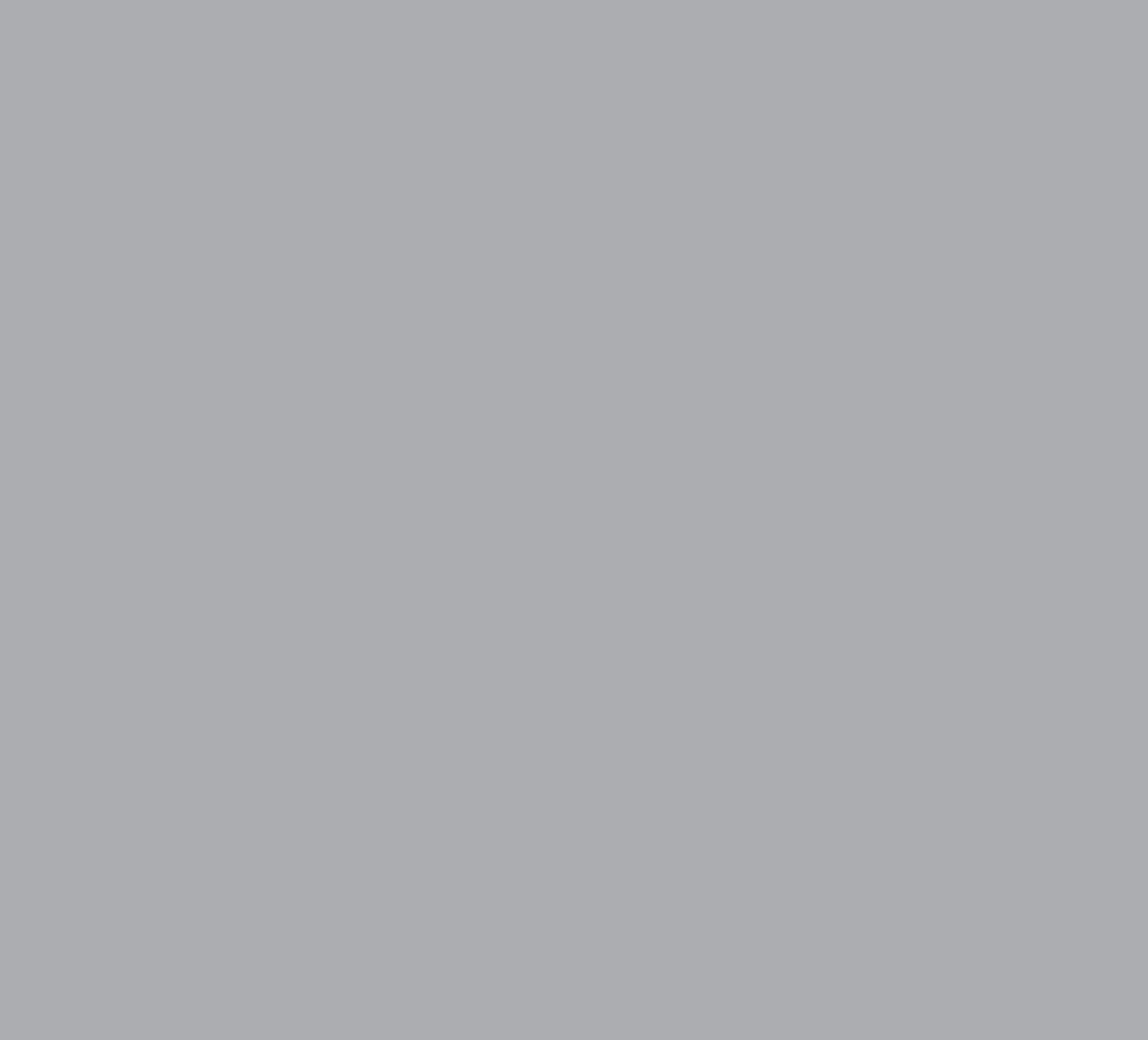




# THE HUMAN CONNECTION

PHOTOGRAPHS & STORIES FROM BANGLADESH & NEPAL

JEREMY FOKKENS



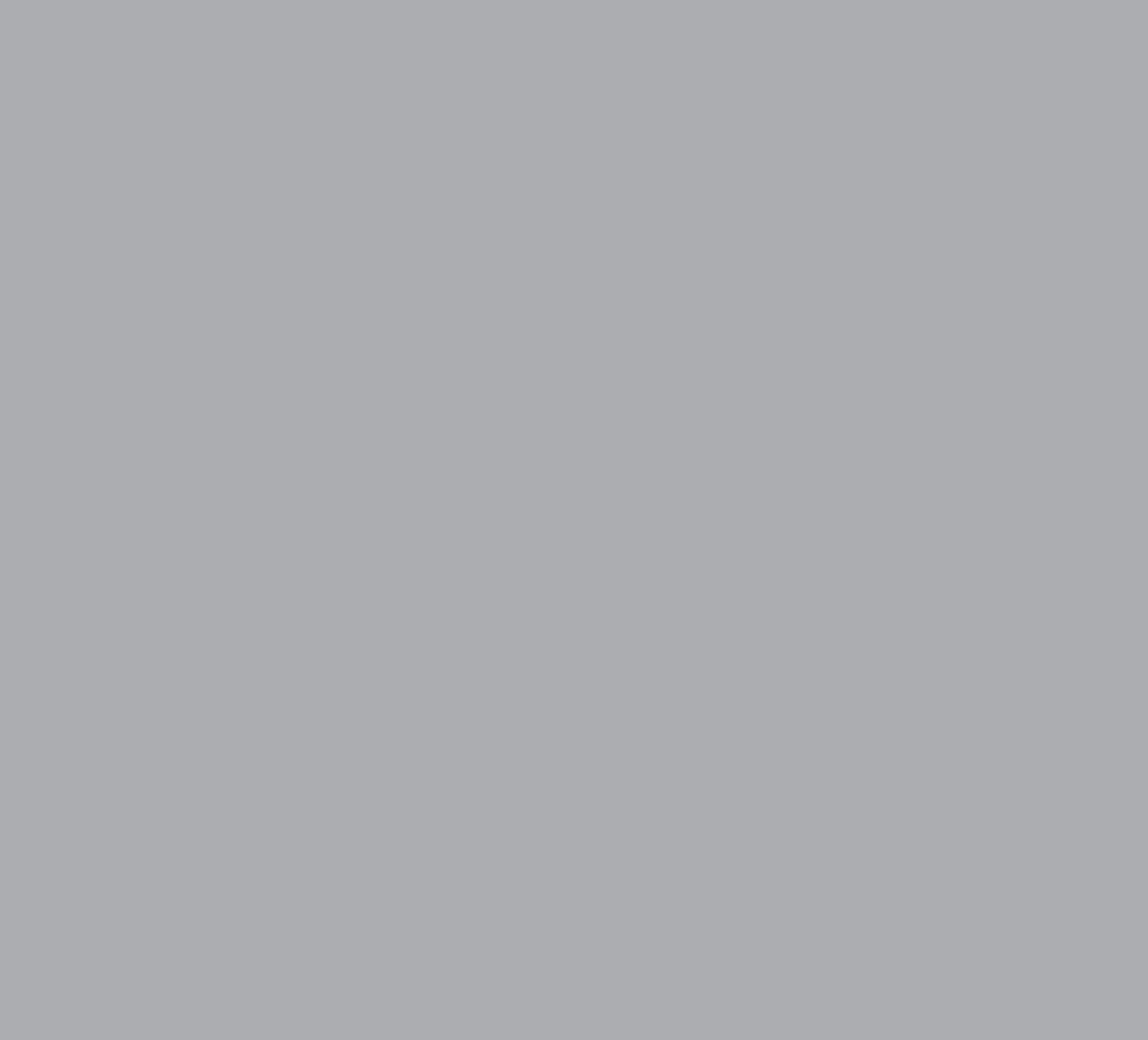
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## INTRODUCTION

As I stepped off the plane onto the pothole-riddled tarmac, my first thought was “holy *shit* it’s hot here!” The date was April 21, 2011, and I had just spent the past thirty hours on three different airplanes before arriving in Kathmandu, Nepal. You always have preconceived notions of what the climate of a country should be, no matter how much research you do, and it is never quite what you expect. Once my naive anticipation of snow had cleared and my body was slowly adjusting to my now sweat-drenched shirt, I lumbered out of the terminal building, one pack slung across my chest, the other on my back.

