

I will be going to Cape Town, South Africa to work with an organization called CHILD FAMILY HEALTH INTERNATIONAL.

As most of you know I am a nursing student and love traveling...since I only have two months of summer I wanted to combine two of my passions!

Let me tell you a little bit about CFHI (most of this has come from its website\*):

"CFHI's program in Cape Town, South Africa offers students a unique opportunity to observe alongside healthcare professionals in an idyllic setting surrounded by Table Mountain in one of South Africa's most beautiful cities. Participants will get an opportunity to understand how the health care system has dealt with a public health crisis that has fundamentally altered the state's social and economic fabric."

Child family health international is known for its high standards and unique service learning methods. I am confident that participating in an international health experience in Cape Town, South Africa with CFHI will help me achieve my goals. Living in a multicultural city, Toronto, it is important to enhance my cultural sensitivity and to further understand global issues. I believe that being exposed to an international health experience will enable me to be more versed in alternative health practices, have a greater appreciation of health care from a different perspective and enable me to provide a more holistic approach to care.

CFHI's values and goals complement mine very well. I believe this organization encourages health care students to learn as much as possible but also limits them to work within their scope of practice. This ensures that CFHI participants are accountable for their skills, knowledge and judgement which are important because it leaves a positive footprint on the international communities that CFHI serves....If I can't perform a skill/analysis/test something on a Canadian then I shouldn't be doing it to anyone else in any other country.

The main reason why I chose this program is because it health care is provided where health care would STILL be provided otherwise.

I was asked in my application what do I want to gain out of this experience and here it is:

*Service learning Objectives:*

1. I want to have a better understanding of the social and historical issues of South Africa and the role these issues have had in the development of the local communities of Cape Town.
2. As a student nurse, it is part of our code of ethics to reflect on and challenge any personal assumptions and biases in order to gain a more informed perspective. Participating in this program, I will be actively engaging and exploring a diverse community that is different from my own as well as trying to understand how

power and privilege has shaped my biases and those individuals in the Cape Town community.

3. It is important for me to apply my academic and practical skills in an international community. This will enable me to make meaningful connections with the local people of Cape Town.

*Learning Objectives:*

1. Enhance transferable skills including communication, teambuilding and problem solving with multifaceted challenges such as differences in culture, language and health care training.
2. I would like to become more confident in my skill set by having the opportunity to observe and practice clinical skills.
3. I would like to have the opportunity to view alternative and complementary health care that is not commonly practiced in North America. It will provide more insight of the culture but also of alternative health care practices that may be useful in North America.

So hopefully now I am accountable to all of you to achieve the goals that I have set out for myself!

I am about to disembark on my 3 day journey to S.A!!

*Totsiens (Goodbye in Afrikaans)*

**My Host Family & The CFHI group**

So most of you are probably wondering who I am spending most of my time with...as most of you are aware I am IN LOVE with my host family. Mama Liz is actually the greatest woman on this earth...unfortunately 2 years ago her husband suffered from a huge MI while driving some elderly person to get his pension cheque...he died instantly...since then Mama Liz hasn't really left the house...but she is such a warm spirited lovely person...She talks so loud and is obsessed with her cat {phoebe} all day...one day I caught her lovely cat phoebe doing the naughty with another cat...Mama Liz was so upset when I showed her the picture...she felt that phoebe was going to leave her...but of course the cat came back to her...mama liz makes Lamb everyday...its unreal...but I don't think I'll be ordering any lamb curry when I get home!

Chandra is Mama Liz grand daughter...she is such a sweet and wonderful person...she is only 18 but is so



mature and so beautiful..she looks more asian to me...we went out to hemispheres (I will talk about my nights out another blog)...she can dance and sing until her heart is content!

Portia is Mama Liz's daughter...she looks exactly like my mother. It is scary...one night I thought she was my mom!!! lol! She too is such a lovely person...

Zoe and Kim are both granddaughters of Mama Liz...she watches them everyday...they are so cute and so polite...they loved playing with the stethoscope and cards!



The three of them opened their homes to me...treated me like part of the family...and made my experience in South Africa so wonderful...Some people were shocked to find out we were in Athlone staying with families...because apparently it is dangerous in the cape flats...I never once felt unsafe with Mama Liz....

