

# ProjectsAbroad

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# The Proof Is in the Pudding

Leslie Priddy – United States of America  
Chitwan Medical Teaching College



I don't know where this colloquialism originated, or what exactly it even means for that matter, however, it seems to fit the purpose for titling this post.

I have learned many things during the past 8 weeks in Nepal - things about Nepal, things about myself, and things about my perspective on life. I have learned that true Nepal exists somewhere between the unfortunately stifling pollution, poverty, and political strife, and the epic, awe-inspiring majesty of the mighty Himalayas. True Nepal is found in the Nepali people - people who have left me with many unique and happy memories. It was during my second week at work that I had my first unexpected experience with the innocent and loving nature of the Nepali people. In America, facial piercings

are popular among the younger, "millennial" generation, but as a whole are not widely accepted and definitely not professionally. In Nepal, as in India, nearly every woman has a nose piercing. Knowing this, I expected my nose ring and I to fit quite easily into that part of Nepali culture. Nope. My piercing is in my right nostril (all women have their left one pierced), my piercing is sterling silver (theirs are all gold), and mine is a ring (they have mostly studs). I have been approached a few times because of my nose ring, but pointing at it apparently isn't enough. I lost track of how many people stuck their fingers up my nose to get a full assessment of my strange piercing, and believe it or not, I actually got used to this. One day walking into work, two women began smiling at me and giggling to each other, taking turns pointing at their piercings and mine. Being accustomed to this, I politely pointed to mine and returned their smiles. They attempted to have a conversation with me, but quickly learned that I only understand and speak enough Nepali to tell them I don't understand or speak Nepali. We again smiled, exchanged the Nepali head-wobble, and headed our separate ways. Later that day, I was sitting alone at lunch in the canteen. Those same two women walked in with their friend, smiled to greet me, and then proceeded to join me for lunch as a demonstration of their kindness and friendship. It doesn't matter how old you are, sometimes it's not fun eating lunch alone in a room full of people. Even though we didn't speak the same tongue, a language existed between us in our smiles and actions that spoke volumes more than words ever could.

## Nepal Fact #6

In the late 1960s, there were only 100 one-horned Rhinoceros left in Nepal. Thanks to conservation efforts and poaching restrictions, the number grew to over 600 in 2000. Unfortunately, it has once again fallen to around 400 due to recent political instability.

Every day included a 4 mile round trip walk between work at the hospital in town and life at home in a more rural area. I grew to really love that walk, despite the traffic, noise, and pollution. A certain fondness grew in me for the plethora of little shops, their owners, their regular loiterers, the families, and the animals, especially the goats, for obvious reasons. It was impossible to walk without hearing the cheerful, though sometimes obnoxious, voice of a child or ten yelling "Hello! Hi tourist! Which country?! Where are you going?! What is your name?!" The joy in their faces and the pride in their voices as they spoke a language that wasn't their own were undeniable. Some would be timid and just stare at my fair skinned self, but as soon as they saw me smile or greet them, they lit up with happiness. They loved to hear about me and try to pronounce my name (most commonly pronounced as Luh-slee) and simply interact with someone so, supposedly, unlike themselves. One particular group of

young rascals - you know, the kind that are hyper and attention-seeking and generally just being the way young boys often are - would pester me and ask for chocolates or money on a daily basis and would mock me when I denied them. I quickly brought all of that to an end with a bit of sass and by calling them out on their rudeness. After that, it was friendly greetings and silly interactions for the rest of my walks. I think they appreciated that I could, as an adult, be silly and goofy with them and have sound-effect contests. Fart noises and funny faces are a universal language. After work one day, I was resting on the patio at the hotel where the volunteers spend their free time, which also



happens to be a popular venue for weddings. Some teenage boys, bored with wedding festivities, came to chat with me and the three volunteers hanging out with me. After asking the usual questions and discovering I was from America, I got a new question: "Do you know Justin Bieber?!" Looking into their anxious and excited faces and in classic Leslie form I replied matter-of-factly, "Not personally, no. I've never met him." Their heartbreak was audible and disappointment palpable, but neither was enough to deter their strong and resilient spirits from asking for a few pictures with us before heading back to the wedding happenings. I didn't have the heart to tell them the Biebs is from Canada... My final story is my favorite and happened to take place my very last night in Chitwan. I arrived home from work, and was warmly greeted, as per usual, by my host

mother and grandmother. Before I had a chance to remove my shoes and put my bag inside, I was asked to join them for a post-wedding celebration down the street. They were so pleased with my Nepali dancing during Tihar, that my presence was specifically requested by some of their friends. I guess word gets around fast when white people can work the Nepali dance floor. I graciously and humbly (okay maybe not THAT humbly) accepted their invitation. Before leaving though, I was made more presentable with the gifts of a necklace, bracelet, and braid-in hair accessory. After arriving at the wedding reception party, I was seated hardly 3 minutes before I was excitedly pulled to the dance floor where I remained for the next hour surrounded by other women dancing, singing, and clapping. A power outage during an American wedding would be considered a disaster, but in Nepal, the show goes on! Drums, clapping, and voices making up songs at random filled the dark emptiness of the night air. In fact, when the power was restored, the recorded music was cut-off so the singing and song-making could commence as before. My loving host mother, in her considerate nature, saved my weary limbs by telling everyone that I had to return home to eat dinner. The way I was invited and welcomed into their celebration and so deeply appreciated while I was there is something I will never forget.