I quickly found a taxi away from all the other locals and travellers that were being politely accosted by the hundred or so eager cabbies looking to score an overpriced fare. Unfortunately I felt sorry for my driver, as he knew right away after sizing me up and giving me a price on my destination that I was not

going to budge like all the other virgin travellers that were still being paraded around like cattle behind me. Once in the taxi I rolled down the window and gazed out peacefully on the chaos of Kathmandu. The car looked similar to a Chevy Chevette, just without seat belts and with a hole in its floor where I could see the road passing underneath me. This is the part of travelling I enjoy the most: taking in all the smells, imperfections, noise, congestion and unfamiliarity of the people and their environment. I never knew I missed Asia so much until that moment.

My plans for this trip started when I had returned from a jaunt to southeast Asia in 2008. It was during that odyssey that I started to get a clearer understanding of what I wanted to say as a photographer, as I aimlessly walked streets in Vietnam, Cambodia and Laos for three months. So when I decided to go to South Asia I used the same approach: just dive

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in head first without really checking to see how deep the water is. (Oddly enough, that's exactly how I almost drowned when I was five years old, on my first trip to Australia.) I immediately started researching countries and regions where travellers were not visiting, including places rarely, if ever, covered in mainstream media. I prefer going to places I have little or no familiarity with. It forces me to be vulnerable, yet this feeling of the unknown is what takes me out of my comfort zone and into my element where I can communicate and connect with my photographic subjects.

The plan was to travel to Nepal, Bangladesh and India for no set amount of

time, camera in hand every step of the way, volunteering for grassroots and local initiatives when I could, and all under one mission, which was to take pictures and build a body of work I could be proud of. So, with a one-way ticket to Kathmandu, forty pounds of camera gear and one change of clothes, I put my business on hold and promised myself a trip where I could focus on nothing but photography. One thing I had not planned on getting from this trip turned out to be something greater than just taking pictures: finding a voice where photography would be my means of inspiring and telling stories of people from all walks of life.



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## NEPAL

Depending on how you travel there and your reasons for visiting, Nepal is a place that will nourish your soul. Through the generosity of its people, a warm, heartfelt smile will be a daily encounter that often will happen several times in the span of walking two city blocks. From enjoyment of simple things such as sitting in a food stall gorging on the local cuisine of dhal, momos and chai to venturing out into the country's vast landscape of the world's tallest peaks, Nepal will challenge you and push you to your very limits. This is always the joy of travelling, as it puts everything in perspective. It humbles you and you discover things about yourself. I never knew what a simple life meant and I never knew what travel meant until I started pursuing experiences with less comfort, away from the familiar, seeking both physical and mental adventure.

Before I made my first leap into the world of documentary photography in 2008, I had

these crazy ideas and situations that I would constantly unfurl in my own head, picturing myself always on the move by helicopter or jeep, photographing a thousand different stories, running into a mob of angry protesters, hanging by one hand off the side of a mountain while dramatically taking pictures with the other hand like some sort of action hero. These thoughts blinded me from really seeing the reason why I travel now and why I am a photographer. The best advice on this I ever heard came from a close friend, who is also an artist: "Don't force it." Three simple words that have stuck with me ever since I took the leap into photographing people in foreign countries and at home in Canada. You cannot force creativity. It is a process that comes from pursuing knowledge, engaging in a community, failing miserably, being open to new places and environments and embracing more failures than successes.

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The act of just physically moving around Nepal was an adventure all on its own and one that many travellers who visit the country could write several books about, I'm sure. One of my more memorable experiences was meeting a local pilot in the town of Surkhet, where I was volunteering for a local orphanage. "James" was from New Zealand and we went out one evening and had one too many beers. Some time later, James informally but generously offered to fly me into the Humla district, in the far northwest of Nepal, by labelling me as cargo on his manifest. The morning of the scheduled departure I found myself sitting among 50-kilo bags of rice and a host of other food supplies and medical equipment bound for the small village of Simikot. Once we were in the air and reaching our cruising altitude, James motioned for me to come forward to the flightdeck. I thought I was going to just briefly ogle the view, but the first officer unbuckled her seatbelt and invited me to take her place.