Marion and Avril...Marion was our homestay/social coordinator-not going to lie I ended up assisting her with the social part...I have a control problem! Avril was the medical coordinator and helped us understand the socio-political context of the health care system...They were amazing supports...truly is the reason why the CAPE TOWN program is such a success...Also, Tony (Avril's husband) was the teacher who brought us into his school and introduced us to the children...the fact that Avril and Marion hug us everytime we see them...call us regularly to find out what is going on...is so comforting and makes the transition so much easier....

## **HIV EDUCATION IN THE SCHOOL**

Today Ashley and I went to a school in one of the townships....we went to do a very informal presentation about HIV...I had no idea that going into the school was going to have such profound impact on me. To this date there have been very few moments that has totally shaken my core and my values but today my thoughts are jumbled and my emotions are erratic....

We walked into the school....evidence of vandalism was everywhere. Children (age 14-20) who are on TIK (Crystal Meth) break into the school steal light bulbs, door knobs, pipes, bricks...anything they can sell to get more of the debilitating drug.

I am sharing these stories on my blog...although I am in conflict of whether I should...but I am simply wanting you to become AWARE...

After a short introduction two young girls (age 16, 17) sat down with me and shared very personal stories...stories that they have never shared with anyone for fear of shame and for fear that nothing can be done anyways...One of the girls has been raped by her sister's husband every day for the past few years and was living on the streets from age 6 to 11 but when her mother (HIV+ and TIK user) almost died she got into a foster home...this young sweet girl tried to take her own life 3 times....one of the girls uncles has touched

her while on TIK. They both can't go outside but they can't study inside their homes since they live in a 1 bedroom shanty house with 12 other people...but they they both excel in school so they can have a better future for themselves. Gangstars run their township and they live in constant fear of being accidentally shot and/or raped...

Once they left Tony brought in two young men (age 17,18). These boys are gangsters...they are both West Side Gangstars...the gangs give these boys a ranking...if you are 26 then that means you have robbed, if you are 27 then that means you are thirsty for blood (injured/killed someone), if you are 28 then you have done 26 and 27 + you have raped. The two boys sitting across from me one was a 28 and one was a 27. Their rival gang is called the ugly americans...although the ugly americans are bigger...they have less guns. I listened to these boys talk about killing, robbing, taking drugs...it seemed just so normal...they walk around knowing that at any minute they could be stabbed or killed. One of the boys was shot and stabbed because he tried to get out of the gang...I am so conflicted because on the one hand they have done such horrible things to people...but I don't hate them...I wasn't scared of them...they looked like any other teenage boy. They were pushed into this pathway at 13...don't know any different...or do they?

I have so many more stories...of girls being sexually assaulted, grandfathers being people's fathers too, murders, beatings...what is so difficult for me to understand is that these kids are smiling and laughing while telling me the hardships that they have faced...this is normal. One girl said to me "Don't cry...this is just life."

Every child I spoke with I asked them if they have any way of coping...do they have anyone they can speak with about these hardships...every single one of them said that they would love to talk about things...but no one is there to listen.

Tony, Ashley and I were talking about ways to help these children...because money isn't really what they need...we are going to try and set up a PEN PAL type of system where students can write down there feelings...If anyone has any suggestions please let me know ASAP of how we can give these children a way to cope...

Sorry I have been so MIA....i guess that's what happens when you're having too much fun!

A few weekends ago we all played hookie with work on Friday to do the infamous Garden Route. It "includes one of the most beautiful stretches of coastline, whose starting point is constantly contested as towns such as Witsand, Stilbaai and Albertinia join the route that winds its way for some 200 km via George, Wilderness, Sedgefield and Knysna on to Plettenberg Bay and culminating in the Tsitsikamma Forest - a fairyland of giant trees, ferns and bird life."

We woke up at the crack of dawn and drove for a few hours to CANGO CAVES. These caves are "in Precambrian limestones at the foothills of the Swartberg range near the town of Oudtshoorn in the Western Cape Province of South Africa. The principal cave is one of the country's finest, best known and most popular tourist caves and attracts many visitors from overseas. Although the extensive system of tunnels and chambers go on for over four kilometers"



Basically they are uber cool...and we laughed a lot when people got stuck in the tunnels (no big whoop the tunnels were so small that i could barely get my hips through them!) Also, apparently a week prior to us going to the caves there was an overweight woman who tried to go into the tunnels (even though the tour guide told her not to) and she got STUCK for 10 HOURS! They had to use paraffin wax to get her out...and now she is suing them for "discrimination"....

