

I can still recall the feeling of shock that I felt upon my arrival in Kathmandu, Nepal this past summer. As we made our way along the bumpy dirt roads heading south of the city to a small village named Lele, I took in my first glimpses of life in Nepal. Kathmandu operates at a chaotic pace, while the countryside just outside of the city encompasses some of the most stunning landscape I have seen. The main cause of the shock that I so vividly remember, however, was the immense level of poverty that I witnessed on that first day in Nepal.

I spent my summer of service at Anandaban Hospital, which is a leprosy hospital that cares for roughly 100 patients at a time. Anandaban is actually a Nepali word for “forest of joy,” and I quickly learned how fitting this name truly is. People from both Nepal and India travel for days to receive care at Anandaban, as the cost of treatment for anyone with leprosy is covered entirely by the hospital. Patients affected by leprosy suffer not only from their physical disabilities, but also are discriminated against by both their families and communities. The rejection and isolation that these people experience can be the most demoralizing aspect of the disease.

Despite these challenges, I found so many patients to maintain such a positive outlook on life. I spent most of my day in the wards getting to know patients. After a few patients taught me some of their favorite Nepali board games, we often found ourselves playing these games for hours. I became close friends with a patient named Bharat, who actually was the same age as me. Bharat was forced to leave his university to receive treatment once he was diagnosed with leprosy. Although he was unable to attend lectures, and often felt sick from his medication, I found Bharat studying on many afternoons. He even caught a local bus one Saturday to take his midterm exams. Becoming friends with Bharat put so much of my own life into perspective, and I think often of his bravery and strength.

I enjoyed my time at Anandaban so much that I actually decided to stay in Nepal for an extra three weeks to go trekking. I hired a guide in Kathmandu, and we embarked on a 16-day, 120 mile hike around the Annapurna Himal. We would rest each night at small villages along the trail, and our trek even brought us over the Thorung La Pass (17, 769 feet).

My time in Nepal this summer surpassed my expectations in almost every way. Although many people in Nepal may not have the material possessions or lifestyles that we aspire for in the West, I truly believe most Nepalese people are content and happy with their lives. I think that this happiness can be accounted for by people’s dedication to their families, friends, and faiths. Life in Nepal is rooted in forming meaningful relationships with others, and I will always cherish the friendships I made with patients and staff members at Anandaban. These six weeks have had such a meaningful impact on my life, and I cannot wait to return to Anandaban someday to return the favor.

John Stone ‘18

