

**Dhal Bhat and My Dad's Pizza: Comfort and Steep  
Learning Curves in Nepal**

Author: Elsa Froelicher

Senior Honors Project: Creative Project

Honors College

Mentor: Nina McConigley

April 28, 2018

## Artist Statement

I have always thought of myself as a fiction reader, lavishing *Harry Potter* and *the Hunger Games* and more than my fair share of Nicholas Sparks' many, many romantic novels all taking place in small towns in North Carolina. But recently, I have learned to really love reading more non-fiction novels. It started with Wild, a memoir by and of Cheryl Strayed as she walked the Pacific Crest Trail. Since reading that book a couple years ago, I have started reading other similar books, and most of those books are some of the best I have ever read. *Tiny Beautiful Things*, another book by Cheryl Strayed, is one of my favorite books of All time. I read *Unbroken*, written about World War II veteran Louis Zamperini's by Laura Hillenbrand, twice in a year. I have read several of Jon Krakauer's books, including a memoir of Christopher McCandless in Into The Wild and Krakauer's own memoir of climbing Mt. Everest, Into Thin Air. These memoirs were so interesting and eye-opening to read, always giving me a different perspective than I had experienced before.

I spent 4 months in Nepal and wrote three journals. These journals were not intended to be memoirs at all. These journals were so I could read them later for the memories and so that other people could read them to get a better idea of what I experienced while I was in Nepal. This paper, however, is a memoir of my time in Nepal, based loosely on my journals that I wrote avidly in while I was there. Written through my own perspective, I attempted to capture a little of the Nepal that I experienced while also expressing myself in the writing. It is a very personal writing, expressing my own feelings and joys and difficulties while I was in Nepal.

If I were to write a memoir of my time in Nepal, however, it would turn out to be much longer than the intent of this work. To specify my experience, I looked at my experience through a food lens. Writing about food is more than just writing about the taste of this spice paired with this piece of chicken, or the flavor of this potato vs. another potato. Food is so much more than

just a source of calories to supply us with the necessary energy to keep our body going and doing our daily tasks. This is very important when writing about food. This idea is discussed in a blog post by Brian Klems. He discusses five different questions that should be pondered when writing about food. What did the cooking or dining experience mean; why is it important? Is the cooking or dining part of a larger story? What personal relationships does the cooking or dining experience involve? How can the reader be brought right to the table or kitchen; how can the description capture the smell, feel, sound, taste, and visual to experience the food itself. How does the physical senses of the food interreact with the emotional experience of the food? This perspective is how I approach my time in Nepal. I am a person that lives my life from one meal to the next, always looking forward to my next meal, running 21 miles so that I can eat as much pizza as possible without any guilt. Food is important to all of my life, but it became particularly important while I was in Nepal.

In my paper I explore my infatuation with food and its relationship with my experience in Nepal. I focus on the relationship of food with my emotions, my relationships, and my learning experience while I was in Nepal. I found small joys in the food. I made associations with different foods. What I learned about the world and about myself in my experience in Nepal could be seen through food and food cravings. I focus mostly on the emotional and relational aspects of the food rather on the specifics of what I physically experienced while eating the foods. For me, this was the more important part of the food while I was abroad. In this work, I relived the most prominent parts of Nepal through food.

# **Dhal Bhat and My Dad's Pizza: Comfort and Steep Learning Curves in Nepal**

## **20 Hours of Flying Later**

Nepal is a fairly small country that is smashed between India and China and is well known for housing the largest mountain in the world, Mt Everest. In this country known for its very large mountains, near Pokhara, the second largest city in Nepal, there is a small village nestled into the side of a mountain, Kimche. It is located in the Annapurna trekking area, and is on the path to Annapurna Base Camp. The population of this small village is unknown, but I would guess that is no more than a few hundred people. This village sprawls over the side of the mountain. There are trails leading everywhere, unmarked and misleading, but to the local, it an intricate system that allows them to quickly traverse the small village that is primarily only accessed by foot. It is a small, and very close-knit community that overlaps frequently with other neighboring villages.

In the spring of 2017, from January to April, I had the opportunity to spend four months in this beautiful, small village of Kimche, Nepal. I initially thought I was going to be teaching

English in the local school, but ended up teaching some physical education classes and then whatever class needed a teacher; I was a makeshift substitute teacher. The rest of the time I spent exploring the cities, setting my eyes on as many 8,000 meter peaks as I could, including Everest, and spending every last cent of the money I had been saving since I was old enough to have a savings account. I saw beautiful sights, experienced beautiful things, but above all, I met the most beautiful and wonderful people.

Now, while I was embarking on this adventure of sorts, I managed to consistently write in a journal. I do not generally do this. I have tried, several times, but have never gotten much farther than “Dear Diary, Today was a good day. For breakfast I had honey bunches of oats cereal.” But I was determined to put as much of my experiences on paper as possible, not just for my future self, but for any other person who cared to better understand what I had done in those four months of bumming around because I was pretty sure I was never going to be able to really explain it to anyone. Despite my previous failures at journaling, I was very successful. Three journals later, pages full of memories and emotions and random thoughts, I began my long trek home, broke but happy and full.

