



Back to Reality

By Selina Liu | July 24, 2012

For the past couple weeks, I've been working on my honors thesis and studying for the MCAT. As I sit before my desk and flip through the textbook tonight, I notice the picture frame on my bookshelf. In it are pictures I took in the hospital where I worked during my internship. Looking at the pictures makes me nostalgic, and I say to myself: "I still can't believe that I just spent ten weeks in South Africa."

My time in South Africa was like a dream; so good that it passed by before I realized it. I thought ten weeks would be a long time when I first arrived. Everything around me was new and different. I was nervous yet excited about exploring my surroundings. There were definitely times when I felt uncomfortable with situations, but I learned to always have an open mind. After ten weeks, I was accustomed to saying "no" to people begging for money as I passed the townships (where locals live in "houses" built with cardboard and old metal) on my way to the hospital. Saying goodbye to South Africa was as painful as leaving home to go there. I couldn't imagine just leaving all the people I was with and the places I had stayed over the past ten weeks.

I never knew that I would fall in love with the country, but I did. South Africa is a beautiful country filled with breathtaking scenery. At the same time, it also has lots of "ugliness" including a high crime rate and high unemployment. The differences in lifestyle between the rich and poor there are huge and it still shocks me how a township could be only five minutes away from a very nice neighborhood. Seeing people that lived in the townships taught me to be gracious for what I have been given. It also showed me how blessed I am to have been born into much better circumstances than other people.

I went on this internship to find out how much I want to be a doctor and I found my answer. Being able to work in the hospital and have close contact with the patients showed me how much I love being in the medical field. I was able to perform small procedures and it made me feel like part of the medical team instead of an observer. I enjoyed



admitting patients and getting to know them. I felt the greatest joy when I witnessed patients getting better during the course of their treatments. The level of trust the patients and doctors showed me made me feel honored. At the same time, I felt unprepared to accept their trust because of the limited knowledge I have. I know now that I want to be a doctor and it is totally worth it to go through all the schooling to become one.

Coming back to the states, I returned to my life as a pre-med student. It is not as exciting as my life in South Africa, reading books instead of seeing cool things in the hospital. Although I get bored of studying sometimes, I know that these are the necessary steps I have to take before becoming a doctor and it will all be worth it in the end. I knew from the beginning that my time in South Africa would be a life-changing experience that I would never forget. I will always be grateful for all the wonderful people I met who made it my home away from home. I will also be forever thankful for all the support I had from the people at home. I certainly plan to go back to South Africa someday and continue exploring the country.