Between the kindness of strangers, the silly innocence of children, and the love shown to me by my host family, Nepal grows more and more beautiful as times goes on. It is with sadness that I leave my life in Chitwan despite the adventures that are awaiting me. It has been humbling to be so warmly accepted by a people who, on the surface, seem so different from me. Mostly, the Nepali people have challenged me with a difficult introspection. How often, in my own city, do I make an effort to communicate with those who seem to differ so much from myself?

Finally I leave you with the words of the wise and feisty Albus Dumbledore:

"Let us step out into the night and pursue that flighty temptress, adventure!"



# PROJECTS ABROAD NEPAL PHOTOGRAPHY COMPETITION

Congratulations Charlotte Yuen on winning the inaugural monthly Projects Abroad Nepal Photography Competition! Charlotte, 17, from Canada, volunteered this August in the Care and Community Program as part of our Two Week High School Special in Nepal.



Here is what Charlotte had to say about her winning photo:

"After spending a busy day painting school walls and playing with the children at the school, the other volunteers and I decided to do a little bit of sightseeing. Together, we squished ourselves into a tiny taxi (The taxi driver played Call Me Maybe and we had a full out sing along session during the ride) and made our way to the Boudhanath Stupa. It was here that this photo was taken. We were walking around the perimeter of the Stupa when I noticed this old woman sitting by the side. Perhaps it was her face, lined with age, or perhaps it was the bold colours that she wore, but this older Nepali woman immediately left a striking impression on me. Without hesitation, I snapped a photo of her. However, upon looking at it on my camera, I noticed that the photo had come out dark and blurry. Perhaps, I lamented, the photo was not meant to be.

Or so I thought.

Looking up from my camera, I quickly realized that my friends were nowhere in sight! It seemed they had wandered off while I was taking a photo of the woman and had left me behind. With no cell phone and money (I had placed them in my friend's backpack earlier.) I had no choice but to stay put and hope they come back to fetch me. I took it as a sign for me to take the perfect photo of the Nepali woman, so I did just that."

**Congratulations again to Charlotte! Next month's submissions will be accepted until January 7th, so start shooting. Good luck!**

# If You're Happy and You Know It...Wash Your Hands!

*Christina Jensen – Denmark  
Chitwan Medical Teaching College*

På Chitwan Medical College Teaching Hospital arrangerer en gruppe læger og sygeplejersker jævnligt "childrens' health camps" på skoler i Chitwan. Her foretager de gratis sundhedstjek på børnene og måler og vejer dem.

De havde inviteret 10 af os frivillige med, og ville have os til at undervise børnene i tandbørstning og håndvask. Jeg kom på håndvaskeholdet. Da vi ankom til skolen ved 9.30-tiden var børnene lige mødt ind og løb rundt i skolegården og synes at det var vildt spændende at så mange fremmede, hvide mennesker var kommet til deres skole. Da klokken ringede ind, kunne vi sidde og drikke en kop te og forberede undervisningen. Vi havde følgende til rådighed: en skolegård, en



vandpumpe, en plasticspand med tilhørende kande, tre stykker sæbe og to håndklæder.

Vi startede med at undervise de 6-8-årige. De kom ud til os i skolegården og dannede en cirkel rundt om os. Med skilte og små rollespil viste vi børnene 4 klare eksempler på hvornår det især er vigtigt at vaske sine hænder: før måltider, efter toiletbesøg, når man er syg og hoster/nyser og når man har tydeligt beskidte hænder. Herefter demonstrerede vi hvordan korrekt håndvask skulle udføres og børnene kunne selv prøve bagefter.

Vi dannede to håndvaskehold: et ved vandpumpen og et ved plasticspanden. De var gode til at deles om sæbestykkerne og de to håndklæder og vi roste dem meget undervejs. Sådan kørte det i to timer med 4 klasser indtil frokost. Herefter underviste vi to klasser af de 8-10-årige.

Det var rigtig sjovt at undervise børnene, og de var rigtig gode til at vaske hænder og huske at skrubbe godt imellem fingrene og skylle al sæben af :)

Det var en lang dag, men jeg følte virkelig at jeg gjorde noget godt som frivillig! Lægerne roste os efterfølgende og sagde at vi havde været rigtig gode til at undervise. Deres Health Camp motto er: 'World change starts with

educated children'. Så sandt som dets sagt!

