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On her way to becoming a physician's assistant, Shannon Casey sees the diversity of humanity in Nepal

Preparing to leave Nepal after volunteering for three months at a local hospital; a phrase springs to Shannon's mind: "There's more than one way to be human" she says, "a professor told me that once, and I've really experienced that here in Nepal."

The 22-year-old from Santa Clara, California came to Nepal to volunteer at the Projects Abroad Medical Project after graduating from a biology degree at the California Polytechnic State University:

"I want to become a Physician's Assistant," Shannon explains "to get into those courses you need to have completed between 1500 and 2000 hours in a clinical environment and this experience in Nepal at the Medical Project has helped me work towards that goal."

Based at the Alka Hospital in a district of Kathmandu, Shannon witnessed different medical situations. "As I'm not qualified to do surgery I was there to observe," she says "but the surgeons explained to me what they were doing and it was so exciting being there in the operating room." Shannon was present for a removal of an appendix and she also witnessed the doctors fix a broken arm.

When not in surgery, Shannon often attended Dr. K.C.'s clinics: "The atmosphere is much more relaxed than in the U.S." Shannon explains "Dr. K.C. could spend 15 minutes with a patient! One woman was given dietary advice and then she left. During the next consultation she popped back in and asked the doctor if it was OK to eat mushrooms! The doctor calmly explained mushrooms were just fine. Nobody seemed to mind the interruption."

The types of problems the doctor dealt with also reminded Shannon she was in Nepal: "Many patients had back pain which isn't surprising because you always see people carrying extremely heavy loads on their backs here," she says "and another common problem was chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) which is basically breathing trouble. The pollution and dust is much worse in Nepal than in developed countries, so again these symptoms didn't surprise me."

Whilst volunteering at the hospital, Shannon stayed with a Nepali host family close to the clinic. "They were so welcoming and my host mum always wanted me to feel at home. It was an awesome family to get to know."

Traveling around Nepal was also high on Shannon's agenda and she managed to do a lot of it! Visiting Namo Buddha was a must for Shannon and she was keen to learn about religion in Nepal, but she also visited the famous Chitwan National Park where on the back of an elephant she saw a rhino! "I've had so many incredible experiences in Nepal, but perhaps the most unique was meeting a former Guerrilla fighter called Lobsang Dorjee," she says with a smile "I went on a tour of Tibetan villages and met this 93-year-old man who'd been a bodyguard for the Dalai Lama. It was such a privilege meeting him – it was history coming alive. If you get the chance to come to this amazing country, you really should!"

