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La República Dominicana - A Photo Essay

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La República Dominicana - A Photo Essay

This photo was taken on our first full day in the Dominican Republic. We took a walking tour of the Colonial Zone that included the sites of the first hospital, church, and university in the Americas, as well as the subject of this photo - the Fort of Christopher Columbus. More accurately, this is the view from the edge, in one of the main landings in the standing fort. Our tour guide, Sam, was talking about how while it's true that

Columbus did bad things, the Dominican people are still happy for the good things he did for their history. I remember thinking really hard about that, and how much it resonated with me. Bad actions, do not a bad person make. They're not mutually exclusive. And particularly when talking about historical figures, this seems to be a little owned perspective.

Columbus is regarded as comical in the States, as there's more of a cultural focus on the negative things he did that impacted us, whereas in the Dominican Republic, the focus is on the good he did. I learned that history can be multifaceted, and considering the full context of someone's life and actions is important. This experience was significant to me because it broadened my understanding and encouraged me to take on a more balanced perspective. Because of this learning, I am going to approach historical figures, and the average person with a less critical and more compassionate mindset, and remind myself of the complexities of human nature.



On the second day of our trip, I captured this picture of a stray dog, or “coconut dog” drinking from a plastic cup on the street. He ended up following me all the way back to the doors of the hotel. I remember noticing that while he looked hot, and probably sick, he looked well fed and groomed. I was surprised by how many people were willing to feed or groom them, but how little vet care was available to them. The locals are just happy to have the help with pest control. It seemed like a polar opposite to home, where

the majority of people see the strays themselves as pests.

As soon as we got back to the hotel, I looked up local animal rescues, wanting to know if there were any doing any rehoming or rehabbing work with the strays. I was only able to find one that was super prominent, but found that they had plenty of ways I could help - both from home, and via travel. This learning is significant because it reinforced the idea that caring for vulnerable beings, location aside, is a universal responsibility. As a result, I am motivated to contribute to animal welfare efforts no matter where I am, and potentially setting up a percent donation for different welfare groups from each session when I eventually open my production studio.



I took this photo of the painting the students in the English class gave to the Seita Scholars on the day we visited the Children's International center. They had started it during an interpretive dance performance they'd put together just for us. It focused a lot on how they're taught from a young age that there's a million reasons they won't make it, or a faster and more reckless way to

get there if they do. I felt really touched by that show of vulnerability, and genuine self. I struggled to understand a few tiny spoken parts of a roleplay they'd put on as well, but I didn't struggle to understand the message behind it. I spent some time after, on the bus, thinking about how if I'd looked away, just because I didn't get the words or whatever part of it, I'd have missed something beautiful, and I wouldn't have understood why this painting meant so much.

I learned that there are many ways to understand someone, and that "can't" isn't a possibility.

But, you have to be willing to give it, or them, your honest and open attention. I will use this learning to better my interpersonal skills when interacting with peers and colleagues, and make a conscious effort to give all the attention necessary to understand them, if they are giving me their time by trying to communicate.



This photo was taken on the day we had the Alumni dinner. A lot of Dominican WMU alumni were in attendance, speaking about their experiences, and how international relations has helped them further succeed. Dr. Dunn was also in attendance. He talked about his love for the Dominican Republic, and the people who inhabit it, and his desire to keep fostering educational opportunities and gatherings, and his hope that Seita continues. This moment, where I was talking, to him, Peter, and a WMU alumni in the Dominican Republic, is where something

clicked for me. I was talking with Dr.Dunn about how my fondest memory was hearing him say YEARS ago, that “there are no drop-outs, only stop-outs”. And standing there nodding in agreement is Peter, who convinced me the trip would be a good opportunity for me to take a different perspective. And here is this alumni, who I’ve only just met, telling me that he admires I went back to school, when he came from vastly different circumstances to myself.

I learned in that moment that there is so much love and support, generations of it, if you are just open to receiving it, and I had been very closed off for a long time. I had missed educational, professional and personal opportunities due to it. Seeing all the alumni intermingle and be just as friendly and supportive with everyone they interacted with as the one above reinforced that learning. And with that learning, I will begin to approach situations, particularly unpleasant ones, with an open mind, and remember that there is support, and it’s okay to take it. I plan to apply this academically as well, as I struggled in the past with reaching out in that regard.



I took this photo of Liz on the day we went to the retreat. I was processing a lot of feelings as the trip was coming to an end. I was realizing how connected I'd begun to feel to these people I'd barely known, or didn't know at all just nine days prior. Just a little bit before I took this picture, we'd done the shoulder tapping activity. After it was done, I wanted to walk to the giant suspended swing they'd told us about, and Liz offered to come with me. I was still puffy eyed and emotional, but not trying to be obvious about it. And Liz just started talking. I thought at that

moment about how she'd been doing that all week, for every single one of us on that trip. All while not feeling well. She didn't know anything about us, and never made it something anyone could feel or see. She made you feel known from the minute you engaged with her. And it changed the entire group dynamic for the better. She gave it that extra bit of care it needed.

I took the photo because I wanted to acknowledge that I knew her too, even if I didn't know her super well. That reinforced some learning I'd already picked up, that you do not have to know or agree with someone to make them feel seen and heard. And that feeling is extremely motivating and powerful. Moving forward, I'd like to implement this learning academically by making an effort to know and see my peers better, to facilitate a more productive academic environment, where we are open to asking questions of each other.