Now, I have flown in many planes before, even as a teenager. My best friend, Ryan, was a pilot at 16, so when all our friends were getting their first cars, Ryan and I were off in little Cessnas doing flybys over farmers' fields, our parents' houses, even over highways, with barely 100 feet between us and the ground. But here, over craggy Nepal, the view was breathtaking and James even let me take the controls for 20 minutes. I have flown over the Canadian Rockies many times in aircraft of all shapes and sizes, but there is something different about the Himalaya. It's wild, it's daunting and it makes you feel very insignificant and helpless.

After about 45 minutes of flying we could see the gravel runway and the little village of Simikot, situated atop a small plateau with nothing but massive snow-capped mountains surrounding it. The landing was far from smooth and once the plane taxied to a neutral area, I was greeted by a man named Santos, whom James knew quite well. James had given Santos a heads-up about my arrival, to make

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sure I would have a place to stay in Simikot. As we set off toward the guest house I was in shock at the views that surrounded this tiny town. At 2900 metres above sea level the air was cool and the sun's intensity was noticeably stronger. I could feel it penetrating my fragile skin with only minutes of exposure. A perfect bluebird sky contrasted with snow-covered mountain-tops. Santos led me to my room, which consisted of two beds and a table. The bathroom was outside, in a separate shack adjacent to the guesthouse, with a communal sink and a solar-powered hot shower. After pausing to absorb the view, I decided to stroll around the town to clear my head, get my bearings, meet some of the locals and just take everything in. I was shocked at how remote this place was, with little huts and other villages you could see in the valleys rising up like staircases thousands of metres above the valley floor. There are no roads to Simikot; the only way you can get here is by plane unless you want to walk 10 days from the nearest road. The locals still

use yaks and donkeys to bring in supplies from neighbouring regions like China. They've only recently added the airport – more like a dirt track with a shack beside it – to enable more frequent trips and deliver more goods, if only during the summer. Come fall, all flights cease due to the unpredictable weather and heavy snow during the winter.

My two weeks in Simikot was a real eye-opener as to the type of people that inhabit the area. I spent my days exploring the town and surrounding villages, getting to know local people. When I was away from Simikot, I slept in a one-man tent, photography gear and all. People let me sleep on top of their massive homes, which were twenty feet high and made completely of brick and mud. These houses were surprisingly cool even when daytime temperatures reached into the mid-thirties. It rained almost every night, with winds that made me wonder if I was going to be blown right off the roof. Some nights were better than others. Some were terrible, especially the

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night I discovered a hole in my tent, which forced me to sleep with my photo gear between my legs.

There was one of the small places nearby that I visited often. The village is perched on an outcrop of a mountain with sheer drops of more than thirty metres as you approach. People live in mud huts that are all joined together, resembling a jumble of stairs sticking out from the mountainside. If you were to kick a soccer ball off the top, it would drop hundreds of metres, bouncing off the odd roof on its way down and finally plunging off a cliff. It was a very poor town, with clear signs that it lacked basic necessities such as healthcare, education, nutrition, even running water in some places. The good news, though, is that I met up with a grassroots foundation that was working with the locals to fix those issues, including programs that supported horticulture, biogas and irrigation.

When photographing in any country, I try to stick to some sort of schedule and take

maximum advantage of morning and evening light. In Kathmandu I had a guide for about a third of my time there, which happened by sheer luck. And of course, there's a back story to that.

You see, before I became a photographer I had been a professional dancer. And on this trip to Nepal, after countless hours photographing in extreme heat and less than glamorous conditions for weeks on end, I was starting to need a little break, so I figured why not see if there was a dance studio in Kathmandu. And after a short Internet search, it turned out there was! It was a salsa studio owned by an ex-Montrealer named Katia. So of course I gave this person a call. I told Katia what I was doing in the country and asked if she could use a dance teacher. As it happened, she could, and she would put me up for six weeks if I taught two or three times a week at her studio. I had never taught a dance class in a foreign country before, especially one where Nepali teenagers and adults were learning hip

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hop solely from watching videos on YouTube, mimicking moves and styles from pop stars like Michael Jackson and Justin Timberlake. It was great to give Katia's students a bit of a foundation in just basic movement and then work our way up into more stylized forms of dance. My classes would number upwards of forty students and they loved every minute of it. They soaked up every ounce of dance knowledge they could and would return week after week to show me how well they had practised last week's moves.

