

## **Aline Lane, undergraduate, Western Washington University 2006 Field School**

### **Reflection**

The places we go, people we meet, things we do are all experiences that build our character and make us who we are in this very moment and for the future. Being twenty years old, confused about life, people, and where or what to do with my future, traveling to Peru for three weeks was probably the best thing I could do for myself. Leaving the United States for the first time, going to another country, where yes, I knew things would be different, the people, the food, all combined in a new culture, what was I to expect? I have always been the type of person to embrace new things with open arms without judgement. I must say that I feel my parents raised me well, disciplined me to have open eyes and an open heart for new experiences, whether bad or good. I feel this relieved most cultural shock some people have when entering a new place, a third world country. I kept my eyes and heart open for new things since the moment I stepped off the plane in Lima. Although I may have felt some nervousness, but mostly for how my Spanish would be, or what people thought of my place in their country. I erased that nervousness and jumped into anything I could that would allow me to have a new cultural experience. I have had many, hearing new anthropological ideas, to seeing different people, eating different food, speaking a new language to all new exciting people. I have learned so many new things and it has really opened my eyes even more, but also opened my eyes to who I am as a person and what my place on earth is.

It's funny, even before traveling when I would eat in the U.S. I always realized how much we ate, how many different choices we have to eat, and much we waste. It has always disgusted me, because I knew there were poor people in the world that didn't eat that much, that good, or even at all. When actually coming to Peru and seeing how poor some people live, having elder ladies begging me for *soles* so they can eat, then seeing food be wasted here where we are staying, it hurts my heart and all I want to do is cry for those that need help, wishing I could fix the world with the blink of an eye.

La Casa de Pocha is completely fabulous, amazing... the mountains and nature that surround us, waking up to ducks quacking and roosters crowing. However, I feel so spoiled here. Being able to eat three great healthy meals a day, having hot water whenever we need it, and as much toilet paper as we want and need. Being waited on, clothes washed, and I try my hardest to do what I can to let these amazing people know how much I appreciate it all. I feel that to completely experience this culture I have to live harder. I mean, come back here and completely immerse myself. Work in the field for what I have to eat, wash my own clothes in the stream and I feel I am prepared to open my arms and heart for the hard life that some of these people live. Get my hands dirty and carry loads of corn on my back, and do whatever it is to experience it all, whether it's hard I might not like it all, but how else to get that cultural experience. Although going to the Sunday market, I really put myself there and felt as if I was in the heart of Peru, talking in what Spanish I could to communicate, and seeing all the hard work of people, varying from the clothes, the weaving they put their hands to do, and the crops, corn, potatoes, these people grow. It is just, for the most part, the market of hard work and life.

I don't see laziness, or greed like I do in the United States. Don Pancho for example, a brilliant, brilliant man with masses of knowledge in his brain. He knows so much about natural healing, herbal remedies, and has helped so many in need, yet he lives so poor, why? Because what he cares about and lives for is helping the people. So much respect I have for the people that put themselves out just so they can make a difference. It takes my breath away. I am so interested in the knowledge that this man has, and it saddens me to think that there is no one to take over his knowledge when he passes. It amazed me to walk around Pocha's yard and every two feet have Don Pancho pick up another herb and tell us what it was good for, how it heals and cures. I am so interested because it disgusts me the way that I have seen and met with doctors in Western Medicine. It seems all they care about is making the money, they don't care what is actually wrong with you, how you are feeling. They spend five, ten minutes with you and throw any prescription in your face, take this, take that, when healing naturally might take longer, but if you can do it naturally, why not? Why when you break a bone, a doctor will throw a prescription for a bottle of thirty vicidin with a refill at you? Take the pain, it lets you know that you are alive. Maybe it hurts but that's life. Maybe I say this because I do not like the way the pain medication makes me feel but there are better ways out there and Don Pancho has opened my eyes wider and I still have so many questions to these doctors where I live. I want to know what Mother Nature has given to us, people survived for years without all this crap that has sank into our society.

What is a society? I have thought that a lot since I have been here. Dr. Hammer has inspired me, watching her work, making the people laugh and participating in the community. It makes sense that society, a community cannot be that until people come together, until they know how to organize themselves and until they know the problems that their society holds. How else can you solve them without participation and action research. I may still be a little lost as to where I go from here when I return to the United States, but I know that I am here to help people, doing what, I am not 100 percent sure yet, but I want to be someone that helps make a change, a little at a time if I can, but I have been inspired going to Peru, learning all sorts of aspects of this culture, music, dance, food, religion, the people, the way they live, and learning where the roots are. Going to archaeological sites and seeing life that once live thousands of years ago, seeing that the world today came somewhat, mostly from what used to be here. That's why the past is so important to learn, but also because the past is what lies ahead of us. The past is how we make progressive steps towards the future.

So what does the future hold? I don't know. I need to learn more from the past to find out. Maybe I can know more, and have more to say once I have grown a bit and have had the chance to completely emerge myself. For now, the experience that I have had has been amazing, learning and participating, yet I still leave here wanting more knowledge, and still more questions. However, I have found a lot of myself and I recommend this great experience to any one person. Maybe in a year's time I will know more and will have a more educational approach to these thoughts I have laid out. I go home with a smile and thanks for what I have been able to embrace and what has opened my mind, body, and soul.