If a person were to read through my three journals that I kept while I was in Nepal for four months, that person would find a striking pattern or theme. I did not consciously aim to do this, someone who read the journals pointed it out to me. But anyone who knows me even the slightest would not be at all surprised. I talk about food A LOT. I mean probably every day I mention it. Food is a very important part of my day anywhere I am, likely the best part of my day, but it seemed to be particularly important while I was in Nepal. More important than just the wonderful taste and giving me energy. Food became so much more. It gave me comfort, it

helped me communicate, and it bridged the huge gaps between me and the people of Nepal. But it also, on occasion, absolutely ruined me and my digestive system.

### **Culture Shock or Bowel Shock?**

When I got off the plane in Kathmandu, Nepal on January 5<sup>th</sup>, I had no idea what I had just walked into. I don't think I actually realized how different Nepal was from Laramie, WY. When I signed up for this adventure, more than half a year earlier, all I really thought about was the mountains and how incredible they would be, how much hiking I would be able to do. I choose Nepal almost solely on the mountains. Growing up in Wyoming, I love the outdoors and love mountains. I try and spend as much time in Nature's beauty as possible, rain or shine, wind or snow, whatever the miserable weather may be. It did not seriously cross my mind the severe difference in cultures between Nepal and Wyoming. I knew I wanted to go abroad while I was in college, originally thinking I would study abroad. I realized, however, I didn't need the classes for my degree and decided that I would rather not spend the money on classes that I didn't need. I had a friend who had volunteered abroad and I thought I would check it out. I did a lot of research on different volunteering companies and on volunteering abroad in general. I started looking at Nepal specifically because of the legendary mountains, and stumbled upon Trek To Teach, the company I volunteered with, and loved their goals and their specificity to a specific area. Nowhere in my decision was the idea that I would be spending four or five months in a developing country in Asia.

It did not cross my mind that I was entering a much poorer country, with different foods, and a very different culture. The shock I experienced when I first arrived was pretty bad. I didn't poop for a week. A WEEK. For a whole week I had no bowel movements. For a girl who gets a lot of pleasure and satisfaction out of multiple bowel movements a day, this was not okay. And it

really was a testament to how out of my comfort zone I was. In Kimche, I lived in a guest house with three other people, and the occasional guest. I lived with my *Bhauju* (wife of older brother) and her husband, Arjun Dai, and their youngest son, Abijeet, who was three years old at the time. I slept with my sleeping bag every night. There was a small outdoor shop with the guest house, selling lots of tourist-oriented knick knacks and a colorful variety of scarfs that lined the store. There was a guest house that, at one point, could house several guests, but due to damage with the earthquake in 2015, was pretty beat up. There was a small building with a tin roof that had two rooms in it, one that I used and one that the family used. The kitchen was a separate small building that was attached to the shower room (a bucket shower). And if it was a clear day I could see *Machhapuchhre*, also called Fishtail, which was part of the Himalayas.

I remember laying there in this new place I was supposed to call home in the morning, about three am due to some nasty time change and jet lag, thinking I was not going to last four months in this incredibly unfamiliar place that was so far from anyone that I knew and loved. My body was in shock. My mind was in shock. I was not ready. My bowels were telling me to go home, right now, this was unfamiliar territory. So unfamiliar it might be enemy territory. I mean, what kind of food and place makes it so I can't poop for a week? Not any place I wanted to spend my time.

### **Comfort Foods Should Always Have Sugar**

Despite this initial shock, I grew much more used to life in Nepal, and so did my digestive system. It took a long time though. One of the things I found the most comfort in a cup of tea, '*Calo chea*', or black tea. There was nothing like watching the sun come over the mountains across the valley while drinking a cup of hot tea after I had gone for a walk in the morning. It was how I started every morning while I was there. The joy I got out of the thermos

of tea that my *Bhauju* made me every day to take to school that I would drink after my thirty-minute walk up straight uphill to school was almost unrivaled. Or the hot tea that she would give me when I got back from school, and then after dinner. Despite never being a tea drinker at home, not even a coffee drinker, this tea became my routine, my constant, something that I always looked forward to. It gave me so much comfort. Although that could have been partly due to how much sugar I put in each cup of tea. Regardless, I began to associate this joy of tea with a joy of Nepal, and slowly, very slowly, I realized I was beginning to feel content, to feel at home in this tiny village that was so different from the place I left.

