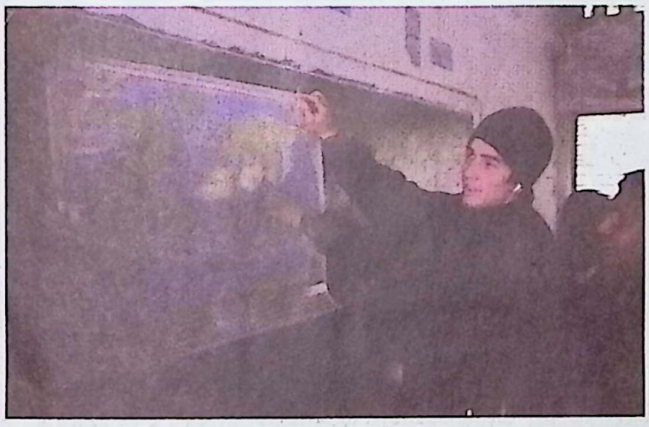
My Bangladesh Adventure: A Journey of Discovery

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OCTOBER 2005. The 17-hour flight was the least of my worries as I waited patiently with my parents in Vancouver airport, Canada about to embark upon the most intense journey of my life. The flight schedule was straight-forward enough even though the kilometers were long and I was being flown to the other side of the world. The flight path was Vancouver to Seoul, Seoul to Singapore, Singapore to Bangkok, and finally Bangkok to Dhaka. Getting on the plane, my mind was flooded with all kinds of thoughts about what it was going to be like, I knew it wasn't going to be easy, this wasn't just a simple get-away-from-home vacation for a week or two to go and rest and unwind.

This was something I wanted to do, to change my vision and perspective on the world, to help me understand other peoples and cultures. I was embarking on a 4-month trip to spend time in Bangladesh working with a non-government organization called RDRS (Rangpur Dinajpur Rural Services). My parents flew down with me to spend a week getting me settled in and visiting their dear Bangladeshi friends, then, assuming I was 'adjusted' flew off to Australia leaving me in the very capable hands of their friends in Dhaka and RDRS.



In addition to the green countryside, the humidity and temperature differences were the first things I noticed when we arrived in Dhaka. I remember the feeling so distinctly, it was as if I had landed on another planet. My father's very good friend, Iqbal Rahman, was the one who greeted us. It had been 3 or 4 years since we have seen him, Iqbal and his wife Nazreen were my local guardian in Bangladesh. As we loaded our luggage and bags into his car, everything around me was so different, the tropical vegetation (remember, I come from Canada where the only thing tropical is bought in cans), the armed police men walking around with heavy machine guns, the beggars walking around with no shoes on, it was all so surreal for me. It took a little longer than the week my parents had stayed with me to become adjusted to the change in life-style and the new country that was to be my home for the next four months.

My first experience with the poverty of Bangladesh occurred within minutes of leaving the airport, sitting in traffic at a red light a woman with a very infected, very diseased cut from her elbow down to her hand came up to the car and was showing us her cut, trying to get help. The saddest thing about it is that it is the standard to just ignore them. I remember that gut-wrenching feeling of sadness as I saw this take place. I came to realize that there is often little choice but to do so.

I spent 2 weeks with Iqbal and Nazreen touring the city, visiting many different parts of Dhaka, getting a feel for the culture of the city. Spending time in Dhaka was a fraction of what I had come to Bangladesh to do. Getting used to the life style change in Bangladesh like the food, the people, the culture, the 12 hour time difference. The heat was tough, but after a few weeks I felt more comfortable being there. On the 2nd week in Dhaka I met with the president of RDRS to meet and discuss my itinerary for my field work. This is what I really came here to do.

As my experience in Bangladesh was life changing and I am just waiting for the day I get the opportunity to go back. At my young age of twenty I have been to over 10 countries in this world, and Bangladesh is one country that I hold in my heart, body and soul forever.

I spent 3 months in the rural areas of Bangladesh in places like Thakguraon, Lalmonirhat, Rangpur, and toward the end of my trip I spent 7 days on the Char Islands of Bangladesh. These are the islands that are flooded every year because of the monsoon season, causing all the inhabitants to move and start again with nothing every year. It had been arranged so that I could spend one week of every month in Dhaka, which was very good for me, Dhaka was the place in which I met other Canadians. There was actually a Canadian Club where you could congregate, work out, swim, so this was like a life line for me in the middle of this very, very different world. The other 3 weeks of the month I would spend in rural Bangladesh. The RDRS head office was in the rural city of Rangpur, this office was called the Northern Bengal Institute and was where I spent most of my time.