After the good ol cango caves we headed to the ostrich farm. I hated every second of it...but I must say it was amusing. Aelita you can be proud of me because I refused to go on an OSTRICH RIDE! That's right you can ride an ostrich except they put a BAG over its head....I just couldn't bring myself to do it...I have a video of others doing it though...also I just think ostriches are kind of ugly!

That night we decided to go out for a nice dinner...a few bottles of wine later we ended up stealing a pie...and one of the guys ate the whole thing while our Medical Director watched him! It was all in good fun...but she did laugh and say...you guys are our future doctors?!

The following morning we again woke up early and went through the forest on zip lines...I was NOT GOOD at that...in fact I was the worst! I didn't know how to brake so I would go zooming between the trees almost flipping over! It was definately a sight...I finally got the technique down by the end but dear lord it was hilarious!



After that a few of the girls went bungee jumping on the world's highest bungee! Crazy!

We then headed to an elephant reserve where they rescue orphaned elephants, injured ones...it was amazing! I learned a lot about elephant's mating techniques...length,size, girth...you name it we were taught it! lol!



That night we took a sunset cruise...then went and had a BRI...in other words a BBQ! It was a packed day but well worth it!

The last day on the Garden Route we went to a GAME RESERVE! It's similiar to a Safari...we saw Giraffes, rhinos, zebra, lions, elephants, horses, ostriches, gizelles, wildabeast...you name it we saw it! It was so so amazing...

By the end of the trip we were all exhausted and cranky...we had crammed in so much in one weekend....also I felt bad for Punit as he was the only guy who came on the trip and he was the only British guy...aka he probably wanted to die. There was me, two sorority girls (who I love by the way!), a texan, a physics major and small town girl from Alberta....aka we were so annoying! love it!



## Weekend Fun

Saturday:

Since we went out Friday night we decided to sleep in and just chill out for most of the day. Most of the group is tight for money so they decided to go to a bar to watch the tri nations Australia vs South Africa rugby game. The tickets were sold out so two of us went to the stadium and just hoped to buy scaplers tickets...NO ONE was selling any...but just by

fluke we were walking by this drunken men screaming out that they were selling two tickets for 100 rand a piece (the regular price ticket was 125 rand)...the guys had two extra tickets and just wanted to get rid of them...they ended up being really cool and so we bought them from them...they were standing section but SO MUCH FUN! The spirit of the crowd was incredible...although I really don't know too much about rugby (aka nothing at all) I enjoyed myself!

## Sunday:

We woke up and headed to green point market. Its your basic market with trinkets and toys and things that tourists buy to show people that you were in Africa! After that we drove to Cape Point which is the most south westerly point of Africa...but on our way we ended up in Hout Bay and the road was closed...aka we had to turn back and it ended up taking 3 hours! Ridiculous (on the way back home it took 40minutes!).



Cape point is famous because once ships from Europe made it passed this point they knew they had survived the worst part of the journey to India. The national park also has wild animals...we saw some ostriches and monkeys which was really cool!

Monday:

It was a long weekend because it was Women's Day in South Africa. "This commemorates the national march of women on this day in 1956 to petition against legislation that required African persons to carry the "pass", special identification documents which curtailed an African's freedom of movement during the apartheid era."

### **Interesting Hospital Stories**

1. Aortic Dissection - so I took this patient to get x-rays we were chatting...he came in with Shortness of Breath...we were laughing and joking together...I brought him back we looked at the x-ray (we were looking for a widened mediastinum in his heart because the MD was trying to rule OUT aortic dissection) but it was normal....so the MD wanted us to do more ECGs (oh yes I forgot...the MDs, nurses do ALL the blood work, tests etc...there are no labs) we were really busy so we ended up doing vitals on other patients..all of a sudden i noticed him breathing heavily...the swiss students ran and got the doctor...I thought the patient was having a myocardial infarction (heart attack) but instead it was in fact his aorta's muscular layer was splitting and he was in a lot of pain...we stabilized him (aka I was holding the IV bag because there was no IV pole...the MD even told me I was the best IV bag holder out there....lol...) but then we sent him to another hospital that had more facilities...never learned of the outcome...unfortunately

2. Shock- a patient came in HIV+ (still the nurses were taking blood without wearing gloves) in shock...he had a lot of blood loss which means it was hypovolemic shock...his blood pressure was dropping and it actually was like what our text books tell us....the exact signs. It was really interesting to observe...next time I get to do the catheter (its sad that I'm excited for that)

3. Bullet- I already mentioned the guy who shot himself and managed to not damage anything even though it passed through his KNEE!