#### *NEPAL MILK TEA*

- Small handful of black tea
- Small (or large depending on the drinker, like if the drinker was myself) handful of sugar
- Put tea and sugar in a pot of water
- Get water to boil and let boil for period of time so that tea is sufficiently stewed and sugar is dissolved
- Add very small handful of powdered milk
- Poor the tea into a small glass cup through a strainer

It wasn't just the tea that really helped me feel at home in Kimche. My *Bhauju* made these pancakes. But they weren't like the IHOP fluffy pancakes. Which are good, don't get me wrong, but nothing like these legendary pancakes. She added more eggs to the batter so that they came out like thick crepes and then we would put real honey on it that was from a bee hive cove that was nearby. A person has not lived until they have tried these pancakes. They are heaven on earth. These pancakes were this glorious food that I would never be able to get anywhere else,



especially not in Laramie, WY, and I would never be able to replicate. It was in these pancakes, these crackcakes, that I really began to realize that I was experiencing something that I would never get to experience at any other time in my life in any other place. And I need to cherish it. Every step I took on my walk to school, every game of hangman I played in the classroom, every morning walk I went on, every second I got to spend with the wonderful people I learned to call my family. I realized that the most important and memorable parts of Nepal were not the mountains, but the people and the pancakes. I found so much love in unexpected places.

### *BHAUJU'S PANCAKES*

- ½ cup of flour
- 1 spoonful of custard powder
- 1 egg
- ½ spoonful of liquid milk
- Add water as needed
- Mix everything together well, add oil in frypan so whole pan is covered, add batter and cook for one minute, flip and cook one minute, place on plate, add honey, enjoy the best thing you will ever eat in your entire life.

While I was living in Kimche, I spent most of my time around people with very limited English. I spent most of my time with either my *Bhauju* or with the kids of the school, neither of which had enough English to ask me anything beyond food and about my brothers and sisters and mother and father. I couldn't have conversations with them beyond 'Are you hungry?' 'Yes.' At school, I had a hard time connecting with the other teachers. At home, I had a hard time connecting with anyone around, visitors and family alike. In the beginning, this was the hardest

part. I had no one to talk to and it made me so, so lonely. I could figure out how to communicate, to form relationships in this place that I would be spending two months. But one of the ways I figured it out was through food. I couldn't talk much with my *Bhauju*, so instead I spend a lot of time in the kitchen while she was making food. I would just sit there with Abijeet, her youngest son, while she cooked. We would laugh at Abijeet, I would watch her cook, she might have other women over to eat and cook with and I would just watch. That time I spent watching them helped me more than I could express. I couldn't talk with everyone in the kitchen, but being in their presence, being around people while food was being cooked, was a better connection than any conversation. Food is so associated with family and love in my life that this time I spent in the kitchen with my Nepali family was probably the most cherished time I have there.

### **Dhal Bhat Power 24 Hours**

Rice is the staple of all food of all meals in Nepal. I ate rice for breakfast, for snack, for dinner. No meal was off limits for rice. In the kitchen, there was constantly a pressure cooker going off for the rice. My favorite meal was the mountain of fried rice I would get for breakfast most mornings. But more times than not, the food that was being cooked was *Dhal Bhat*, the most classic Nepali food. The Nepalese would eat *Dhal Bhat* twice a day, both for breakfast and dinner. *Dhal Bhat*, generally, is rice with curried vegetables and lentil soup. It is served on a copper plate with a large pile of white rice taking up most of the plate, the lentil soup in a separate bowl, and the potato and vegetable curry in a small section of the plate. All of it gets mixed together a portion at a time with fingers and is eaten with hands. It is a delicious meal, but every day, twice a day, I wasn't sure I was going to make it.

I have never, before spending my time in Nepal, really liked anything curried and I have never been a big fan of rice, so the idea of eating *Dhal Bhat* every day twice a day was very

daunting to me. But, despite all odds, I grew very fond of *Dhal Bhat*. I began to crave it. I looked forward to every night when I got my dish full of rice and curry. It was SO GOOD. I began to crave it. When I was really hungry, I craved *Dhal Bhat*. I didn't crave cheese pizza or a pile of pasta, but I craved this *Dhal Bhat*. It's all I wanted when I was really hungry; it seemed like the only thing that would be satisfying enough. I lived for *Dhal Bhat*. This craving I had for *Dhal Bhat*, despite not liking curry before coming to Nepal, is a good example of how I, despite my initial thoughts, learned to be so content in Nepal. How I learned to feel at home. Eating enough of the same food seemed to have an effect on my palate preference, just like spending enough time in Kimche seemed to make me feel like I belonged there, like I had a home. There was a comfort in the familiar routine of mixing the rice and curry together with my fingers and then scooping it into my mouth every night, a comfort in the routine that a developed. I learned that if you give it enough time, if you are persistent enough, if you keep an open mind, you can learn to be happy somewhere, to feel at home, to make connections you didn't think possible, to feel loved. Having patience to reach the point of feeling content most of the day, to feeling joy, despite the difficulties of the language barrier and cultural differences, it is a difficult place to get to. But to reach that point, feeling happy and loved and at home, after such a difficult start, was a feeling like nothing I can describe, it was more gratifying and fulfilling than anything I have experienced to date.

