

## Epiphany

by Shreya Konkimalla



“Ok then you can just work in McDonalds when you grow up!” my mom roared. She threw her hands up as if I had just announced that I was going to drop out of middle school. In reality, all I wanted was to hang out with my friends on a Friday evening. Like all Asian Indian moms, my mom was always stressing the importance of education. She would tell me how in India, kids studied hard every single day. To me, this was nuts. How would a couple hours of studying for an English test in middle school determine my future? But this past summer, I had an epiphany that completely changed my perspective.

I was travelling to a remote village in India. The journey was long. The heat oppressing. The car cramped. The road bumpy. But I was *giddy* with excitement. I was going there to visit two kids, Aryan and Kushi. I sponsor their education by sending them money annually because their families can't afford it. This was the first time I would get to meet these kids in person. My mind was racing -- What would they say? Would they understand me? Would our language barriers inhibit our ability to have a good conversation?

When we finally got to the school, I jumped out of the car and rushed in. I poked my head into rooms packed with children working at worn out desks and chalkboards. The school had one small library and one computer lab, with ten ancient computers. It was a far cry from my school, but this was the best option for the villagers.

Finally, it was time to meet the families I was sponsoring. As they walked into the room, I noticed how small and fragile the kids looked. Then, I sat down with them and started having a conversation. The kids slowly opened up. They told me about their favorite

subjects, how hard they worked, what they enjoyed at school. Aryan was very interested in science, and Kushi had a passion for art. They both told me about their stellar grades.

Time flew by, and our meeting came to an end. As we rose to say goodbye, Aryan's grandfather said, "Please continue to sponsor my child's education. He is a very hardworking kid." Then, he shocked me by kneeling and touching my feet, a mark of respect reserved for Gods at the temple. As I watched the frail man at my feet, I stood rooted to the spot, unable to protest, words stuck in my throat. Tears welled up in my eyes and my heart twisted. At that moment my thoughts fell into place.

These kids and their families were so incredibly thankful that I was helping them go to school. Now, I understood why my mom stressed the importance of education. It is not something many kids in the world can take for granted. To most, it is a privilege.

I remembered all the days I would wake up and grumble about homework. The days I would argue about studying. The days I would complain about piles of worksheets. Now, I see things in a new light. When I wake up early in the morning to go to school, I smile. When my teachers teach me, I learn. And even when my mom lectures me, I listen. Because now, I know.