4. Motor-Vehicle Accident- saw a little kids skull...seriously...wear your seatbelts!

### **My first impression of the hospital**

For those of you weak in the stomach I will warn you which paragraphs to skip...but there are some cool and interesting things that I've learned in the past week in the hospital.

My hospital is about 30 minutes away from Athlone...it is a referral hospital that used to be private but in fact now it is public. Therefore, it is much nicer than the public hospitals in the surrounding area...MUCH nicer!

I'm placed in the casualty department in the trauma unit...its doesn't feel very different than Canada but the population and system is quite different. It is so strange and odd to

me since...HIV and TB is so common here that nurses and doctors don't use gloves, masks, goggles, gown...even if they are taking IVs etc...but there have been TWO deaths of SWINE FLU and the nurses and doctors are running around with masks and gloves! Its funny because more people die a day of HIV, TB and the regular flu here...but everyone is scared of H1N1!

There are a lot of things that are simply just not done in Canada but I can't help but laugh...There is a book...called 'THE BOOK OF DEAD.' Seriously, it is in bold letters all around it and the nurses just walk around holding it filling it in in between taking patients vitals.....imagine seeing that when you were at the hospital....

Also, they treat mental ill individuals quite horrifically here. Yesterday a man came in with two armed police men...one was holding the largest gun I had ever seen....of course I had the nerve to go up to him and ask the police men what he was holding..."oh, its just an R5 semi automatic assault rifle." My question is...if the man with schizophrenia were to run away or become violent would the police officer shoot him right there in the trauma unit? They also immediately sedate the patient...which seems bizarre to me...maybe trying to calm the patient down would be helpful? Maybe? Lol!

This hospital is interesting because all the doctors are juniors except for 2 seniors...the rest apparently are in Canada! The doctors do not get paid very well here and actually were on strike last month...illegally (obviously!)! But last year there were more South African doctors outside of South Africa than there were in South Africa! One of the doctors was telling us that a notice from one of the hospitals in Canada was sent and it stated: "Attn: Doctors please write your medical notes in either French or English, NOT AFRIKAANS"....I haven't run into too many South African doctors but now I am going to go keep my eyes out for them! Lol!

The nurse ranking is also different...if you have a 4 year degree you are called a SISTER, 2 year you are a STAFF NURSE, 1 year Nurse assistant, 6 months Care assistant. Also, if you are shown something by the doctor and he feels confident that you can do it...you are allowed to do it...because you are under his medical license....obviously I don't understand the legality about it but the CEO of the hospital tried to explain that stuff to me...it went right over my head!

Yesterday...I went to the other hospital...saw a bullet getting taken out...the guy accidently shot himself! It was a tiny bullet but still sweet!

## Orientation, Waterfront, Camps Bay, Hospital

I have been partying way too much these past few days. I guess it always happens in the first few days of vacation (also I haven't been in the hospital very much yet)...so in terms of culture/education...it's been little to none...



On Saturday we went to the waterfront which is a strip of shops and restaurants to watch the rugby game. Rugby is like a religion here (well according to MAMA LIZ...Soccer is like a religion to the "blacks")...the whole city stops and just watches the sport! Most of the Americans here have never seen rugby or even knew the rules so they really wanted to watch it (even though it was only on TV)...we have decided to buy tickets to the SOUTH AFRICA vs AUSTRALIA match of the TRI NATION TOURNAMENT (MARK CAMP...I KNOW YOU ARE JEALOUS)!

On Sunday I had to do orientation for the CFHI program... Afterwards we went for a drive through a gang run neighbourhood with the coordinator...she wants us to see the conditions of the people...so that we can understand why individuals are coming into the ER with such severe wounds and in such late stages of chronic illnesses....For me it was not too scary but I felt bad for the girl in my group, Tabitha, who had just arrived and never left Alberta or even been on a plane...Culture Shock! Anyways...it was quite interesting because Avril was explaining that two twin brothers ruled the neighbourhood...the police can't do anything because of corruption within the force...but finally one day the whole neighbourhood got fed up and went against the brothers...killing one of them and another one was put in jail for so many things...I don't have room to list them all! As we drove by we saw about 10 children all under the age of 12 stealing tires off of a car that was parked...it was like a game to them....I am sure that in the rich part of Cape Town the 12 year olds are playing cricket or rugby beside their parents BMWs....another example of the contrast of the rich and the poor!



