

Saturday, October 10, 2009

One week down, 9 to go

I have just finished up my first week in Dehradun, India. The host family experience was wonderful and the city itself was...well quite an experience. I've gotten used to walking around here without gasping constantly. I find myself weaving in and out of traffic like a true native...well except today when a bike came out of nowhere attempting to end my trip early. At least the many people around me got a good laugh at the foreign girl scream while almost getting ran over in the middle of the square. The square (I don't think it's really called that but I tend to make up a lot of words which I don't know here) is a massive market with hundreds of outdoor shops. There are alleys shooting off in every direction with the most colorful items for sale. It's packed with people. I've come to miss the "No Motorized Vehicles" signs in the US because here even though you can't see two feet in front of you, you always have to be ready to dodge the speedy motorcycles that creep up behind you without warning. At least everyone has LOUD working horns which I get the pleasure of hearing 24 hours a day. Just a warning, I may come home half deaf. This place is so different (Duh I know). A massage lady comes to the house everyday for only 50 rupees per hour (that's \$1 btw!) yet I find myself crouching in the corner of a dusty bathroom attempting to rinse my hair with the drizzle of cold water that might come out of the spicket if I'm lucky. I find that services here are extremely cheap. I got two pairs of pants tailored for 40 rupees (80 cents) and I spend 5 rupees (10 cents) to get anywhere in town I want on the auto rickshaw. Maybe that's also because it's the sketchiest thing I've ever been in lol. It's finding normal goods here that's the hard part. I asked about where a grocery store might be, a place to find food, products, and what not. They pointed me to the *MEGA MART* down the street. Basically it's half the size of the smallest market in the most rural towns. I leave to go to Than Gaon for the next week. I'll be without internet and phone and living in a stone hut. Oh ya I have to carry a 4 foot long stick with me everywhere for... reptiles? Here goes nothing!



Friday, October 16, 2009

Than Gaon

So I just got back from Than Gaon, a very rural place in the foothills of the Himalayan mountains. I could probably write forever about how beautiful it was, but basically, think about the most incredible picture of the himalayas you've ever seen and multiply that by at least 10, that's how amazing it is. I think I finally understand the meaning of having your breath being taken away. The road up to the town was something in itself. It was basically offroading on rocky terrane in a rickety, windowless SUV. Talk about parts of the body All over the place. A massive cliff was a mere 2 feet away as well, as we attempted to chug up the mountain, similar to a sketchy rollercoaster climbing up it's first



big incline. Anyway, we get there and like I said it's absolutely incredible. We got to our room which was a little stone hut with four beds surrounded by mosquito nets. We played volleyball (surrounded by the Himalayas, I'll be saying that a lot btw) and the guys were better than those I play with at home (Greg and Mike!). We walk into our room later that night to find a HUGE spider on the wall! Biggest thing I'd ever seen, well until a couple days later. The clinic there is a small building that provides free service to people in surrounding villages. We observe the doctor and we actually help out quite a bit. I've learned how to check the heart for abnormalities, the lungs, and blood pressure. The next day we hiked to a nearby village, Batoli. It was a two hour hike each way in the mountains. We basically went from one peak to another, crossing a small river below, and running into herders, cattle, and sheep on the slim, steep, rugged path. We sat up a make shift clinic in a courtyard and people came to see the doctor that comes once a month. We then hiked back in time for yoga. We did yoga twice a day... surrounded by the himalayan mountains :) It was quite the experience! Especially practicing neti. This is where you pour salt water in one nostril and it comes out the other. All I can say about that is... horrifying. There is a free elementary school next to our hut as well. The children are all in little uniforms and when we come out in the morning, we are greeted by a symphony of "Good morning maam". Today they celebrated Diwali at school. Diwali is an Indian holiday celebrated by days of fireworks, sweets, and festivities. The actual Diwali is on Sunday, but tomorrow will be the big celebration. Let's hope I make it through to tell you all about it's craziness. There have been tons of warnings about the danger of fire crackers and the big mobs of people. It's time to get crazy, Indian style!



Thursday, October 22, 2009

Happy Diwali!



Well I made it through the weekend. So much has happened in the past week. We celebrated Diwali Friday and Saturday night. Just a reminder, Diwali is the biggest festival of the year in India celebrating the Goddess of wealth. Friday night we were invited to a place called Dun club. It's for the elite of society to come together and celebrate, eat delicious food, and watch incredible firework displays. It was quite the change from what I see in the city. The women were in beautiful saris with gold jewelry hanging off every part of them. Some had their hair down and some even showed parts of their legs! Just for the record, I haven't seen knee caps since I got here. Needless to say, everyone here is very conservative. The following night was the big celebration. Me and the four other students stayed at the homestay to enjoy the festivities from the rooftop. The family's son is our age and had about 15 of his friends over. We all ate, drank, and danced the night away while fireworks exploded all around us. The amount of fire crackers that go off on Diwali is about 10 times as many as our 4th of July. The sky is literally lit up with explosions until dawn. With that though came a downpour of ash so thick you can only make out the outlines of people in some of the pictures. I'm not complaining though, Diwali will probably be one of

the greatest experiences I'll have here.

