

6-24-2015

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Racchi, Nick, "A Steward's Adventure in Guatemala" (2015). *Rivers Institute Blog Archive*. 286.
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Wednesday, June 24, 2015

A Steward's Adventure in Guatemala

Nick Racchi, 2017 Cohort

I recently just got back from an amazing trip to Guatemala. While there, I stayed with a host family in Quetzaltenago (called Xela by the locals), which is a beautiful city with some of the most amazing people that I have ever met. I was there for four weeks and had many adventures, like hiking to the top of the tallest point in Central America, seeing my first live tarantula, jumping off a forty foot bridge into a river, getting sick from eating some delicious street tacos, and learning more about myself and others than I ever thought possible.

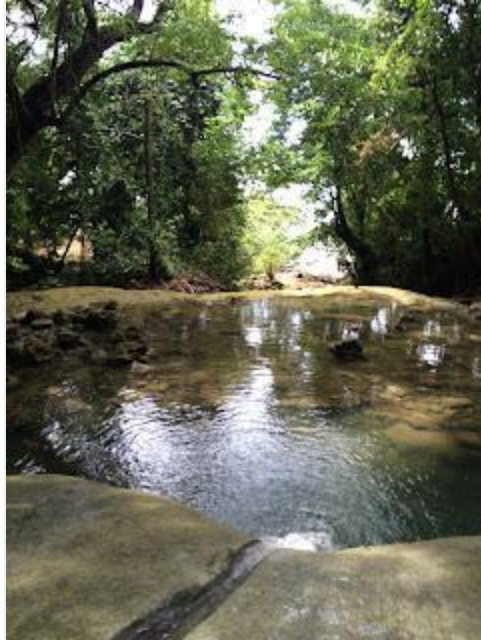


I was able to volunteer at a local clinic there named Primeros Paso. This clinic was basically the main source of medical and dental care for over 15,000 people in the valley that I was staying in, and it was basically this small “building” with a couple rooms and electricity that would go in and out. Some of the volunteering projects that I took part in were helping out with a class that taught the indigenous women about nutrition and how they should be taking care of their children, and going out to some of the schools and teaching the kids there about nutrition as well as just some basic life skills while also bringing some well needed medicine to the children and families. I was able to learn so much from these people, more than they could have ever learned from me. Sure I learned that I should appreciate what I have, but what person goes to a third world country for a month and comes back still not appreciating the fact that they have things like heated showers, or running water for that matter. Something that I feel was more important that I learned on this trip was that you shouldn't go into service looking at all the bad

that has happened and thinking that your going to be able to fix everything for these people, because in reality that doesn't happen. What really happens is that you see yourself in those people, you see the humanity and the similarities with yourself in another person, and you figure out that you can't fix all their problems. Thinking about this while on my trip really made me reflect on the Fitz Center, and my involvement with the River Stewards Program, mostly due to our asset based thinking approach to service. Looking at all the good that the communities had was a lot easier than focusing on all of the bad. I felt like I got a lot more out of my "service" trip down there then any of the Guatemalan people got out of it.



I learned a lot about the water resources in Xela. There actually is a big problem with pollution there, especially because of the fact that a big mining company just bought a lot of land near the clinic I worked in, and basically stripped everything off of it. Also, this one village that I worked in was located on top of a mountain, and everyday the women had to walk up and down that mountain just to get water. I actually had to walk up it in order to get to the community one day (since the buses would not go up there because of the incline and the roads were too dangerous). So, I can tell you first hand that the hike up and down that mountain is no stroll in the park. Those women must have legs the size of body builders, because in order to walk up and down that mountain and also be carrying a couple gallons of water on their head would take a lot of strength. I was able to see first hand how not having direct access to drinking water affected these people's lives, and just how much I can take that for granted.



My trip to Guatemala was one of the most life changing experience that I have ever had, and I think that it has changed some of my perspectives on life and the way that I view the world. I would not trade the experience that I had or the relationships that I built for anything.

Nick Racchi

2017 Cohort