### *DHAL BHAT*

- **Dhal**

- Lentils: soak in water for 1 ½ - 2 hours, enough water to cover the lentils, add flour to make thicker if needed
- In Pressure cooker:

- 2 spoonfuls of oil
  - Half an onion
  - Pinch of turmeric powder
  - Salt to taste (one spoonful)
  - Stir everything two times, then add
  - 4 cups of water
  - ½ spoonful of ginger paste
  - Let pressure cooker explode 5 times
- Cook rice (Bhat)
  - **Potato Curry**
    - Peel and cut potatoes (boiled or not boiled)
    - Cut up other vegetables (like cauliflower, etc.)
    - Fry vegetables
      - Onions, then potatoes
      - Then add small spoonful of salt, turmeric, and chili powder
      - Fry cauliflower, fresh peas
      - Stir
      - Add one spoonful of garlic paste and ginger paste (for gastric and throat problems)
      - Add chopped tomatoes
      - ½ cup of water
      - Cover with lid
      - Add ½ spoonful of cumin powder (for digestion)

- Add chopped up coriander (for digestion)
- Cover with lid and turn off heat

### **Chocolate Cake is Part of a Well Rounded Breakfast**

Now, as much as I had come to love *Dahl Bhat*, I was not going to turn down the famous chocolate cake of the village of Chhomrong that had been featured in *Time Magazine* in 2010 in the article ‘Sugar Mama’, part of the best of Asia 2010. Once we had heard of this cake, another teacher and I had made it our sole purpose to find and eat this chocolate cake. This cake was made in The Chhomrong Cottage, one of the many small guest houses that sprawl through Chhomrong. Luckily, it wasn’t actually too hard to find, and find it we did. We found it several times in a span of 24 hours actually. It has a small restaurant area, with a central wood stove for heating, and slightly cramped seating with cute decorations and various magazine clippings about this cake.

When we got this legendary chocolate cake, it was as if we were an infant on their first birthday who had never had sugar before and had been given their own cake to eat. We dove into that cake. We destroyed that cake. This cake was a little dry, but on top of it was a heap of chocolate pudding and the combination was heavenly. I mean, if this cake was served anywhere at home, it would be nothing special. But in our chocolate deprived states, it was the best thing we had ever tasted. We found an unexpected amount of joy in this slice (well lots of slices) of chocolate cake. Find this much joy in one tiny thing became critical to my time in Nepal. While I was here I found joy in the laughter, in a shared snack, in a warm cup of tea, in the first sight of the mountains on my morning walks, in holding the kids hands all the way to school each morning. When I was feeling lonely or homesick, I turned to these little moments for comfort and reassurance. And now, I cherish these moments so, so much. I look back on them fondly

every time they cross my mind. We often look for grand gestures and huge accomplishments and crave crazy adventures outside our daily routine. We forget and neglect these tiny moments that are just as beautiful and joy-bringing. Sitting across from someone every morning while eating cereal is just as important as the day you married that same person. Every six-mile easy run can be just as liberating as the 32 mile trail race. We forget to appreciate these moments, and I grew so much more aware and fond of these small moments while I was in Nepal.

### **I came for the Mountains and I stayed for the Kids (and their popcorn)**

Some of my favorite memories while I was in Nepal involved the wide array of snacks the kids would bring to class and then share with me. The most common was the dried noodles. These noodles, basically like ramen noodles only the flavoring was different and more spicy, were a staple in most kids diet at school. But they would also bring other things. Sometimes they would bring just plain white bread, which was kind of a delicacy in Kimche because they couldn't make it. My favorite was when they would bring popcorn. It was different than the popcorn I was used to in the states. It was literally an ear of corn that had been dried out and the kernels are taken right off the rind and popped a pan over a fire. Some of the kernels didn't pop but you could still eat them and they were so good. Popcorn has always been one of my favorite snacks, but this popcorn in particular was my favorite snack of all while I was in Nepal. The kids figured out it was my favorite snack and they would bring it to share with me. One time, afterschool I went over to one of my student's houses and she saw a picture of popcorn on my phone and insisted I stay for popcorn and for tea. This girl's mother heated up tea and popped popcorn over a small fire in their home. And together, my student and I ate popcorn and drank tea on their beds and watched the National Geographic Channel on their small box TV. It was one of my favorite moments of my entire trip.



(My student removing the kernels from the corn that would be popped for my enjoyment.)