## Nepal Fact #7

Mount Everest was named after George Everest, the Surveyor General of India at the time. The British claimed no local name could be found. In fact, the Tibetan word for Mt. Everest, Chomolungma, had been used for centuries before the British naming. It means "Holy Mother."

# Places We Love: Boudhanath Stupa

*Ian Sandler – United States of America  
Information Manager*

**Projects Abroad Nepal is starting a new blog series, highlighted in the monthly newsletter, #PlacesWeLove!** The premise is simple: write about your experience at a Nepali location that you love, that stood out to you, that you'll travel back to while daydreaming at your school desk or office cubicle. I started with my experience at Boudhanath Stupa, but the place can be your favorite cafe, your host family's home, even a dusty road in the middle of Nepali nowhere.

The idea is to be able to see how your experiences in a place compared to someone else's, and to gain insight into places you haven't yet explored. I hope many of you decide to share, and they can be emailed to me at [iansandler@projects-abroad.org](mailto:iansandler@projects-abroad.org)



When you step through the painted archway of Boudhanath stupa, the first things you notice are the eyes. At the peak of the massive dome, surrounded by fluttering prayer flags, rest two colorful spheres, peering out at the throngs of monks and tourists below. You can tell a lot about a person by their gaze, and this solitary guardian atop the temple was no different. This was no curious goggle, nor friendly peek. These ocular menaces were piercing, omnipotent, all-knowing. “Yes, I saw you toss that banana peel on the sidewalk, puny mortal,” these baby blues shouted. In an instant I was Frodo, and the eye of Sauron was reminding me who was boss. Am I a tad dramatic? Always. But the important thing is that this place had power, real power, and despite the camera-toting masses – me included – one could sense the spiritual energy between those fiery eyes. So is your introduction to this iconic Nepali landmark.

Boudhanath stupa was the first stop for the two week special care volunteers in Nepal, and I was their humble tour guide. While being peppered with questions on Buddhism and architectural history, there is only one way to handle the situation; act like you know what you are talking about. And so I did. Post-spiritual enlightenment and twenty minutes in an internet café, I added another subject to my ever-growing list of factoids and potential trivia-winners.

To start, a stupa is a mound-like structure that is said to contain Buddhist relics, and acts as a place of meditation. In this case, Boudhanath allegedly houses the ancient remains of Kassapa Boudha, hence the name. Kassapa was the sixth Buddha, or enlightened one, before Gautama Buddha, or *the* Buddha. While the rest of the world associates Buddha with the pudgy, jolly little man in a lotus position, there were in fact six more enlightened teachers before him, and one just so happened to be entombed where I had stood moments before.

Boudhanath is the perfect dichotomy for our modern age. It is both tourist hot-spot and sacred landmark; the ideal Facebook default picture and site for peaceful reflection. Around its ancient walls walk Tibetan monks adorned in the red and gold robes of tradition, slightly outpaced by frantic mothers trying to wrangle their less-than interested children. In a lot of ways the stupa is a microcosm of Nepal itself, a country steeped in history, trying to catch up with the modernity that has taken it by storm.

The massive semi-hemispherical mound is more than just an aesthetic beauty. Its structure is that of a *mandala*, or the



Hindu term roughly translating to “circle.” The dome in the middle is encapsulated by a large square, with four gates in the middle of each side. This shape is said to represent the cosmos; its symmetry and circular flow a perfect representation of the universe.

Pacing this universal microcosm with the curious volunteers was as enlightening for me as Boudhanath itself. Fresh-eyes and minds absorbed every detail, every novel moment. Things I continuously scoff at – me being the jaded, know-it-all staff member – began to sink in quickly. Yes, Nepalis can fit many items on a bicycle. True, stuffing 30 people in a small van is an impressive feat. You take many things for granted living in one place for an extended period of time, and what was once strange and exotic fades into normalcy. Sometimes all it takes is a new perspective to remind you of excitement that drew you there in the first place.

This wasn't my first time going to Boudhanath, and it certainly won't be my last. While I may not have the privilege of accompanying such an inquisitive and feisty group of students again, I hope I've taken on a bit of their wonder in the process. Next time, I will stare back at those piercing eyes, ready with questions of my own.

## Projects Abroad Nepal Christmas Party!

Last week Projects Abroad Nepal threw its annual Christmas party for the kids of J&K House and Happy & Friendship House, children's homes in Kathmandu, at the beautiful home of Olga Murray. There were plenty of laughs, an extraordinary cake, and one jolly, over-sized Santa Claus. A special thanks to Ryan Gunasena for his incredible donation of 68,000 Nepali Rupees that allowed this event to take place, and went to our placements at MSPN and NRH!

