



Two Weeks in Peru with the Nuñoa Project

July 2014

“Most of all, LIVE the opportunity and LEARN so much that you feel excited and exhausted and energized.” PJ Jones, Jester Farm Alpacas

I first became interested in traveling to Peru when I heard Dr. Stephen Purdy speak to the Pre-Veterinary Club at UMass Amherst. He spoke about alpacas and the people who rely on them. Many of the people do not have hot and/or potable water, comfortable beds or iPods or televisions with three hundred channels-most of them cannot read or write. Watching the slideshow, I felt drawn to this place, hoping that maybe I could see it one day and try to make a difference. Alpacas, as I now understand four years later, mean so much to the people of Peru. Never realizing that I would actually make this journey-sponsored by the generous PJ Jones and traveling with Dr. Purdy- I sat in that room and dreamed about the 'what ifs'. If I could tell that girl- the girl with fringe bangs, a green camelid studies hoodie and no idea of what the future might hold-one thing, I would say nothing. I would smile and give her a hug. That girl needed to make every decision and take every leap, hold back at times and make mistakes. All of that led me here- stronger, more understanding, living in the present and open to the possibilities of the future.



July 8th 2014 Journal Entry “One thing I can already tell about this trip is that I am going to realize how small I am in comparison to the entire world. I am transplanted in another place where I am ignorant to the culture and don’t understand the language. Humans are humans and we have the same basic needs. People who dedicate their lives to helping others around the world are certainly representatives of strength. “

July 11th 2014 Journal Entry “Marta, who runs the store around the corner, brought her dog Robito to see us in the common area tonight. He came over to me and I picked him up. He was just sitting in my lap and I became overwhelmed with emotion. I let him down, quietly walked to the bathroom and began to cry. I admire the people here for trying their best to survive. There is a certain perspective gained when you realize how fortunate you are.”



On this trip I was able to work with other students interested in camelids and helping people, including a wonderful Veterinary student from Argentina. Her name is Paula Rey and I felt privileged to work with her. The entire time she watched out for me and helped me when my Spanish was less than adequate. I worked with hundreds of alpacas under the supervision of one of my heroes- ultrasounding, assessing body condition and taking fecal samples. I got to see experienced Argentinian and Peruvian Veterinarians work with the animals. I saw Peruvian farmers herd alpacas at altitudes of almost 14,000 feet. The sights were astonishing and walking through Pre-Incan and Incan Ruins felt like an honor. I started my journey with thankfulness, and ended it with excitement for working with people and animals around the world.



On one of my last days in Nuñoa I took a walk to the entrance of town, where there is a large arch and three alpaca statues. I walked out past the statues and when I turned around I was filled with warmth. The town was covered by dark clouds, but rays of sunlight were shining through onto the statues. I found this particularly meaningful- it was as if my entire trip was summed up by this display of nature. Despite all of the difficulties that the people face and how hard things can be for them, there is still a sense of hope and contentment among them. The admirable spirit of the people and respect for their animals is what has gotten them to this point, they have survived and are doing the best that they know how.





Thank You!!

Nicole L. Raga