

Dear Class of '55 and other generous Alumni,

Greetings! My name is Rebekah Kurtz; I am a senior at Cornell and am writing to you today to thank you for your generosity and kindness. I studied abroad in India during the second semester of my junior year, and the scholarship that you help fund, the Class of '55 Study Award, helped make it possible for me. You helped make it possible for me to have experiences and gain knowledge that would never be available to me in the States and more importantly to become different, better person.

Again, I want to personally thank you for helping make it possible for me to study abroad. I am majoring in International Development, but in the spring of my junior year, I traveled to India to study Sustainable Development and Social Change through School for International Training (SIT).

While applying for this scholarship, I had to write a thank-you letter ahead of time, just so Cornell could make sure that I was proficient at explaining my gratitude. I was planning on using this letter when I got back from my semester. However, now as I read over it, I find myself thinking that it's terrible. I was thanking you for things that hadn't happened yet and for things that I didn't understand. So, this is my genuine second try. I hope you like it.

I have had a hard time explaining my time in India to anyone. How do I describe four months of experiences? How do I explain an entire country of which I only got to see a tiny slice? Everyday, little stories slip out that I chose to tell to others, but mainly, I've been very selfish over my Indian memories. I can't explain my time or experiences with adequate words, so I get frustrated and keep it all to myself. However, there are a few things I can share with you. I was chased by a monkey at a train station. I met the best friend that I have ever had while in India. My host family was absolutely incredible and matched my personality perfectly. I called them mama ji and papa ji and they named me chulbuli, which means bubbly girl. I met Pakistani refugees and learned that I would love to work with immigrants experiencing injustices. I conducted a one-month independent study project in a rural town in the Himalayas. I studied the effects of self-help groups on women's empowerment and utilization of government health services. When I returned to the United States, I was invited to present this research at Notre Dame's Human Development conference. Finally, my time in India prepared me to be a successful Fulbright candidate. I will be teaching English in India beginning in July 2015 until March 2016.

My time abroad helped me grow as a person and has also opened several doors and opportunities for me. Thank you so much for helping make this possible.

Rebekah Kurtz
Cornell College '15