

The Advocacy Project- Summer 2012 Peace Fellow

Personal Statement

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It's hard to explain living in a place like Bangladesh. I think people can only really relate new experiences to experiences they've had before and for me Bangladesh has been most closely compared to an extended hiking trip, a trail race, road rage, and a job interview.

The extended camping trip:

Living in the wilderness for a month at a time prepares you for new and uncomfortable environments. There are days you hike many miles with heavy packs and little food to a rocky campsite. You eat some cheesy mac, drink some tea and do the whole thing over the next day. Its an incredible liberating feeling to know you can be pushed so hard, have so little, and still experience some of the most amazing human emotions there are to experience. Bangladesh offers the same kind of experience...Its just in the form of loud buses, hours and hours in traffic that doesn't move, and plywood beds with moldy pillows. At the end of the day you're still learning the most you've ever learned about yourself, connecting with people on new levels, and feeling empowered.

The Trail Race:

You start out fresh and well-trained going into it thinking, "okay, take this slow and steady". About halfway through you get excited and maybe race a little harder than you should... You've got to remind yourself to keep drinking water, stay positive, and know your strength. While running a trail race you're constantly looking out for good footing. Bangladesh is no different with potholes the size of small cars and small ponds everywhere. You have to be on your toes! When the faint feeling of wanting to quit creeps in...you smash it with tea and the good company of locals. Finishing is somewhat anti-climatic and you just run through a tunnel. Much like the security at the airport. When you've finished you know you have done something challenging and positive. Even if customs charges you 30 dollars to leave.

Road Rage:

My friend Matt said that if I were allowed to drive in Bangladesh I would be dead or in prison. Experiencing the constant invasion on my senses has given me the opportunity to do a lot of reflecting on my personal responses to discomfort and I look forward to seeing how that might shape my responses in new settings.

The Job Interview:

I found myself under constant observation. I didn't know all of the codes for effective communication or dress and it was reflected in the response of my observers. I learned how answer the right questions and use the right body language. I learned a new way to fit into a mold.

What I did in Bangladesh was less about the work I did with the organization and more about the relationships I was able to develop with individuals. I connected people who wouldn't have otherwise been connected, and raised awareness of the issues faced in Bangladesh. The most radical changed thing of all is probably my view of the world and the new ways I've learned to interact with it.