This level of caring, the kindness, and the love I felt from these kids, which is only glimpsed in the snack sharing, is incomparable. They seemed more involved with their family and friend's lives. They took care of each other like I had never seen before. They took responsibility for more. They cared for me in a way that no teacher in the USA would feel cared for by their own students. The love I received from them seemed more unconditional than any love I have experienced from a child in the states. I don't know if this was a societal difference or if it was because I was so different from them, so more interesting, but it was so heartwarming and made my job teaching them so much better. I looked forward to every single day of teaching to get to spend time with these kids. I got to know them, I got to know their personalities and

their quirks, what made them laugh, what made them mad, what games they liked, and what situations helped them thrive. These snacks helped, again, as a sort of bonding, a form of communication. Food is already very important, clearly, to live, but for me, in Nepal, it became so much more important.

Another time this happened, the sharing of snacks, was between myself and another teacher. This teacher was young and didn't speak any English. One of the hardest parts of school is I couldn't communicate with the female teachers very well at all. This was difficult because I generally find it easier to relate to woman, I find them easier to talk to when I first meet them. So this sharing meant more to me than the young teacher could have known. We sat in these red plastic chairs in the school yard, sitting right in the sun with flies buzzing all around, not exchanging a single word. Just sharing a snack. A snack of hard, uncooked noodles. And it was one of the happier moments of my time in Nepal. I wrote about this incident in my journal for a while and how much it meant to me. I felt welcomed and part of the school. Sharing food is much more significant than sharing substance to keep us alive. It is a way of showing acceptance and love.

### **Food Porning**

Despite all these beautiful things about Nepal, all the connections and love I felt and beauty I experienced, it was also really hard to be there. I was homesick a lot. One thing I did to cope was to make a list of my favorite things, like my favorite books or favorite places. My favorite list to work on was my favorite foods. It was by far the longest list and I spent the most time on it. It brought me a lot of comfort. What I realized, since then, when I was looking back on the notebooks after I returned home, was that most of these foods were associated with



memories that I was also fond of. I was finding comfort in these foods because they made me happy, but I think what was really making me happy is what those foods were associated with.

It wasn't just the list of my favorite foods that I spent so much time on. On the weekends, when I was with any of the other teachers, we spent an abnormal amount of time talking about different foods that we were craving at the time, or really missed. We talked a lot about fresh fruit and vegetables, since eating them in Nepal was dangerous for us because our bodies were not used to the water there. We talked about ice cream and ice water and peanut butter. All these foods that we didn't have access to that we were so used to having readily available to us. I think these food cravings, for me, was parallel to my homesickness. I miss what I had at my fingertips. I missed my bed at home. I missed eating cereal in the morning. I missed sitting on couches and watching TV. I missed going out my door and going for a run. I miss all these little things and that showed in my metaphorical bulimia in my constant discussion of foods I craved.

### **It's not the food, but the people that eat the food with you**

The food I missed more than any other food was my Dad's homemade pizza. My favorite food in the world is pizza and the best pizza I have ever had is from *Beau Jo's* in Colorado, where they are wise enough to give out honey for the crust. But this is not the food I missed the most. I mean, my dad's pizza is delicious, definitely better than your average pizza, but it's not *Beau Jo's*. But I craved my dad's pizza. This is probably obvious, but this preference for pizza was because it was so strongly associated with not just my dad, but also my entire family. There are so many wonderful memories of when I was younger of me, my brother, my mom, and my dad eating pizza on a Friday or Saturday night together, often while watching a movie. And now, whenever I come home from college, my dad always knows to make the homemade pizza. A delicious homemade wheat crust with pesto and lots of mozzarella, parmesan, and feta cheese

with tomato slices on top. That homemade pizza is more than just pizza, it was my family, my childhood, everything I loved most dearly.

The fact that the food I missed the most was my dad's pizza was a symbol of the most important thing I learned while I was in Nepal. I learned the importance of my people. The people that matter most to me are the most important part of my life. It doesn't matter where I am or what I am doing, the best part of any day is the people I spend it with. This became so painfully and joyfully obvious while I was in Nepal. I learned from observing it with the people I grew to love so much in Nepal. The Nepalese had no desire to leave their homes. They didn't want to leave Nepal. They had their families and their friends. They had their people. It didn't matter what conditions they were living in, they were happy, probably happier than the average person living in the States. And I really believe that it was because of the value they put on the people in their lives. The joy I saw when my *Bhauju* was drinking tea and talking with her friends was unrivaled. When I asked one of my Nepali friends whether she would ever move away from Nepal, she said she wouldn't because she didn't want to be far away from her mom or her sisters or her friends. It was so different from home, where there is a push to see the world, to leave home, to see the world, to become independent. I went to Nepal to see the world, to find new experiences, to catch the travel bug, all of which I did. But when I returned home, what I was more prominent was my value of my family, of my home, of my people. Exploring the world and seeing new perspectives is incredibly important, but the importance of home and people should never be understated.

