

**Wilkes University presents  
the 2013 Colonels Abroad Essay Contest**

**First Place to  
JILL PRICE  
For Staff Traveling Abroad**



The sun was easing off the heat in a Southern Indian sky, and a breeze swirled through the small, coastal fishing village. Our boats docked for the evening, and the group of photographers jumped onto land, lenses dusted, ready for dusk's light and culture. We were 10 days into a 3-week excursion to India. Simply stated, I was oversaturated with my first third world exposure. The moment our plane landed in Mumbai, the sounds, colors and smells of India created warmth in my soul and a stretching of the mind's eye. People bathed in streets, men solidified deals with handshakes and women nursed babies on the stoops of 3-storied shacks next to fenced in, mini-mansions. Extreme was the only collective adjective to describe those initial city days, and I was glad to be in the quiet of the rural South.

I kicked up dirt, slowly, trying to process how the world could be so big, and diverse. How many people in India seem at peace with so few luxuries and people in America at such discord, with so many?

On the pathway to village houses, there was an old woman sitting on porch steps, dog at feet. She had thick, coke-bottled glasses all dirtied up. I waved. She waved back, and flashed a big smile. Continuing on, I found the group snapping photos of an elderly lady in a lilac shirt, cataracts in both eyes to match. She was crying. In a very touching moment, a sweet man in our group extended his hand to reach hers, money encased. Time paused. The energy between the two was of compassion and empathy. Others began to give her money, and I felt conflict of wanting to give but not having much to hand out. I spent every penny in my bank account to get to India, and was on a very tight budget to survive the next 2 weeks. When the woman began prompting her grandson to tell the crowd how sick she was, I turned and left.

Numbness filled my spirit and I quickened the pace to escape. The woman with the jovial smile was still sitting on her steps, dog at feet, now with rosary beads hanging in her weathered hands.

"Can I sit with you?" I yelled, just in case speaking a foreign language also meant she couldn't hear me. She laughed and nodded, though it was unclear if she understood my self-invitation. Inching my way up towards her, the dog sat up snarling and she kicked it back down before patting the spot next to her. I slid in so close she could have been my own grandmother and she laughed, again.

"Are you Catholic?" I asked, loudly. She nodded.

"Are you Catholic, like Father, Son, Holy Spirit?" I asked again, signing the cross in the ritualistic manner of Catholicism. She was still nodding, but with a goofy smile, as if she had not understood my questions.

"Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name..." in my big ol' overwhelmed state I began to pray. I was craving spiritual guidance to help comprehend India, my misery with work at home, how I would ever make enough money to give to someone in more need than my late 20's self and then, like a school girl in the last pew, my new friend began to crack up and laugh, at me!

With a glance into her dirty, thick glasses, an eruption of belly laughter pulled us together. We smacked our thighs, shared deep breaths interrupted by hilarious and ridiculous giggling. She kissed my cheek and patted my wild hair. I held her hand so tightly it may have bruised had it not been toughened with years of 3rd world strength. After a few minutes of aching joy, and ten days of comfort zone expansion, tears released. This woman lovingly wiped my dirt-streaked face before slapping me on the back, almost as hard as she kicked the dog.

On the stroll back to our house boat, two valuable life lessons seemed clearer than the evening sky:

First, while giving the shirt off one's back is considered noble, without a backup shirt it is a foolish, prideful offer. One must have materials to give materials.

Second, and more importantly, the human spirit is filled with devotion and warmth. It is the richest and most valuable asset we can offer another human being, regardless of age, world status, language spoken. Love is universal and laughter is free.