



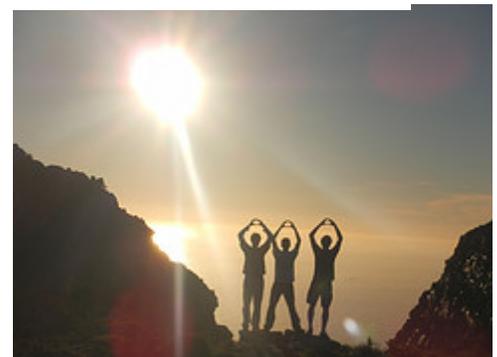
## From RSA to USA

By Alex Crane | October 30, 2012

Before going on my 10-week long summer internship to South Africa, I was given a list of materials to read about how to handle culture shock and even reverse culture shock. For those of you who don't know, culture shock is basically a personal disorientation due to an unfamiliar way of life or new way of doing things, while reverse culture shock is when you've adapted to your new culture so you exhibit the same signs as culture shock except with your own culture. When I first read about this I thought it seemed pretty silly...until I arrived in South Africa and received my first taste of culture shock.

I saw things in South Africa such as living conditions and racial segregation that I had never encountered in the U.S. When we drove through a township (lots of small huts housing up to 10 people), which I thought would be very similar to a ghetto in the states, I was surprised when the people we met were more than welcoming towards us. Most of the people living here were black and were stunned that white people would want anything to do with them. They were actually ecstatic to be conversing and sharing their stories with us! This wasn't just in townships though, it was all over the country. The people of South Africa were very welcoming and kind in every aspect of their way of life. It was very strange to encounter this type of reaction when in the states you would probably be ignored or stared at for not belonging. This taste of culture shock was not as uncomfortable as I would have thought when reading about it, in fact it was almost a relief, proof that there were still people out there with bigger hearts for strangers than for themselves.

After spending 10 weeks in South Africa I had become accustomed to their way of life, which I had begun to really enjoy! You can only imagine what it was like to step off the plane and suddenly be trampled by the groups of people trying to get where they needed to be not worrying if they were being conscientious or not. People looking at me in the same clothes I had worn for 2 days because of travel and an unshaven face with looks of disgust on their face. It made me want to hop right back on a plane and go back to South Africa! I have been in the U.S. for about a month now and I'm still working on dealing with some reverse culture



shock. Those of you who have been to third world countries will know what I mean, in seeing all the ignorance of Americans. It's not that I can place blame, I mean after all I was that same person until my summer of 2012 took me abroad.

This past summer will live in my memory as one of the most life changing experiences of my life. Whether it be from the situations I was exposed to, the doctors I worked alongside, or the wonderful people (American interns and South African locals alike). Before going on this internship, my life after college was up in the air and I was hoping for some sense of direction. I would never have dreamed that I would find this halfway across the world in a country I had only heard about one week out of the year when Shark Week was televised on the Discovery Channel. But now I can honestly say that I couldn't imagine spending those 10 weeks anywhere else in the world. I hope someday to return to those host-families and hospitals that showed me so much compassion and love as a Physician to aid in the never ending squabble of health problems that the impoverished of South Africa face. After all, it's the least I can do.