



Linfield Magazine

Volume 13
Number 2 *Spring 2017*

Article 6

Spring 2017

The World from a Different Angle

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Recommended Citation

Fraser, Mackenzie '17 and Linfield Magazine Staff (2017) "The World from a Different Angle," *Linfield Magazine*: Vol. 13 : No. 2 , Article 6.

Available at: https://digitalcommons.linfield.edu/linfield_magazine/vol13/iss2/6

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About Mackenzie

Mackenzie Fraser '17, an English major with a Spanish and gender studies double minor, served in July as a translator for Capitol City Medical Teams, a Salem-based medical mission team, in Coya, Peru.

Before that, Fraser studied in Costa Rica for a semester, and traveled to Nicaragua and Peru. In March, she presented work at a literature conference in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

"After living in Costa Rica and working as a translator in Peru, I want to pursue a career as a bilingual advocate for victims of domestic and/or sexual violence in the Latinx community of Oregon," she said.

After graduation, she will teach English in Costa Rica after earning a Fulbright grant.



The world from a different angle

On our last day on the Inka Trail, we awoke at 3 a.m. to the sounds of Quechua being spoken in hushed tones among porters as they tiptoed around our campsite. I used a headlamp to see as I pulled dirt-covered hiking shoes over my blistered feet, and questioned my sanity in traveling halfway across the globe to put my tired body through this. And then... I unzipped the tent I shared with my younger brother, Griffin, for the past four days and caught a glimpse of the stars. Our campsite, perched at 11,975 feet, was untouched by light pollution. As we began our five-mile descent into Machu Picchu with headlamps and stars as our only sources of light, I was reminded of why I came to Peru: to see the world from a different angle.

In December 2015, when I was asked to accompany a Salem-based medical mission team as Spanish-English translator to a clinic in the rural town of Coya, Peru, I immediately started researching southern Peru. I discovered that not only is this region home to rich farmland, wild jungle, jagged mountains, ancient ruins and delicious cuisine, but also to diverse indigenous cultures, environmental damage, political strife, drug trafficking and unequal wealth distribution. Though various factors have contributed to the hardships, beginning with the 16th Century genocide of the Inkan Empire and highlighted recently by an ongoing guerilla war, Peruvians persevere as best they can.

Tourism in Inkan sites, such as Machu Picchu, has aided the national economy by bringing in thousands of foreign tourists a day. Meanwhile, the culture of the modern-day descendants of the Inkas celebrated at these sites has been largely ignored. The Quechua people have been linguistically, culturally, economically and socially diminished over centuries, only to now have their history on display in the form of a Peruvian theme park. I experienced this phenomenon when a group of indigenous women dressed in traditional garb approached me at the market, put a baby goat in my arms, and asked me to pay them for a photo. Regardless of the economic benefits of tourism, the practice of cultural commodification in southern Peru threatens the existence of these cultures and hinders opportunities for travelers to gain substantive knowledge of the places they visit.

I spent the beginning of my trip learning about this cultural history by backpacking the world-famous Camino Inka, the trail to Machu Picchu. Our guide informed us not only of the history of the Inkas, but also of the current struggles and triumphs that their descendants experience in Peru today. Though Quechua is now taught alongside Spanish in public schools, members of the



more than 55 indigenous groups in Peru still face educational and economic inequality.

Our medical team spent a week at the Kausay Wasi clinic, a place that has provided health services to more than 320,000 patients since opening its doors in 2005. This clinic mainly serves impoverished and marginalized patients, many of whom belong to these indigenous groups. While much of its funding comes from Western donors, the clinic is ultimately run by Peruvians for Peruvians. Although it made me deeply sad to see the lasting effects of cultural imperialism on many of the patients, I took heart in the fact that the clinic encouraged a grass roots, patient-centered approach to these issues rather than an American quick fix, “savior” attitude.

Yet the most rewarding part of my trip was seeing the look of pure relief and joy on a female patient’s face when I translated the doctor’s diagnosis to her, explaining that she did not have cervical cancer. The moment she hugged me will forever live in my memory as the day I truly understood how powerful the bonds created by language can be. Though social circumstances, skin color, economic status and even continents separated us, in that moment, language brought us together. Knowing different languages grants travel opportunities and, more importantly, creates space for connections between cultures. Our strong study abroad program at Linfield, as well as the rigor of the Modern Language Department, gave me the chance to study in Costa Rica and travel to Peru, experiences that have drastically changed my view of myself and the world around me.

– Mackenzie Fraser '17