Anyway, it was through teaching at the dance studio that I met Ashok, a local salsa teacher. I asked him if he would be willing to take me around Kathmandu three or four times a week on his days off when he was not studying or teaching. We settled on a fair wage, and for the remainder of my time in Nepal I had my own personal guide. Ashok would take me wherever I wanted, all over the Kathmandu Valley, on the back of his 75 cc moped. He would also translate

so I could talk with locals, giving me a true Nepali experience.

It is sometimes hard to adjust in a place where the people, the culture, the society, even government policies, sometimes hinder your plans and expectations of a country where its own citizens are scratching their heads right along with you. No one can give you a valid reason or even understand why themselves; in Nepal, as with so many other places in this world, you just have to accept it. But without setbacks, bad days, great days, even days when you get litres of street juice splashed all over you and your expensive gear, we could not create those special connections that come from the sheer love of the craft. Photographers take pride in what they do and will go to almost any lengths to continue taking good pictures, even great ones. We cannot grow individually without these experiences, and from there we cannot move forward. In three incredible months in Nepal I had the honour of meeting so many fantastic and beautiful people from

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such a vast variety of countries, including Ireland, Germany, the USA, Belgium, Canada, the Netherlands, Spain and of course the Nepalis themselves. The people of Nepal are by far some of the most generous and

warm-hearted individuals I have ever come across in all my travels. Their carefree spirits and their constant drive to satisfy even the simplest request make you feel as if you are an extension of their very own family.

#### THE BRICKYARDS OF SURKHET

I made a conscious effort to get up extra early one day because I had discovered this amazing brickmaking factory the day before. I was in the town of Surkhet volunteering for a local orphanage (run by the Blinknow Foundation) that also educates some 350 students, and before I made my way to the school that day, I wanted to spend a few hours photographing this place just for the shock factor and to satisfy my curiosity.

So, I awoke at 5 a.m., gathered up my gear and headed toward the centre of town, veering off the main road next to the side of a small bridge. I continued to walk, kicking up dust, given it was already well into the dry season, past riverbank communities whose shacks

looked a little damaged from a storm a couple of days before. I crossed numerous rice paddies, yielded the right of way to a herd of goats and water buffalo and finally arrived at my destination. I was approaching a clearing where you could see a dozen or so people slowly carrying what looked like large boxes on their backs. As I got closer I realized they were carrying stacks of bricks using tumplines: ropes looped from a pad on their forehead down their back and under the load. I spent that day introducing myself, making a variety of hand gestures to establish communication and adding the occasional drawing on a notepad I carry wherever I go. The locals working the brickyards of Surkhet were very welcoming, letting me go

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wherever I wanted, and they were very willing and curious to have their photo taken. By 10 o'clock the temperature had already soared to a stifling 35°C, which can be pretty uncomfortable all by itself, let alone all the dust, chemicals and debris in the air.

Brickyards in Nepal vary in size depending on where you are in the country. Some are large-scale industrial operations, but many, as at Surkhet, are essentially artisanal, using a basic technology called a "bull trench kiln." These brick-curing ovens are quite simple: a large rectangular hole in the ground about two metres deep. Workers harvest wet clay from the earth and hand-shape it into bricks using moulds that resemble cookie cutters. They leave the clay bricks to dry in the sun awhile, then arrange them in the pit, leaving a small space between each one so that the heat will bake all the bricks evenly. The "green" bricks are then covered with fine sand and ash and the kiln is fuelled on top of the pit, usually with coal, occasionally

with firewood. The heat draws any remaining moisture out of the clay and causes the bricks to harden.

The brickyards I visited in both Nepal and Bangladesh employed anywhere from 10 people all the way up to hundreds, ranging in age from 12 to 80. It was quite upsetting to see children working in such conditions, especially with thousands of bricks stacked unstably high with only narrow passages in between, plus the abundance of chemicals and fine debris that the workers inhale daily. This got me asking questions as to why this type of labour exists. Is it because there was a need for more bricks due to the booming economy in Nepal at that time? Perhaps health and safety regulations are not on the agenda for the companies that run these outfits where labourers work in fear of losing their job if they speak out. Quite possibly it could be lack of education about the materials they work with, not knowing what health problems could arise due to exposure.

