

Reflective Essay

Growing up in a multicultural home I have a strong passion for understanding how cultures shape us into the people we are today. I am a Nlaka'pamux woman and a status, registered member of Lower Nicola Indian Band, which is located near Merritt, British Columbia. My Indigenous heritage comes from my fathers side. However, having said this I have grown up with a relatively westernized upbringing, learning few traditional practices or values of my Indigenous culture. In the last decade as I grew older, I felt my interest in learning more about my culture grow as each day went along, and I am so thankful that I listened to my gut and sought out opportunities of which I could further educate myself, as this not only taught myself more about my culture, but about so many others as well along the way.

One of the first experiences that sparked my interest in learning more about other cultures was my first international travel to Mexico with my family when I was in middle school. I remember being memorized by the traditional dancing, the music and the atmosphere of cultural events that we went to; The delicious traditional cuisine was simply a bonus. After returning home from this trip I immediately began to create a list of places I wanted to go, things that I wanted to see, events that I wanted to take part in on a global level. I am happy to say that I have begun to make a dent in that list in my early adulthood, but definitely recognize that there is still much of my list to go, not inclusive of the additions that I will surely continue to make.

I have since been on numerous international travels to a large variety of places including but not limited to Indonesia, Philippines, Dominican Republic, Cuba, and Mexico. With each trip my appreciation for culture grows, and the knowledge I have acquired is abundant. As you can see based on the countries I have listed, many countries that I have travelled to are considered to be third-world

countries, and I have seen with my own eyes the lives that many locals to these areas live. I have seen horrendous things in some of these countries from physical abuse, neglect, starvation, sexism, homophobia and dehydration to list only a few. Seeing this has made me look at my own life in a different light, and has helped me understand all of the reasons I have to be so grateful for the life I have, and the opportunities that are available to me on a daily basis. I want to use my privilege to support and advocate for communities in need.

Last year, myself and one of my good friends (and colleague) founded the TRU UNICEF Club on campus. Our club is grounded in the belief that we can take simple effective steps to help address issues related to the well-being of children and women internationally through advocacy and empowerment. I hold the Vice President position within our club, and as an invested volunteer I am highly involved in all aspects of the club including planning, fundraising, community outreach, events etc. I am really passionate about the club and raising awareness to global health issues; I am so excited to watch the club grow and flourish in the TRU community. Additionally, in my teen years I began to utilize my social media platforms as means for education, advocacy and allyship of minority communities and people of color. One current event that really touched a soft place in my heart was the recent finding of 215 children at the Residential School site in town, followed by the thousands of other bodies continuing to be found among other Residential School sites across the Nation. Being an Indigenous person myself, this hit home for me, and is a topic that I am very emotional about. If I had been born earlier in the 1900's one of those bodies could have been me, or my sister, or a cousin. In fact, I'm sure that I am in some way related to more than one of the bodies found amongst the many given that this is so local to my own Indian Band. To support promoting reconciliation, I have taken a strong interest in Indigenous health and eliminating racism and stereotypes in not only the workplace, but in our society. The impact of colonization and the inter-generational trauma that residential schools have left on many Indigenous communities is a huge area of interest for me. I often advocate for Indigenous rights in nursing settings

surrounded by my peers, and I also make a point to speak out on social media platforms about Indigenous culture, rights and the systemic racism that is embedded in the society we live in.

On a professional level, on top of my goal of working in the mental health sector of health, I have decided to dedicate my career to Indigenous Health. I have recently accepted a job opportunity on Vancouver Island with a rural Indian Band working as a community mental health and wellness nurse. I am so excited to embark on this journey; it is such a great honor to use my experiences, my knowledge and my skills to support my own community in this capacity. The knowledge, appreciation and education that I have obtained in my years of cultural research and understanding has gotten me to where I am today, and I would be so immensely proud to say that I am a globally competent graduate nursing student who is using her life and professional experiences to better our community on person at a time.