

Reflections

Five years ago I set out on a life changing adventure. My desire to see the world took me on a four-month journey across Southeast Asia with just my backpack and a camera.

My travels opened my eyes to the diverse beauty beyond my homeland.

I experienced the gilded splendor of the Grand Palace in Bangkok. I grew to love the chaos of the street markets found in all Thai cities, and never ceased to be amazed at the exotic fruits and dishes that became my daily cuisine.

In Malaysia I hiked the jungles of the Cameron Highlands, and went to the highest point in the Petronas Towers in the modern city of Kuala Lumpur. It was off the small islands of Pulau Perhentian that I experience my first night dive into the ocean.

Cambodia's majestic Angkor Wat took my breath away, while the ruins of Ta Prohm overtaken by the jungle reflected the fragile nature of mans designs. Though I witness the remains of the Khmer Rouge reign, I could not bring myself to visit the horror of the killing fields where thousands of Cambodians were killed.

To travel along the Ho Chi Minh Trail and learn about what the Vietnamese called the American War opened my eyes to the tragedy that fell upon the innocent people of that country. Still, the impact of American culture was pervasive even in the cities that once shunned the capitalism.

Perhaps though the most profound experience was the day I walked across the border from Thailand into Cambodia. I passed through the guards at the border and walked onto a path lined with children and adults, missing body parts and living on the street. Many were disfigured from land mines that remained in over 70% of the countryside at that time, remnants of a brutal civil war. My heart broke, I wanted to reach out and help them all, but knowing that wasn't possible I just cried.

Thanksgiving Day is just around the corner and it is a time most Americans take a moment to reflect on all they have to be thankful for in their lives. In a country where we can have a peaceful, albeit media frenzied, change in power on a national level and the majority of people have more than enough food to eat everyday, I believe we should not relegate our thanks to a single day.

As for myself, I have a wall in my office dedicated to photos from my Southeast journey. It is my daily reminder of the beauty of the world and the tragic lives lived by so many around the world.

The photos also remind me of the greatest lesson I learned while on this adventure, there truly is no place like home.