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## A LITTLE PIECE OF HEAVEN

Pashupatinath is a holy place boasting Hindu temples, public altars, shrines and old architecture. It is situated on both sides of the sacred Bagmati River in the eastern part of Kathmandu. Most people who travel to Nepal usually come here to get a glimpse of the temples, visit the majestic Himalayas and do a little shopping for paraphernalia in the local street stands.

Locals and tourists alike flock to this place to witness Kathmandu's residents paying their respects to loved ones who have passed away. In Nepal people do not bury their dead; they cremate the remains at sites along the banks of the Bagmati. These sites are outdoors and completely open to the public, so anyone may view the proceedings of what westerners would call a funeral. The dead are put on steel-beam structures along the river to hold the remains in place. Wood is placed under the body as well as on top, and after religious rites are performed, the remains are burned until

there is nothing left but ash. Another sign that someone has passed away is that occasionally you will see Nepali men with their heads shaven clean, leaving nothing but a little lock of hair on the back.

We all know death is a part of life but I find it very refreshing how willingly and widely death is accepted here and in other Asian countries. People in Nepal die every day in homes, streets, villages and hospitals and from curable or controllable diseases such as flu, diarrhea, tuberculosis, waterborne viruses and infections. Fatal road accidents are a daily occurrence, the fourth-greatest cause of death in Nepal. Death is an everyday event everywhere in the world, of course, but I think most people in Nepal have seen death first-hand at least once, and it seems to facilitate their carefree acceptance of the inevitable fate of every living thing on this planet. In Canada, on the other hand, I think the majority of people are afraid of dying or even thinking about it. It



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has become a complete taboo. But you can't blame people for being scared. Heck, it still makes me a little nervous. It is the unknown. Is there a white light or will it only be lights out? We just don't know. But rather than run away from the inevitable, why not try and understand what is so frightening and see how we can learn from other cultures to accept and celebrate death as much as we celebrate birth?

When I first heard of Pashupatinath from other travellers, I actually had no interest in the temples and monasteries, never mind the entrance fees and the cheap memorabilia you are pressured to purchase from every man, woman or child you make eye contact with. Rather, my reason for coming to this holy place was to visit a specific ashram not frequented by tourists or even many locals. It was also to volunteer for a special cause that involved Nepali seniors who have been abandoned by their families, whether because the families could no longer support them or they were a disgrace because of old age or disabilities.

As you enter the grounds of Pashupatinath, there is a large, square, weathered brown building immediately to your right as you approach the admission gates of the several main temples that are visited by tourists. This structure looks a little out of character compared to the rest of the buildings on the Pashupatinath grounds because it doesn't even have a gate, let alone a Nepali attendant collecting your admission fee. As you approach the ashram you go down stone and concrete steps that descend a couple of metres below ground level. As you near the entrance, you start to hear sounds of music and voices where a set of wooden steps covered by an archway marks the entrance to the ashram. As I made my way up the steps and under the archway, I was suddenly greeted by an array of beautiful faces chanting and singing, accompanied by a single drummer and a harmonium player, while a hint of sweet incense gently lingered in the air. The people creating this colourful music and celebration were residents of the ashram, who

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greeted me with an abundance of head nods, clasped hands and namastes.

The outer structure of the ashram has two levels, with an open courtyard in the centre. The two indoor levels are living quarters for the residents who were so warmly welcoming me. The centre courtyard contains five major, structured altars where residents and locals perform their daily religious rites and offerings. As you walk around the centre temple you come to a door directly opposite where you entered. As I walked through this second entrance, my senses were suddenly overtaken by a smell I can only describe as ... death. But please do not take that word in a negative sense, as the word "death" should not have a negative stigma attached to it, which is one of the reasons for the series of images beginning at page 85.