But my experience, my difficulties, while I was in Nepal, made this idea, the idea that people and relationships are what my world turn, most obvious. I was lonely. Very lonely. Don't get me wrong, I got used to life in Nepal, got close to my family and the kids I was teaching, but

sometimes it was so incredibly lonely. I miss my family and my friends. I miss hanging out in the kitchen with my parents. I missed laying on the couch for hours watching TV with my brother. I missed backpacking in the Wind River mountains with my boyfriend. I missed running around the windy streets of Laramie, WY with my best friend. I spent two weeks in the Everest region, going over cho-la pass and to Everest base camp, and I saw some of the most beautiful, mind blowing mountains. It was incomprehensible and incomparable to anything I had ever seen before. But those mountains, they were marginal in my mind because I didn't get to share it with anyone. I didn't have someone I loved with me to experience it. It was a heartbreaking, eye-opening experience. This feeling, this epiphany, changed me. I know what is most important to me. I have my people, and those people make me happier than anything else in the world. I can see big mountains and beautiful lakes and eat delicious foods but it's never going to be as big or as beautiful or as delicious if I don't get to share it with someone. That cheesy saying that Chris McCandless writes in his journal towards the end of his life, in the book Into The Wild by John Krakaur "Happiness is best when shared," it's so true, it hurts. I saw Mt Everest, the queen herself, and all I wanted was to see the pine trees that scattered their selves all through the mountains of Wyoming because that meant that I have my brother, boyfriend, my parents, or by closest friends with me.

### *MY DAD'S HOMEMADE PIZZA*

- Crust
  - In one bowl: 1 package of yeast, ½ cup of warm water, put together for 1 minute then stir
  - In another bowl: 1 cup of warm water, ¼ cup of sugar, 1 tsp of salt, ¼ cup of oil, add yeast, 4-5 cups of flour

- Let rise for an hour, then punch down
- Sauce
  - 2 cloves of garlic
  - 6 oz can of tomato paste
  - 2 ½ cups of canned tomatoes
  - 1 tsp of salt
  - 1 tsp of Oregono
  - ½-¾ tsp of pepper
- Add toppings as desired (extra, extra cheese)

## **REJECTION**

Okay. Outside that deep, life changing realization I had through by obsession with my father's cheese pizza, my journal continued to demonstrate my food-related experiences in Nepal. And sometimes, that food really did not settle with me well. Sometimes, my body was in full rejection of Nepal and its food. After I had finished my teaching, after I had spent two and a half months in Nepal, after I had eaten the same Dhal Bhat that I had been eating since I arrived to Kimche, I laid down to go to bed in my bed in my room in beloved Kimche, for what I thought was my last time, with my stomach churning and my body sweating. I laid there, not sure what was happening in my stomach. And then I was in the bathroom, puking up rice and curry into the squat toilet. And then I went to bed. And then I was back with the squat toilet, getting rid of more rice and curry. It was coming up looking just like it went down. This repeated again. Only this time, I didn't make it to the bathroom. I projectile, actually projectile, vomited all over my bed and backpack full of my clothes that I had just packed up to leave the next day. I made it to the morning, dry heaving the rest of the night, with nothing left in my system. This

night was rough. It was long. But then it was done. I spent the day exhausted, not eating anything, and feverish, but the next day I woke up completely fine, ready to do, and got on the bus to go to the city to meet the other teachers.

This night was exactly like my emotions while I was in Nepal. I was up and down so fast. One second I was riding a high, watching the kids play a game they loved or watching my *Bhauju* cook, the next second I was crying because I was lonely. It was a vicious cycle. It was exhausting. And exhilarating. These emotional highs and lows became part of my life. One second I was puking up rice and curry all over my bed and the next second I was laughing because the little boy I lived with had his mouth all over the hose. I learned to appreciate the highs, to dwell on them when I was feeling particularly lonely. I held on to the smiles that greeted me every day when I walked into my class five for their gym class and pictured those smiles while I was sitting alone in a guest house on my way to Everest base camp. I had to hold on to those highs because I knew when I got home it would not be the lows that I remembered, but the highs. And I would remember them so fondly, and question why I was ever lonely or sad while I was in Nepal. So yes, I got really sick while I was in Nepal, but in the scheme of things, it was so brief it was barely a blimp on my trip. I rode the roller coaster of emotions while I was there, but it is only the beautiful moments that I remember and think about frequently now.

## **REJECTION part 2.**

Now this traumatic night was not the only time I got sick while I was in Nepal. After all of us, myself and the three other teachers, had been in the villages for about six weeks, we had a long weekend and took that opportunity to go back to the city for the weekend, back to Pokhara. We made the trek back, taking a local bus for the last part of the trip. We first got our hotel rooms to share and then went to the closest 'grocery store.' Now this store what about the size of

a small gas station and had the same quality food. It was all the processed foods that you see in a gas station in the USA, but Nepal's version, slightly spicier. There were rows of candy bars, stacks and stacks of cookies, coolers of ice cream treats, sodas and beer in the fridges, bags and bags of chips. We spent probably an hour there. We were just staring at the foods, unable to make a decision. It was like we had never seen peanut butter in our entire lives. Or that we had never tasted chips. All those food cravings we had been discussing in depth were displayed before our own eyes. I have never had such a hard time deciding what processed junk food to buy. So, clearly, we need to buy everything. And we feasted. And then we went to a pizza place. And we feasted again. We ate like kings. Well, like kings of the gas station.

