

To whom it may concern,

Laos is not a typical nation. As in, you rarely hear someone say “oh, I am going on vacation in Laos” or “the Laotian economy...” etc. Laos is a nation that the west can easily forget about. During the Vietnam War when the Ho Chi Minh trail zig zaged across two nations it was all too easy for the Americans to forget about Laos. In fact most people (including me until I went on this trip) don’t even know more bombs were dropped on that tiny landlocked nation than the continent of Europe during WWII. The West as well as the forces of the east (mainly China, Japan, Vietnam and India) have rocked the nation of Laos to and fro shaping and scaring both the People of Laos and their Phi (the spirits who are said to reside everywhere and within everything) and yet most of us do not know their story. Well, because of the scholarship that you gave me, I do know their story.

I am an Elementary Education major here at Cornell College with a minor in Religious Studies. The reason I chose these fields (learning and believing respectively) is because I am fascinated by (as Jung put it) the public dreams that guide our society. Because of this trip I was able to open my eyes to a world that is totally different than my own and I was completely inspired by the love, hospitality, joy, and insightfulness of a culture completely unlike my own. On the trip I was able to conduct an independent research project about how the Lao Marxist government interacts with Buddhism and Shamanism which are the main belief systems of Laos. This really sparked my interest and passion regarding public policy and I hope that I can manifest this interest when I enter the classroom as a full time educator. One of my friends on the trip (our whole group became really close) conducted a project on education within Buddhism and I have had a wonderful time talking with her about our mutual findings and I

think I learned an amazing and equal amount of information from my own research as well as from my classmates.

Of course the highlight was Laos itself. The country has not left me yet and I know that it never will. Part of me is still with that family who took us in when our bus broke down, part of me is still drifting down the Mei Kong watching elephants and Buddhas pass by, part of me is with the Tai Dan and the Hmong watching their rituals and tasting their food and part of me is walking back to our home stay next to the jungle at night, and it is for this that I owe you my biggest thank you.

With Warm Regards,

Samuel Hedine







