos. I hope I can continue to be impacted by the world and by people the way the people on this trip have impacted me. I have changed in different ways because of this experience that it will take some time to process all the changes. I am glad I was able to have this experience. I will cherish these memories forever.

Tuesday, Jan 16: Lea

This morning, I woke up early with my roommates to see our first (and only) Cambodian sunrise. It's funny how when you only have a limited time somewhere, nothing is taken for granted- not even a sunrise.

We spent the day at Angkor Wat. It was so hard for me to wrap my brain around how old the entire place is. I kept trying to picture it when it was first built and it had a different energy. It sort of made me sad to realize how much of a tourist attraction it is, and I also recognize that my being there contributes to that. I feel conflicted because it's so cool to be able to explore, but I fear that the tourist aspect takes away from the sacred nature of the place.

I spent a little bit of time in a small spot in Angkor Wat that was designated for meditation. I felt like I could have spent all day there just enjoying the incense and candles and the comfort of the rock walls. I would like to make meditation part of my routine moving forward.

I am sad to leave Cambodia and wish we had more time to explore and learn. I know there is so much history here for me to learn and I hope I can come back someday.

BLUE JOURNAL:

Wednesday, Jan 10- Brigitte

Today was wonderful! Together, we have all accomplished so much. After all of our hard work scraping, brushing, making cement, digging holes, and painting we are finally starting to see progress! The walls of the room are halfway built up, and half of the fence walls are cleaned and painted! It looks wonderful!

We also began helping Bailey with English classes today with the college students. It was so much fun to exchange knowledge of our languages and cultures. We also got to play games like Uno.

Currently, we are all relaxing and playing B.S. in the one classroom. It is wonderful to enjoy each others' company after our hard day of work covered in dirt, paint, and cement. I can't wait to continue to see how we all grow together and learn as we continue our work. This trip is such an incredible experience with such wonderful people.

Thursday, Jan 11- Ana

Today we got to do a second coat of paint on the wall and so far the paint job we've been doing looks really good. Emanuel has been really helpful and kind and patient as he teaches us how to paint, mix paint, and make concrete. Today Em shared that he speaks 8 different dialects as well as English. He shared that this is because in the Phillipines, all over the island and in different regions, they speak different dialects but, Phillipino people are all unified with speaking Tagalo. He also learned that his specialty is working w/ and teaching about motorcycle engines. Tonight we also got to go back to the Might Market and do some shopping and bargaining. I did a good job matching a cheaper price and it was a lot of fun. Reflection today also was really good as I really enjoyed to hear how the group has been critically thinking about our work and time in Laos and with the church community we have been working with.

I've really enjoyed working closely with Lea and talking more about our leadership styles and how we tackle challenges and creatively come up with daily plans and ideas for reflection.

Friday, Jan 12- Cailey

We started our day at Starbucks today as usual. As it was our last visit, we took a photo with the staff who have been so patient with us. They even remembered that Burhan likes butter with his toast and brought it without him asking.

When we got to the worksite, Hoan and Brigitte helped Asun with the building while the rest of us either scrubbed the bottom edge of the front fence or weeded the back garden. Although I hate weeding, I had a lot of fun talking with Lea, Burhan, and Isabella.

After lunch we started painting the final bits of the front fence until 2:15 when we went to the school next door to play with the kids. The kids were very afraid of us until Cat got them laughing by pointing to pictures of animals and imitating them. We then played a modified version of red light/green light which they loved. We spent the rest of the time playing games and singing songs.

It was cool to see how fast they warmed up to us. One little girl even decided to sit in my lap and have me carry her around. We also played duck, duck, goose and sang songs. Almost right after, we had an English class with Daniel and a couple other students. We talked and then played UNO until dinner. After dinner, we played a couple games as a group such as Mafia and Trip Around the World before heading to the hotel for reflection.

All in all, a good day. We got to play and also see the dorm with a roof on it!

Saturday, Jan 13- Burhan

Today we started our day with a new kind of breakfast: thai chips, bananas, and bread. Then we left the hotel to ride elephants. During our way to the sanctuary, we shared stories and made each other laugh. Thanks to the funny and unique stories of Burhan, none slept during the one hour ride. We were paired with a partner during the elephant ride. The ride was great fun. The location of the elephant sanctuary was astonishing. Beautiful trees, gigantic elephants, aesthetic lake, and small huts added to the scenic beauty of the place. After playing with elephants, and feeding them with bananas and sugarcane, we had a traditional Lao lunch in the nearby huts. The food was amazing and there were a lot of options to serve both vegetarians and non-vegetarians. After lunch, we played Lao and American games. We were all mixed up and socializing and none could tell that we were two different cultures. After that, we left to see waterfall and the garden. The garden was very beautiful and offered much to the visitors: sunflowers, small lakes, waterfall, multiple types of animals and flowers. Every thing was so aesthetic that no one could stop itself from taking pictures near every spot. Then, we left for the Buddha park. During our way, I was thinking about the roads, buildings, and traffic, and was comparing everything to my culture and country, Pakistan. Being an international student from Pakistan, there were moments when I felt that I am just in a different city of Pakistan, not in Laos because there were many things that were quite similar to my country. Buddha park was absolutely amazing. It represented old and beautiful sculptures of Buddha and some gods from Hinduism. The ancient history behind each sculpture was very interesting. Buddha park was so far the most beautiful thing in Laos. We also saw the amazing sunset near the Mekong River on our way back to the hotel. We then went to eat vietnamese soupy noodles; they tasted delicious. Like always, Burhan surprised us with his funny and crazy stories. He tried the