But this food, quickly, I found out, was not going to settle that well in our stomachs. All this processed food and dairy took its toll on my bowels. I spent half the night on the toilet trying to rid my system of this madness. After six weeks of rice and curry, apparently my body wanted nothing to do with fake oreos and gooey cheese pizza. For better or for worse (probably for better), Nepal had changed my digestive system significantly. At home, I didn't go a day without eating a cheese. But my time in Nepal didn't just change my digestive system. It changed me. It changed me in ways I don't think I really understood.

One of the big things I realized had changed about myself was my self-confidence. I mean, before I left, I wasn't full of self-hatred. I wasn't ashamed of myself. But there were times when I questioned myself, wondered if people really did like me, if they really did want to hang out with me or they were just feeling obligated. Or if it was Saturday night and I was questioning myself because I did not have any plans. I came home and suddenly I didn't care about any of that. I was confident in and accepting of who I was. I think this came partially from my realization of I had my people and I didn't need to feel obligated to have x-many friends with

plans every night of the weekend. I had my people and nothing else mattered. But I also gained a lot of confidence through doing this trip. Nepal was so difficult, and being able to deal with that difficulty and learn to thrive in it gave me a huge feeling of worth. I had done what I thought was not going to happen, and I had enjoyed it. I spent four months in Nepal. If I was capable of this, I was capable of so many things.

### **West is the Best (wrong)**

Now, I lived in Kimche, Nepal for two and a half months. And it wasn't just the rice for breakfast and dinner and snack every day that I had to get used to. In this beautiful village of mine, at the wonderful guest house that I stayed at, there were no western toilets. I did not have a western toilet at school. I only had access to squat toilets. This, along with the bucket shower, took some getting used to, initially. But, with time, I came to really love this squat toilet and bucket shower. The bucket shower, while literally just a huge bucket full of water, was always hot, which is more than any of the other teachers could say about their electric showers. And, for me, the squat toilets always seemed cleaner to me. Maybe this was because I didn't actually sit on anything. But, the most interesting part, after I left Kimche and was staying in Pokhara for a couple weeks, I realize that I had gotten more used to the squat toilet than I had thought. I couldn't poop on a western toilet. I could only poop on a squat toilet. In our hotel in Pokhara, I would leave our room, which had a bathroom, and go outside to the back of the building to use the squat toilet. My bowels didn't seem to want to move unless I was in the squatting position. (thankfully, I have recovered from this dilemma and I do not have to squat every time I need to poop) This is not a unique occurrence. I am not the only one who needed to squat to poop. I have talked to several friends of mine who have a variety of digestive problems, like celiac's disease, who have an easier time pooping if they are in a squatting position, so sometimes standing on a

toilet and squatting is suggested. How is it that in the USA, where we eat more processed foods and more foods that are so hard for us as humans to digest, we decided that western toilets were the best way to take a crap? And in Nepal, where the food that is eaten is all about easy digestion and improving health, they use squat toilets that create a body position that make taking your daily poop, or poops, easy as pie?

This idea that the squat toilet seemed better for my digestive system than the western toilet was not alone in a comparison of the ‘developed’ and ‘undeveloped’ worlds. The idea that the United States and Europe and other ‘developed,’ ‘first-world’ countries have their crap figured out better than other ‘third-world’ countries can be absolute crap. Don’t get me wrong, there were some improvements that needed to be made. The education system was not good in the government schools in rural Nepal. And from what I heard and saw, the medical opportunities and options were not good. The closest medical assistance in my village was an hour walk away, and that medical assistance was very limited. And yet, this beautiful country had some stuff figured out that others hadn’t. The people in Nepal seemed happier, in general. The relationships between people seemed more genuine and caring. The children were always around to help for dinner or cleaning, whatever was needed or was expected of them. The kids I taught loved me in a more unconditional way than I have ever experienced. (although I am not sure if this was because of how different I was from everyone else.) The pace of life was so much slower, so much less high strung, so much less stressful. People seemed less focused on making as much money as possible. Also, where else can a person see eight different mountains over eight thousand meters. The United States is an amazing place and it is home to me and I am incredibly grateful to live here, but it is not perfect and could take a leaf out of Nepal’s book at some points.



One of the most interesting things I noticed while I was trekking around in Nepal, trekking to my village, trekking to one of the other teacher's villages, trekking to Everest base camp, the children would come running up to us asking for 'chocolate.' For reference, this meant any kind of candy, not just chocolate, which was confusing for me for a while. But these kids know travelers, they know that they were foreigners and likely wealthier than they were. Which is a good guess. So these kids would ask for candy and the trekkers would give them a mini snickers bar or a sucker or something they had in their bag. This interaction gets at the greatest fear I had when I went to Nepal to teach English for a mere two months. This interaction gets at the 'White Savior Complex' that has taken over the western world.

