

Journals from Sri Lanka

Jessica Wolf, '08
January 16, 2006

Well, we've been back for a week now. I think I've finally developed some sort of "routine" and all my clothes are washed and unpacked. Everyone asks me about my trip—curious as to what we did and my reactions to everything we saw and did. Several people have asked me what my favorite part of the trip was. I find this question next to impossible to answer; I simply cannot choose a "favorite" part. I have also found it very difficult to describe the trip in one word. If I had to pick one word, it would probably be "amazing" or "unreal," but neither even come close to describing the trip.

Since we've been back, I've done a lot of adjusting—to the time, to a new daily routine, to not seeing the group everyday, to not hearing horns beeping constantly, to not seeing Upali, Buddika, and Ananda's faces every morning, and to not seeing the smiling faces of all the Sri Lankan people. I miss climbing up on the bus everyday, wondering what the day would hold. I miss seeing and talking to Nadee and Darshi—realizing every time I would talk to them how much different our lives are. I miss seeing the group. Every time I run into someone who went on the trip, my face lights up—as if I were reunited with a friend I hadn't seen in years. We all shared an experience that can never be repeated. And as much as we try to explain it to others, we will never be able to fully explain everything we saw or felt along the way.

I was showing my grandmother pictures in a book that I bought while in Sri Lanka. It has pictures and information of many of the places that we went to. As I was looking through the pictures with her, it seemed

so "unreal." It's so hard to believe that we have actually been to those places and seen the things that the book talks about. Even when I'm telling people about the trip, it seems unreal to me—almost as if it were all a dream.

Perhaps the hardest thing (now that I'm back) will be sorting out how to make my experience the most that it can be. I don't want to eventually forget everything I learned, saw, and felt during the trip. I want to figure out some way of taking what I learned and applying it to my life. I don't want to forget all the wonderful people that we met. I don't want to say "Oh, isn't it sad that they suffered so much?" and then just keep living my life. I don't want to just feel bad for them; I want to do something to help them. I want to do all that I can to make a difference.

On the front of my journal, there is a poem entitled "Don't Quit." I had read it when I got the journal, but it didn't really have any impact. I read it again on the flight home and it was just amazing how well the poem represents the people of Sri Lanka, especially the ones that we met. Here is the poem:

"Don't Quit"
 by Jill Wolf

Don't quit when the tide is lowest,
 For it's just about to turn;
 Don't Quit over doubts and questions,
 For there's something you may learn.
 Don't quit when the night is darkest,
 For it's just a while 'til dawn;
 Don't quit when you've run the farthest,
 For the race is almost won.
 Don't quit when the hill is steepest,
 For your goal is almost nigh;
 Don't quit, for you're not a failure
 Until you fail to try.

Kelly Beth Smith '06
January 1, 2006

We're in route to Nuwara Eliya on the most terrifying bus ride of my life. To say that the roads are all under construction would be an understatement of the highest degree. The roads are narrow and without lane markings. Most of the roads are unpaved and those that are paved would definitely not be considered paved according to U.S. standards. We've been inches from the edge of giant cliffs as our tour bus skillfully dodges oncoming buses, trucks, and tuk tuks (taxis).

The sights along the way are some of the most beautiful I've ever seen and yet also the most tragic. Amidst the cascading waterfalls and illuminated fields of vegetation there are young boys begging for money and old women with no teeth posing as tea pickers to make a dollar.

I don't know what we would do without Upali (our fearless tour guide), Darshi and Nadee (our Sri Lankan translators and guests for the week). They had to explain

why we couldn't give the little boy in the yellow shirt five dollars.

His shoulders heaved up and down with exhaustion as he raced from one level of the mountain to another to meet our tour bus. His eyes darted from one window to another looking at no one in particular, and yet looking at each one of us. He looked at us with such desperation and expectancy. Upali offered him 200 rupees for the handful of brightly colored flowers, but the boy turned in down and asked for 500. We were all so confused and sad when Upali climbed back on the bus with money in hand. Why had he not given money to this poor child? Nadee helped explain that it is illegal for Sri Lankans under the age of 14 to sell like this boy had been doing. She was insistent that it was best not to promote unlawfulness, which we would inadvertently be doing by paying him. She also said it would be unsafe to give a child that much money.

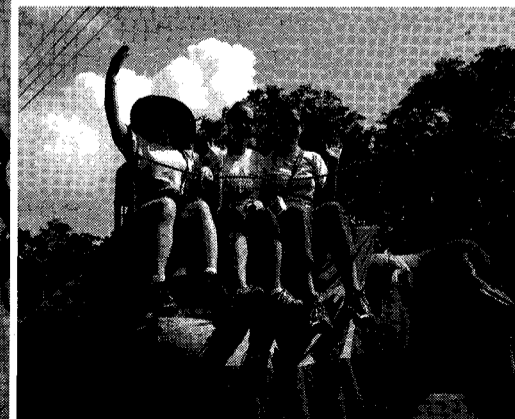
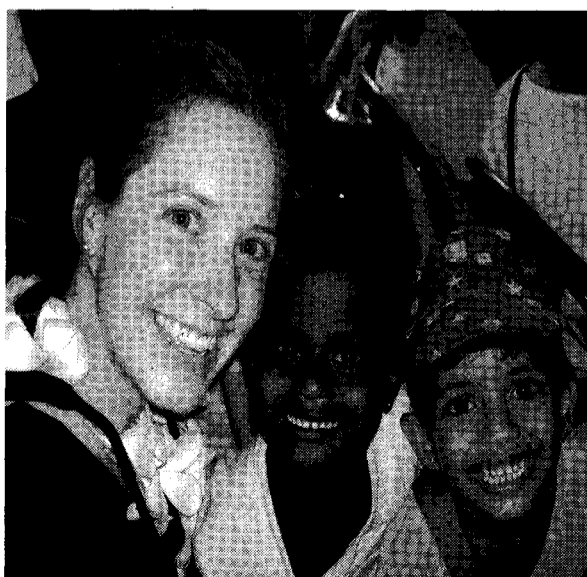
It is important to note that 100 rupees is equivalent to about one American dollar. To think that five dollars

might put the young boy in danger is disheartening. To think of what the equally impoverished townspeople might do to get the five dollars from him is chilling.

I don't believe I'll ever forget the eyes of that little boy. I hope I don't. For a moment we were all so disappointed when Upali refused to pay the little boy 500 rupees. We were sad for the desperate child and I think if we are honest we'd admit we were also sad because we were not able to help. As the bus to our door sealed shut and the engine grumbled its way up the mountain we were powerless. This is a feeling to which many of us are not accustomed.

As we progress into week two of our Sri Lankan expedition I am curious to see how we will handle the unsettling nature of feeling powerless, yet also so powerful and responsible to help the people around us. Each finished day leaves us feeling more affectionate for the people we meet and the more affection we feel the more compelled we are to help.

Lindsey de La Fosse '06



The entire Sri Lanka experience was incredible to me; it is unlike any other place I have ever been. The amount of destruction and personal loss that the children have seen and felt in their lives—and they still smile and laugh—that is amazing to me. We have a lot to learn from them.