"spicy thai challenge" and ate around 10 green chilies raw but, he survived after this crazy challenge. Laughters were all in the air during the challenge, something adventurous and memorable for all of us. Then, we went back to the hotel and had our daily reflection in which we mentioned things that we loved and hated. We then played a couple of games and went to our rooms for rest. I am looking forward for another adventurous and memorable day in this beautiful country and with these kind people.

Sunday, Jan 14- Patrick

We woke and had breakfast at the hotel. Afterwards, Joseph arrived with the blue van and drove us out the city of Vientiane to a more rural area to attend a church service. On the way, we rehearsed Hallelujah, Amazing Grace, and This Little Light of Mine with the intention of singing them at the church service.

We arrived at the church and took our seats. As the service began, I was surprised how musical it was. Asun was playing electric guitar, it was nice to see him enjoying himself. He really deserved it after working so hard all week. Everyone there was so polite. What made the biggest impact on me at the service was all of the stories that people shared. They were so forthright about their personal stories and problems. It was touching that they felt comfortable enough to share such intimate facts about their lives. The fact that people felt able to cry and talk about their emotions so candidly shows the closeness of the community.

After the church service we all ate lunch. Afterwards, we played games with the children and danced. It was nice to combine American and Lao games and dances; it made for meaningful cross-cultural interaction. Despite the heat, I could tell that everyone in our group was happy to have spent the day interacting with the Lao Methodists.

We drove back to the hotel, then went to the mission. By far the most difficult part of this trip was having to say goodbye, not only to Laos, but importantly to our Laotian friends. It was an emotional moment. After this, we went to dinner and had fun and went back to the hotel.

Overall, I am so happy about the relationship we have made both within our group and with the Lao people!

Monday, Jan 15- Kristina

It was bittersweet to say goodbye to the people who have made Laos feel like home to us for the past week. I'm sad to leave them but I'm also assured by the fact that we have new relatives in Laos.

Today we arrived in Cambodia and the country is beautiful. I am struggling with the poverty and children I see begging in the streets because I feel helpless and useless. I want to help but I don't know how- the brochures tell us not to give these children money because they use it as an excuse to be out of school, but something doesn't sit right with me about it. I want to help them not because I want to be a superhero but because I believe every child deserves a childhood...

Tuesday, Jan 16- Wallis

Today was our last day. We packed early and headed to Angkor Wat for the day then to the airport.

Heading to Angkor Wat and having done research on the site, I was aware of the sacred and religiousness of it. Personally, I am not a religious or spiritual person but, from what I had read and seen pictures of made me think I would have religious or spiritual feelings there.

When we arrived, I was shocked at the number of people who were there as tourists and the number of tour buses there were. Walking around viewing the sites, taking pictures, it was hard to take a step back from all of the people surrounding us to recognize or feel the spiritual/religiousness of the site. Rather, I saw religious aspects like the occasional monks sitting or walking around, but I was surprised at how much I did not feel.

Both of the sites we visited were fantastic and extremely beautiful. Having limited time was also difficult in enjoying the experience because there was little time to stop and take a moment to check in/out. While for Angkor Wat was an amazing site to visit and see, it was hard for me to interact with it. The number of people and pictures being taken made me feel the sites were being exploited, not experienced. At the same time, I felt sad in realizing that because that will only get worse and more tolerated as technology develops. Overall, I felt held back from the experience and withdrawn. A part of me wishes I could've looked past that but, I don't think I could have. I'm really glad we visited the site but the experience was not what I expected. Through everything, I found myself thinking about the value of being present and connected. Whether that be with your surroundings, other people, or yourself. Taking yourself out of the social media world helps and has helped me a lot on this trip. In Laos, I felt connected with people over the food, friendly conversation, work, and not over something on my phone.

While I am not a perfect example of this, I am taking steps towards being that type of person and finding better balance. After Angkor Wat, we took a bus back to the hotel, managed to each take a shower (thanks Donna!!!) and then head to the airport. I'm currently on the plane writing this and thinking about how it is going to be back at home/school with my phone, social media, other outside pressures. I'm glad to have had the experience I did at Angkor Wat and I reflect on it as again in perspective, not a negative experience.