

**SRI LANKA
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hundred Sri Lankan rupees. We met a group of fishermen one morning who had been out all night filling their boat with fish—they told us they hoped to make 600-700 rupees. Native Sri Lankans knew we were wealthy for the simple fact that we had made the trip to their country. We met very few people who had traveled internationally. Although we were privileged visitors, the people we met in Sri Lanka treated us with the warmest hospitality. Everyone waved, smiled, and took the time to get to know us. As an example, a group of us set out early one morning for a stroll along the

beach. Within 10 minutes we ran into a man who gestured us all inside his house. His house had been devastated by the tsunami and was no more than a cinderblock staircase, hallway, and side room. Nevertheless, he insisted that we all come in for a visit. His English was broken, but his kindness unmistakable. He rushed around cleaning off plastic chairs for us so that we could all have a seat. We stayed only for a short while since we had to get back for breakfast, but by the time we left (15 minutes after we arrived), he and his wife were hugging us all goodbye and wishing us well.

The country is somewhat of a paradox as the landscapes are gorgeous and the people are friendly despite

the fact that the houses they live in are demolished, trash is piled waist high in some places, and full recovery from the tsunami seems to be a long way out. How difficult it was to understand how these people could be so joyful amidst so much tragedy! Signs of the tsunami were everywhere and it was inescapable in conversation. Sometimes it would be the only word I could decipher as the friends we made talked to us about their lives.

One of the most rewarding aspects of the trip was visiting the three projects that Meredith has been a part of. Our college is financially and emotionally invested in three major projects: the Pelena grade school that was almost completely destroyed

by the tsunami, an orphanage for boys who lost their families due to the civil conflict, and an effort to raise funds for fishing boats in two communities: Lovigahawaththa and Ceylon Government Railroad. I'm so proud of the work that Meredith has done in these three areas. We had the opportunity to visit all of the sites and see firsthand how Meredith efforts have made an impact. I'm nervous though about how these projects will be maintained in the future. It was obvious after visiting the sites that our time and money has been extremely helpful but also that there is still so much more yet to be done. I believe it has become the mission of all of us on the trip to ensure that these projects are continued

until the needs of these wonderful people are met.

I was overjoyed to learn that there will be a group from Meredith returning to Sri Lanka during the summer. I strongly encourage everyone reading this to get involved with the Tide of Hope efforts in one way or another: research the projects on the Meredith website, off your financial support to one of the projects (everything helps), read a book about the country, keep the people there in your thoughts and prayers, or even consider making the trip yourself. After all, Sri Lanka is a lot like Cornhuskin'...YOU JUST HAVE TO EXPERIENCE IT... and we all know how much fun that is!

Journals from Sri Lanka

**Erica Oakley '07
January 3, 2006**

During the two days that we were in Lovigahawatha there are many moments that will remain with me forever but there is one particular memory that is extra special to me. I had become close, well as close as you can in one day, to a girl named Dilshani. The night before, a small group of us had gone down to Lovigahawatha and visited the home of Malani and had a lovely time getting to meet the children. When it came time for us to leave, Dilshani grabbed my hand with a big smile on her face and walked with me as far as she could.

The next day at the party, Dilshani came up to me with that same big smile on her face. During the party,

pictures that Rebekah Meek had taken on a previous trip were given to the families. Afterwards, Dilshani began walking around with me and I showed her how to use my video camera. She videotaped for about 15 minutes and then she disappeared. After a few minutes she



came back and handed me the picture of herself that Rebekah Meek had taken. I told her that I could not take the picture but she insisted. This brought tears to my eyes. I don't know if she had any other photos of herself though I'm quite certain that they had probably all

been destroyed in the tsunami. I could not believe that she willingly gave it to me and I began to wonder if her mom knew. I took a picture with her and of her and told her that I would post them to her once I got back to America. I will treasure that photograph and the memory it holds forever. After the party and when it was time to go back to the hotel, Dilshani once again grabbed hold of my arm and walked with me all the way back to the hotel and we said our goodbyes. The next morning when a group of us went walking along the beach, I saw Dilshani walking towards me in her white school uniform. It was a wonderful surprise to see her and be able to say our goodbyes once again, but I'm hoping that it wasn't a final goodbye.

**Mary Covington Walker '06
December 31, 2005**

After two long days of airports, taxis, and buses, our plane finally landed on Sri Lankan soil. It was hard to believe we had finally made it. This trip that we have talked about and discussed for the past several months was actually becoming a reality. Wow, I am in Asia. I am in Sri Lanka. These are the first thoughts that ran through my head, halfway around the world from anything familiar. It's been three full days of traveling since we first arrived.

From the start, it's been one adventure after another. Our days begin early in the morning and last late in the evening, but every minute is well worth it. In the past three days I have: helped feed a baby elephant, witnessed a herd of elephants enter a river for an afternoon bath, visited the famous Cave Temple of Dambulla, conquered the rock fortress of Sigiriya, and journeyed through a swamp riding an elephant. It's amazing how many experiences we have

encountered so far, and I look forward to the adventures that lay ahead.

I came to Sri Lanka with hopes that I could give something to this country, but Sri Lanka has given me so much in return. The kindness and generosity of the people here is so inviting. Everywhere we go we are greeted with a smile. Our tour guide, our driver, and the other man accompanying us we call our "bodyguard" have gone above and beyond to make our trip memorable. The people here want to teach you about their culture and traditions. They want you to fall in love with Sri Lanka just as they do. And it's working.

In addition to enjoying the beautiful sights, my heart goes out to the not so lovely sights. Everywhere we go there are dogs - not cute fluffy dogs, but sick dogs. The dogs suffered from malnutrition and a skin disease. It just breaks my heart to see them lying on the road so helpless, and no way to help them.