

Tacloban, Philippines

On May 15th, 2010, Nik and I arrived in the Philippines for what would be one of the most diverse experiences of our lives. As soon as we stepped off the plane we knew we were far from home. We were greeted with one hundred degree weather and some of the world's most beautiful nature. Although clearly nowhere near Loudonville, NY, it did not take long for Nik and I to make friends with the most welcoming and gracious people I have ever met.



Some neighborhood friends

We lived in Tacloban which is a town on the Island of Leyte in the central region of the Philippines. We stayed with a home-stay family in the barangay (neighborhood) of Bliss and were given the full experience of what it is like to live in the Philippines. We lived with a Tatay (dad) and Nanay (mom) and five of their grandchildren. Nik and I quickly came to be accepted just like two more kids in the house. Our Nanay would love to show off her Filipino dishes and she always prepared home cooked meals. The kids and often our host parents as well, would all plays games together after dinner as the house was always lively with never a dull moment.



Ranmar, Melly, and Alecs (host siblings) after some back to school shopping!

Nik and I worked in a free health clinic in Palo which is the next door region to Tacloban and about a fifteen minute ride in a jeepney, the common public transportation in the Philippines. At the clinic we were taught how to help with registering patients and how to take and record their vitals and chief complaints. Nik and I also shadowed the doctor as she made diagnoses and assigned treatment plans for a wide range of diseases and injuries. Many minor surgeries such as circumcisions also took place at the clinic which Nik and I were able to observe. The staff at the Palo health clinic became like our second family in the Philippines as we shared many good memories and laughs together.



Getting ready to enjoy a meal with the Palo health clinic staff

Although our time in the Philippines was blessed with many good times, Nik and I also were faced with some harsh realities and eye opening experiences. Many of the areas surrounding the health clinic in Palo were impoverished and the locals' only access to care was at the free clinic. Frequently, these patients came in the form of horribly concerned parents seeking help for their sick babies or young children. I was able to be a part of the process of providing care to dismiss parents' concerns, treat sick children, and help those who would otherwise go without. This was an honor unlike any other I have experienced. It invigorated my desire to practice medicine knowing I will have the skills necessary to be an even bigger part of this process some day.



Local kids waiting to get registered

Nik and I were also able to befriend many other volunteers from all over the world while we were in the Philippines. The volunteers had a wide range of stories of how they ended up serving in the area, but they all had the commonality of desiring to help those in need. It was inspiring to be surrounded by such a community and many of the experiences that we shared together will not be forgotten.



Some of the volunteers we shared our time in the Philippines with

Many of the other volunteers had different service placements than Nik and I which afforded us the opportunity to experience some other volunteering sites. One memorable service location was the dump site. At the dump site, approximately forty kids live on piles of trash that they rummage through for valuables every morning when a new shipment comes in. For many of these kids, this is their only form of survival. They have to work during many of the daytime hours and are not enrolled in any form of schooling. During our time in the Philippines, Nik and I were able to go on missions where we would bring food to the kids living in the dump. We were also able to work closely with our volunteering organization to find sponsors for these children to get them out of the dump, enrolled in school, and with a proper meal plan.



Kids living at the dump site

Our time in the Philippines was filled with experiences that Nik and I will hold onto for the rest of our lives. We made many new friends, got to experience an entirely new culture, and were awakened to conditions that many have to endure around the world. I am fortunate enough to be in a position where one day I will be able to directly serve the medical community in areas that are in dire need of attention. I am extremely thankful that this trip gave me a realization of how necessary this service is.