This separate area connected to the main ashram has another, smaller, L-shaped structure where about 20 elderly residents are cared for by local and international

volunteers, including Sisters of Mother Theresa (Missionaries of Charity). These residents are extremely aged and suffer from blindness, dementia, Down syndrome or amputation and are here to live out the rest of their natural life. I was brought here by a woman named Fanny Vandewiele, who had been volunteering here for the past two years. As Fanny introduces me to everyone I suddenly get this warm feeling because of the palpable joy in many of these seniors and how similar they are to small children. As I walk around taking in all the faces I notice men and women fighting with one another over a juice box. I see a man with Down syndrome constantly poking and harmlessly annoying some of the women for his own satisfaction. I see people napping, people laughing, people grunting. I see people sitting quietly, saying a few words to each other every so often. I can't help but think we leave this world the same way we are born into it, and honestly it's quite beautiful and comforting to see.

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The facility has working toilets, running water with solar panels for hot water, beds, blankets, clothing and food, all your basic necessities. But it was not always so. When Fanny first came here to volunteer she noticed that the place was almost, for lack of a better word, uninhabitable. The Nepali government had built this facility many years ago to provide an adequate place for the aged to live out their lives. More recently a Dutch philanthropist had donated a substantial amount of money to rebuild the ashram because of a lack of maintenance that was never addressed by the Pashupatinath Trust, which was responsible for all the necessary upkeep. Unfortunately, like many Nepal organizations, governments and NGOs, this one too was corrupt, greedy and lazy. The ashram was never maintained again, even after this sizeable donation, and the people there continued to suffer greatly. One day as Fanny and the MC Sisters were working, water suddenly started pouring in through the

roof and the seniors were literally sleeping in the rain.

That's when Fanny Vandewiele had had enough and decided to do something. She gained the confidence of the MC Sisters and four Nepali volunteers – Manish Joshi, Riti Pyakurel, Sudharsan Pradhan and Maya (whose last name I unfortunately was not able to get) – and together they pooled their contacts, skills and resources to start a complete reconstruction of this facility behind the main ashram. Fanny even managed to help fund the project from her own pocket as well as organizing fundraisers in her home country of Belgium to cover all costs. But raising the money wasn't the half of it. They also faced a slew of obstacles along the way, including strikes, building code changes stemming from bureaucratic obstacles, threats, and locals saying they would help but failing to ever show up. To add insult to injury, the monsoon season was right around the corner. Nevertheless, Fanny's team and the MC Sisters got it done,

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all with their own hands. They had rebuilt the living quarters, installed a brand new roof with not a single leak, purchased a solar panel heating system for the water tanks, built proper washrooms and overall made a much

more pleasant environment for the aged residents of Pashupatinath.

I spent three weeks there on and off, volunteering at what Fanny likes to call “a little piece of heaven.”

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## BANGLADESH

When I arrived in Dhaka, Bangladesh, I was shocked at how nice the airport was, given the country's reputation as the slum of all Asia as I'd heard when travelling in southeast Asia and Nepal. As I collected my bags and made my way outside to hail a cab I was immediately hit with what felt like a brick wall of humidity. I am not exaggerating when I say it's comparable to opening a preheated oven at 500 degrees. During the monsoon season, temperature and humidity soar to a point where excessive sweating could become the latest fad. When the "winter" months arrive, the climate calms down to a more moderate 25°C, with evening temperatures around 15°.

With a bit of trouble finding a place to stay, due to my cab driver not being able to understand my very broken Bengali, I managed to finally get my bearings to settle in for the night at a very dodgy hotel, which I later learned was frequented by men looking for a

good time. And did I mention waking up at 1 a.m. to find myself covered in bedbug bites? The next day, I headed out bright and early to do a little exploring and hit up the markets to get the necessary supplies to make life a little easier in a new country. Realizing that everyone here has a cellphone and that owning one makes things so much more convenient, I immediately bought a new SIM card. I also acquired an up-to-date city map and immediately located the fresh fruit stands and a café with Internet access.

The one thing that shocked me about this country, given its reputation, was the hospitality. Bangladeshis are the most welcoming people I have ever met in any country. Anyone and everyone will help you. In my first two weeks I had complete strangers offer me a place to stay in their homes and invite me to dinners and other functions. I was even invited on a family vacation to northern parts of

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the country. Bangladeshis live to please guests, foreigners and friends of friends. The people here do not possess much, but their heart and generosity make up for every negative experience I encountered.

After getting in contact with a variety of NGO people, students, writers, journalists and random expatriates, I started feeling a bit overwhelmed by the mega-city of Dhaka, so I decided to explore more of the country by first heading south and starting to work on a photo series about fishermen.

