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India. A country teeming with life, overflowing with culture and traditions, and my home for two months. For eight weeks, I lived, worked, and laughed in Mysore, India. I accrued an understanding of their customs and cultural nuances. I engaged in religious festivities of various natures and marveled at ancient temples. Through my experiences I was able to gain knowledge and insight, rather than simply absorb facts and figures.

My internship with ProIndia consisted primarily of working with their partner organization, Divya Deepa, a charitable trust that funds a school called Kaliyuva Mane. “Kaliyuva Mane” means, “The Home for Learning,” and is an alternative school for underprivileged children located in a village outside of Mysore, India. For the first month my work consisted of aiding in the construction of a new classroom building, labeling and organizing books for their library, and teaching English. In the second month, a fresh batch of interns arrived, professionals took over the construction, and my fellow interns and I undertook the task of painting a mural on the auditorium wall as well as teaching English. The arrival of new interns brought new responsibilities. ProIndia’s Program Director, Monty, designated me as the unofficial leader of the interns, relying on me to help orientate the new interns, to serve as the link of communication between the interns and Monty, and to keep an accurate account of our project and food expenses.

I vividly remember my first day at Kaliyuva Mane as a blur of smiling faces, indistinguishable Kannada (the local language) banter, and my tongue tripping over the unfamiliar syllables composing students’ names. Though at times I found my project frustrating, all of this tension was immediately relieved by the antics of the kids and their unconditional loving natures. Gradually, I learned each child’s name and their personalities—their quirks, eating habits, likes and dislikes. With the assistance of my forty-three pintsize drillmasters, I learned basic phrases in Kannada.

In the world we live in today, it is very rare that you come across good people doing good work for no other reason than because it is the right thing to do. Kaliyuva Mane is one of those precious instances. There is a certain grace and peace about the school that is impossible to completely articulate because no words will ever fully capture its essence. Sometimes when a gentle breeze swept across the school, carrying the sounds of children's laughter and a feeling of happiness, I would close my eyes and try and absorb as much as possible – to bottle up the indefinable spirit of a place so rich in life. What I contributed to the school is minuscule in comparison to what I reaped in return. Having dozens of kids shout, "Eileen-akka!" (Eileen sister), upon your arrival is far more valuable than any amount of money. In this way, Kaliyuva Mane is very rich. There may be material items the school lacks, but the love and compassion that permeates every crevice of the school is not quantifiable by any monetary sum.

Overall, I think my time spent at Kaliyuva Mane was successful. However, the construction component of my internship left much to be desired. Initially, I was under the impression that my labor was a contribution towards a new classroom. Five weeks into the project, I discovered that the initial classroom design was unfeasible, and there was and had never been a clear project plan - from neither ProIndia's program director nor the school's principal. Supposedly, professionals will finish the construction. While I sincerely hope this to be true, I remain a bit skeptical.

Thankfully this disappointment was partially quelled by the success of my second major project: the mural. In my second month, two new interns arrived to work at the school, both of whom were artistically inclined. Together, we painted a vibrant mural of school children, animals, books, and flowers with petals crafted out of the children's handprints. The teachers, principal, and children seemed to genuinely appreciate the aesthetic upgrade to the school.

ProIndia benefited from having me as an intern for several reasons. First, I interned for two months, while the others interns worked for one month. With this ample amount of time I was able to build trust with Monty, ProIndia's director. In turn, he was able to rely on me for things he could not

have otherwise. Though Monty had the best intentions, at times it proved difficult for him to understand what aspects of Indian culture and society would be hard to adapt to as a foreigner. When the second group of interns arrived, I was able to help guide them through the adjustment period. Additionally, I handled ProIndia's finances for the interns. I maintained records of our food and project expenses.

I benefitted from the organization by forming personal contacts. I can say with confidence that I have friends in Portugal, Venezuela, New York, D.C., Tanzania, Australia, Canada, and especially India. So far, we have all managed to keep in contact, reminiscing about India via email. Not only did I have the opportunity to learn about India, I also gained insight into what life is like in the aforementioned countries.

As a Political Science major, it was fascinating to observe the world's largest democracy in the context of its own people, completely unfiltered. Although India's government is thoroughly corrupt, it exists in the form of reliable state banks, public buses, customs officials, paved roads, and traffic officers. However, in other aspects the government is conspicuously absent or laws are simply not enforced. Pollution, public urination, littering, and lack of infrastructure including clean drinking water are problems plaguing India. What is the law is not always obeyed, but what is tradition is firmly adhered to. For example, women are legally permitted to drink, but it is not culturally acceptable. Therefore, liquor shops do not sell alcohol to women. This tradition does not need to be made into law because it is enforced by society. Yet, it is illegal to litter and everyday I witnessed someone toss trash out of his or her car window. If a law contradicts tradition, tradition reigns supreme. For instance, the legal marriage age is twenty-one for men and eighteen for women; however girls often marry at ages as young as thirteen in rural areas because it is tradition.

The police force in India is terribly corrupt and therefore unreliable. Accordingly, Indians have taken the safety and security of society into their own hands. While this may lead to brutal beatings of societal offenders, it also entails an obligation to help those in need. One day, I opened the newspaper

to an article about a girl whose father repeatedly raped her. Upon discovering this atrocity the local villagers “beat the father black and blue” before the police arrived. In another instance, I was walking home from the grocery store and witnessed an auto rickshaw tip over. Immediately, without provocation, everyone within eyesight ran to help the driver. Though Americans typically do not physically maim a perpetrator of a crime, they do not typically run to help someone in a car accident either.

From this experience I gained a base of knowledge to work with that has allowed me to put facts and figures into a context of people with whom I can personally relate and to more critically analyze international news pieces. This experience has motivated me to further explore the world, to travel as much as I can, to experience life in all different cultures and contexts, and to one day hopefully return to India - a place where I found such joy and peace.