Yesterday was my first day at the hospital...I am in the Casualty/Trauma Unit at a hospital Eastriver...it used to be a private hospital during the Apartheid era and now it is a public one. Needless to say it is MUCH NICER than the local hospital that the others are located at...I haven't had too much excitement but I am just trying to take it all in...one thing I will say is they have NO INFECTION CONTROL....considering the population they serve almost 60% of the

individuals have HIV and even more have TB...the nurses and doctors don't wear masks and gloves when taking blood or when doing basically anything! Luckily, me and the two Swiss students are breaking the norms and putting on gloves and trying to express our concern about the infection control issues both for the safety of the patients and for us...also NO ONE EVER WASHES THEIR HANDS! I think UofT professors would lose it if they saw this....considering we get like 12 THOUSAND lectures on the importance of washing your hands! Lol!

Last night we went to Camps Bay which is also known as MILLIONAIRE ROW... The houses are all mountain side with an ocean view...palm trees line the beachfront...we watched the sunset which was spectacular! When we come here it feels more like L.A. than South Africa....

I am really loving my experience so far and really looking forward to starting the hospital rotation...already I am being challenged, learning a lot and most importantly having fun!

### **The First Few Days...**

So I haven't had a spare moment to really blog or even check my email...I have to borrow a lap top from others and quite frankly I haven't been too eager to spend my time blogging (what has happened to me!)

I got in on Wednesday night and immediately felt at home...Marion and Avril (the medical coordinators/local coordinators) welcomed me with a big hug...they were so chatty and excited so it was easy to feel welcome. My host mom, Liz, or what we call her MAMA LIZ..is amazing! She is hilarious, loud, chaotic....sounds a lot like my family at home. Her 41 year old daughter, Portia, lives in the back house and her granddaughter, Chandra, lives in the house with her. They love their butter, Seriously!!!!

We went out that night and it gave me a small taste of the effects of the Apartheid...apparently it is completely ok to label bars/clubs/malls/restaurants as either a White bar, Coloured bar or a Black bar....if you are White and coloured you can go to each others areas...but there seems to be hostility (according to my house mom) with the coloureds and the blacks....it feels weird even typing this because it feels so wrong...it seems like everyone is comfortable with these terms except me... I should be used to racism after all the travels (refer to taiwan where people did not like my brown skin, but lindsay was adored) but I'm not....its interesting though even though I would be considered "coloured" based on my brown skin but I am considered WHITE because I am from north America.

The bar we went to initially scared me...there were a bunch of guys standing outside...the club looked dark and gloomy...but when we went in it was quite swanky and trendy...it was a nice welcome...we only stayed until 11pm....but they welcomed me with a SPRINGBOK which is a South African shot but also apparently an animal?

The next day we just stuck around Athlone .... There are a bunch of townships close by....now this term I am completely disturbed by....townships are what I would consider SLUMS. The word doesnt really represent the conditions of what people live....it kinda

normalizes it...We are doing a tour of the townships next week which I will learn a lot more about it...

That evening I met the rest of the July group and we went to dinner in a winery in Stellenbosh...its just outside of cape town and there are tons of wineries there....it was quite cold outside so they gave us all individual blankets...and painted our faces...

Yesterday I finally went into CAPE TOWN..it is stunning the view of Table Mountain...the University of Cape town...the beaches...its just spectacular...Its really interesting to see the "white" part of town..the houses are huge and the views are great...the contrast between rich/poor isn't as shocking as India because there are distinct areas in which people live...the rich white folks don't really go outside of their area (apparently!)

Last night...it was the JULY's last night...so we went out to Long Street...it was insane...Long street is basically where all the young kids go...but it can be quite sketchy at night..one of the girls got pickpocketed and called the guy out on it...and he admitted to her that he did! lol! The shots here are uber small...and I mean I'm not here to party (but apparently med/nursing students here do)...so I stuck to wine...A few of the girls here in fact know one of my friends Alex Omicelli from Med school...and one of the girls graduated Kin with me....small world, eh!