**Reflective Essay**

Madison G. Maichin

Thompson Rivers University

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Dr. Kyra Garson

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During the 2023-2024 school year, I lost two very close people to me: a teammate and a classmate. At this point in my life, I felt beyond helpless, as I was learning to grieve these tragedies. It took me by surprise and made the world seem so dark, leaving me lost, but eager to see a brighter side to things. While navigating my losses, I was inspired by one of my professors that was lecturing in class one day, where she talked about her overseas work as a nurse and how empowering it was for her. Weeks later, I made the decision to travel across the world alone and volunteer as a student nurse in Fiji. My goals were to apply my skills, educate, provide care, and learn from the Fijian culture. I never anticipated this experience would allow for cultural humility that would reshape my personal values, which had previously been shaped primarily by my Canadian upbringing, known for being more egocentric based.

Upon my arrival, I was immediately welcomed to the volunteer house by locals with a kava ceremony, which incorporated the rich Fijian culture. It made me feel valued and included, as this gesture to welcome me into their culture, included drinking their sacred kava, being fitted for a personalized sarong, and learning their prayers. I remember discussing with the Germans and Australians in my group after the ceremony, and bonding over how special and personal this seemed with having just met one another. It made me realize how Canada’s culture is much more individualistic and distant when it comes to greetings. The gratitude that lived within the locals was almost constant, as wherever you went, even when you were driving on the road, people would yell from all over “Bula!” This unique word of the Fijian language is a common greeting that wishes good health and a good life for someone. I was fond of this warm and friendly narrative that I got to immerse myself in, at the schools, clinics and villages, which made me realize the love and care that is constantly shared from one another. Having experienced this makes me want to have this type of attitude and energy normalized back in Canada, particularly in my field of nursing, so my patients can feel this trust and love, even though we just met and are technically “strangers”.

While volunteering in the villages, I got the opportunity to teach in schools and provide first aide, where I quickly learned how few resources were available in these settings. For instance, many of the children had wounds on their feet, prompting me to adapt to using basic materials and products to effectively clean the wound and prevent infection. I went back to the basics and used a clean technique to prevent infection, even though I didn’t have the luxury of specialized products for each type of wound. This strengthened my foundational skills that I gained in nursing school and has improved my adaptability in caring for different patient presentations, by focussing on a holistic perspective for my client. Despite limited resources, especially a lack of technology in the schools, the children were still enthusiastic and happy to be at school, appreciating the chance to learn and grow. This minimalist approach heightened my appreciation for altruism, as my upbringing in Vancouver was heavily surrounded by materialistic values that gain people’s respect, as well as the need for the best technology to display good status. There was no such thing in Fiji, it was the simple life, where people did not judge based off looks or valuables, but more so how you treat and share your kindness with others, while valuing their faith in everything they do. It made me feel ashamed of my upbringing, but I gave myself grace, as this concept is built within the culture I come from. However, moving forward, I want to steer away from materialistic values and channel altruism through my interactions with others, so I can prioritize other’s needs over mine in hopes it can be contagious.

The impact from my time in Fiji has encouraged me to become a disaster or travel nurse one day that can serve a variety of cultures that are in need, as I learned about the reality of global health. I want to be a continuous learner, that practices cultural humility so I can build relationships with the beautiful people that fill this world, hoping that I can also impact someone’s life with my personal teachings. In my nursing profession and outside of it, I will apply my newfound attitudes of altruism, adaptability, and openness when working with clients, but also with my colleagues, strangers, friends and family. These principles will guide me in providing better care for my patients and will help me build genuine relationships, as I will prioritize inclusivity and cultural humility when interacting with others.