Monday we started a new clinical rotation. We go to an OBGYN doctor in the morning and a cardiologist in the evening. The first day of clinic started very exciting. A woman came in with a spontaneous abortion, and I watched as the doctor vacuumed out the premature fetus. I know it sounds intense, but that is nothing compared to what I saw the next day. Later that day we caught an auto rickshaw to our next clinic. Tuesday was just as crazy. I saw my first live birth! The baby being delivered was incredible, but things kind of went downhill after that. The doctor used a suction to pop the baby out, so the actual birthing only took like 10 seconds. The aftermath was more dramatic though. The mother had post partum hemorrhaging, which means she doesn't stop bleeding. The uterus wasn't contracting like it's supposed to and on top of that, she had a LOT of tearing, probably from the baby coming out so fast. So I then watched her being drugged and sewed up for almost 30 minutes. That's when things started going hazy. Luckily I made it to a chair right before the bright light took over, and then managed my way to the toilet seconds before my breakfast made a second appearance. But don't worry everyone, both the mother and I are doing fine now. Later that day we went to our second clinic. This time we took a vickram, the cheaper more crowded version of a rickshaw. Halfway there we were pulled over by the police and our driver was arrested. Someone told us later the it was because he had too many people in the vehicle. I guess 12 people crammed into a vehicle the size of a smart car isn't allowed, the maximum is 10! And here I was beginning to think there were no rules around here. All the women here have intense nose jewelry and lots of gold earrings filling their ears. Today I went to the plastic surgeon to get my nose pierced, to further immerse myself in the culture you know :). He told me about an American woman coming to get surgery done. I guess it's only \$1,700 for breast implants and equally as cheap for other cosmetic surgeries. Hey maybe I'll come home with more baggage than I thought lol just kidding mom and dad. Well that sums up the week.

An Indian Wedding

This last weekend, the five of us rented a hotel in Patiala to attend a wedding. Weddings here last for days and we were invited to the last two days which include a night of dancing on each side of the family and then the ceremony the next night. Saturday night we celebrated with the bride's side of the family at a beautiful home lit up with bright lights, colorful saris, dazzling jewelry and some of the best food I've had here so far. So while everyone back at home was out celebrating Halloween, I danced the night away to Punjab music while enjoying endless Indian food, oh and a full open bar J The next night was the actual ceremony and it was hands down the most spectacular display I've seen since being here. You'll have to check out the pictures because it's way too much to explain in writing. Family flew in from all over the world and the guest list was probably around 500. The catering tables literally lined the entire perimeter of the huge courtyard while tons of servers meandered throughout the party with endless amounts of appetizers and drinks. There is a gathering/celebration when the groom arrives and then the bride and groom sit and take pictures with anyone who wants them for 3 hours! I was dragged onto the dance floor by some of the party goers and had one of the most insane experiences of my life. A huge group of men and women started dancing in a circle

around me and suddenly the men started throwing money up in the air above me. It was literally raining money on me for a good 5 minutes!

The Taj and Chandigarh

This week started off with a spectacular viewing of the Taj Mahal. It was everything I was expecting and more. By more I mean the journey to the Taj was something in itself. The plan was to take an 8 hour taxi ride overnight on Friday, visit Agra, then take another one back Saturday night. The plan was to get plenty of rest in our air conditioned, SUV cab. The plan was far from what happened! The '8' hour journey turned into 12 hours after the driver got lost several times. It didn't help that he spoke no English and we had no idea how far we were, not that the driver seemed to know either. And as for the sleeping part, imagine trying to rest your head against a window while off-roading...for 12 hours. Between speed bumps, giant pot holes, dirt caked roads and the fact that every driver here is gas and brake happy, the thought of sleep slowly slipped away as I popped around in the cab like a popcorn kernel. Although we were tired and beaten up from the long night, the sight of the Taj Mahal seemed to brighten everything up instantly. It truly is an astounding piece of work. With thousands of tourists around though, it's sometimes hard to really enjoy even the most spectacular places.

Monday, November 9, 2009

Mussoorie and the train the Delhi

As a popular tourist place, the town was absolutely beautiful overlooking Dehra Dun and engulfed by an endless array of mountains. Although gorgeous in scenery, it was very cold compared to the rest of India. And since heating isn't real practical there, I stayed in long johns, scrubs and a winter jacket the whole time (yes sleeping too). We stayed and did rotations in the hospital. The clinical experience was definitely the best so far. I observed 3 surgeries and one birth. One of the surgeries, lasting 4 hours, was a total reconstruction of a man's elbow. I made it through the cutting, the peeling away of muscle, the breaking of the bone, and even through the drilling part. It was when I saw the man's paining face, while the doctor was stabbing around his neck with a needle trying to find the nerve that goes to the arm, that things started going hazy and I felt the knees go weak. Luckily this birth went a lot better than the last one. I guess by a woman's third child, it's kind of like a slip n slide down there and the baby just pops out without a lot of complications. Sorry for any image you may have experienced right there. Point of this though is that I'm learning a lot about medicine and it's really incredible that I am able to see all that I have so far. The town of Mussoorie was basically one road that wound its way up the mountain lined with shops, hotels, and restaurants, crammed with people and festivities. It was a lovely place to end my Northern Indian experience with. Pune and Mumbai