This idea, that a westerner comes in for a week, hands out bracelets, holds children in an orphanage for a couple hours, and then returns, thinking they are helping the world, making it a better place, helping these children in the orphanages. Realistically, their presence is only making the situation worse. I was very fearful of this idea. That the kids I was teaching would not benefit at all from my being there and teaching them. Or that I would see myself as solving all their problems when I was only making it worse. I wanted to make a positive impact.

Here's what happened. And I am really hoping that it wasn't that savior complex. I changed my mind set. I was there just as much, if not more, for myself as I was for the children I was teaching. I was learning about myself, learning about the world, meeting wonderful people, and seeing beautiful things. This experience, it changed me, it changed my perspective. Those kids did more for me than I could have ever done for them. I tried to teach them English. They taught me so much more.

The other thing I learned was that my inability to speak or understand Nepali was like a version of immersion for these kids. In order to communicate with me or understand me they had

to use their knowledge of English. This, more than any of my teaching skills or strategies, was my greatest benefit to them. The kids improved immensely both in the tests that were given when I arrived and when I left and in the communication we were all able to maintain. I was so proud. The company I went through, *Trek to Teach*, is very small company that sends individuals to teach English in rural villages in the Annapurna region of Nepal. Trek to Teach is unique in its focus on improving the education in a small area. It is not a commercialized, worldwide volunteer company. There is a Nepali board, composed of several individuals from and living in Nepal, that is integral to the program. The program puts all its' funds into improving the schools where they send their teachers. One of the goals of trek to teach is to have enough teachers to so that every school has an English teacher each quarter of the year. The program has great intentions and seems to provide good benefits. I am very proud to have been part of this program.

### **Homeward Bound**

Two things stand out in my mind of when I came back from Nepal. First, I had put on probably 15 pounds. I had never gained that much weight in a short amount of time. And I could feel it. It felt like so much more. Second, the first thing I ate when I got to Denver was a vanilla milkshake from McDonalds. It doesn't get much more American than that. And I paid for it. 24 hours later I had uncontrollable diarrhea. My body, 15 pounds heavier and crapping dirty brown water every thirty minutes, did not want to be back in the states. It was screaming at me to go back, and go back fast.

Coming was a moment that I dreamed of more than anything else while I was in Nepal. I couldn't wait. I wanted pizza, and my people, and to sit on the couch and watch grey's anatomy for an unhealthy amount of time. But coming home was not nearly as easy or as great as I

thought. I had been warned of the culture shock coming back, but I was not prepared. I mean, I did not help the situation, when I came back and slept for ten hours and then immediately went out for a friend's 21<sup>st</sup> birthday. I came back and found out that life had continued without me. People had made new friends. There were new girlfriends. There were new places to hang out. There were new inside jokes and new memories everyone was talking about. I felt like I had been forgotten and left behind by some of the people that mattered most to me. This was inevitable, I had been gone for four months, things were going to change, but that did not make the change any easier. Coming back was really hard on me mentally and emotionally. Not to mention the 12-hour time difference that left me lying awake night for hours and slogging through the day for two weeks. The jet lag and culture shock coming back to the state was so much worse than going to Nepal.

## Alas

Nepal was everything and nothing that I dreamed it would be. I expected tall mountains and children that I would love. And it delivered tall mountains and children that I loved dearly. But Nepal was so much more than that. It was a steep learning curve. It was an eye-opening experience. It was soul-tester. It was emotionally the greatest and worst thing I have ever done in my life. If I could go and do the same exact experience again, I would not do it. But I wouldn't change a single thing about that trip. It changed me as a person, for the better, I hope. And it changed my view on life and the world, definitely for the better. As Cheryl Strayed says...

“It's hard to go. It's scary and lonely...and half the time you'll be wondering why the hell you're in Cincinnati or Austin or North Dakota or Mongolia or wherever your melodious little finger-plucking heinie takes you. There will be boondoggles and discombobulated days, freaked-out nights and metaphorical flat tires.

But it will be soul-smashingly beautiful... It will open up your life.”

Or it will open up your stomach to give your bowels some boondoggles and freaked-out nights... Either way, life and perspectives will be altered unimaginably.

## Work Cited

5 Questions to Ask Yourself When Writing About Food. (2013, September 09). Retrieved from

<http://www.writersdigest.com/online-editor/5-questions-to-ask-yourself-when-writing-about-food>

Mahr, K. (2010, May 13). The Best of Asia 2010. Retrieved from

[http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1988463\\_1989006\\_1989001,00.html](http://content.time.com/time/specials/packages/article/0,28804,1988463_1989006_1989001,00.html)