Bangladesh is without a doubt the most extreme of all the countries I have visited so far – in everything, both good and bad. There are millions of people; drivers are crazier; there is food everywhere, delicious and spicy. But poverty is also very prevalent and in plain sight. People stare at you constantly, though seemingly only if you're a foreigner or you're arguing with a local in the middle of the street. Everybody sings, everybody dances, everybody has a cellphone, sometimes two

or three. There are more tea stalls than we have Starbucks on every corner. People spit as much as they breathe in a day, and the weather is intense. Bangladesh is a place where you catch a child trying to steal your wallet and an hour later thief and victim have become best friends... this actually happened to me. The smiles here are endless and this is one of those places that everyone needs to experience.

Life here is extremely difficult for most residents, both in the big cities and in the country. A Bangladeshi told me that the unemployment rate has reached 40 per cent, making it extremely hard for everyone, educated or not, to find a job to support themselves and their families, especially when the majority of households have only one breadwinner, usually the man/husband.

Bangladesh gave me a roller coaster of emotions and opportunities, and it pushed me to my very limits both physically and mentally. I travelled and lived there for five months, and in my final two weeks it was extremely difficult

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to find any motivation to actually pick up my camera. I started to become very moody; even the smallest thing would aggravate me. I was starting to burn out. It was hindering my relationships with subjects and stories, and all this negative energy was starting to show in my photographs. There is always a need for improvement, where you push yourself to go harder, longer, and never stop searching and shooting. I am a perfectionist, but only human. Unfortunately we are not built like robots to function 24/7. Sometimes I had to force myself to just step back, relax, have a cold beer, put the camera down and get away from it all.

Across Airport Road lies one of the rail lines that runs through Dhaka, where one of my previous excursions had taken me onto the roof of a train. That little stunt gave me a quick tour through the city and showed me some very intriguing and interesting places. So I decided it would be a good idea to walk that same rail line to see what images I could capture.

This particular day turned out to be an interesting one where subconsciously I was photographing children the entire day. Occasionally I would photograph an adult, but for every grownup I had about 40 children pictured. It was a very playful day filled with laughs, children climbing all over me, showing them the proper way to give high fives, which was always a hit with the younger ones. There were many squeals of excitement when kids could see their pictures on the screen of my camera. These are the days when I love what I do, and it puts everything in perspective. When you yourself become a kid, you get better grounded. You stop taking yourself and everything else so seriously. Open your eyes, slow down, smile, have some fun and go for walk. It's amazing what you can find when you just walk.

Vehicle traffic in Dhaka is a real problem and that is an understatement. To give you an example, I once took a local bus from Saderghat to Banani, which is about 12 km.

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Now in any western city, covering that kind of distance should only take maybe 30 to 45 minutes, even on a bad day. Now imagine it taking 2½ to 3 hours, and that's any day in Dhaka. It gets even worse during Ramadan, when it took more like 90 minutes to go 3 km. Why didn't I just walk, you ask; and after those episodes, that's what I did. All this is maybe not so surprising, though, when you realize Dhaka has 15 million people inhabiting an area about half the size of Calgary, Alberta, which numbers just over one million.

One thing I did notice in Dhaka was the contrast between the wealthy and the less fortunate, especially in the financial district, called Gulshan 1 and 2. I lived about a kilometre from this area and walked through the main intersections daily. And every day, I would notice the same groups of people approaching vehicles that were stopped at the traffic lights. These individuals would be trying to sell everything from balloons to stickers

to maps and even using their own children and elderly, hoping to play the sympathy card. You would also see people with severe deformities and mental disabilities begging at the side of the road. Some are on their own, some are homeless, and surprisingly some even go to school. I was curious and decided to find out more about these people. That's when I met 11-year-old Rubina, who attends school during the day but comes to Gulshan 2 to beg for money from 4–10 p.m. almost every day. When I asked why, she told me, "Dad has no work and mum is gone. I need to take care of dad, he is sick."

I heard many similar stories from people who beg in Gulshan. I met Irene, for example, a mother of three children whose husband works as a rickshaw driver. She had been recently arrested because the police started cracking down on people begging in Gulshan 1 and 2. Irene told me she would be staying home until the police situation calmed down.



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