

Kevin Gao

10/23/17

Lumos Reflection

China, is a place that is part of my identity as a Chinese American, but it is a place that I am not too familiar with. I really do wish to understand more about my own heritage. Being brought up in an American culture and education, there are many parts of the Chinese culture that I am not familiar with. So choosing China as a destination for the Lumos is very desirable since I can make the impact in the community and also answer these unanswered questions about my own heritage. Being in China is an unexpected experience. I felt like it was returning back to long lost home, but yet it was so foreign to me. I did not know too much Chinese and a lot of the customs there is not the same as the ones I am used to here in the United States. It was very difficult being such an outsider in such a big city. I felt kind of lost, and this journey was not as easy as I thought.

My placement in Shanghai is working with Cerecare, a wellness center for children with cerebral palsy. My first day at Cerecare was nerve wracking, I was very tense and nervous, and I just did not know what to do. But when the children of Cerecare started to warm up to me, that is when I knew that this was going to be a great experience. To me, Shanghai is the most beautiful place in the world. It is not because of all of the landmarks, but because of the children and all of the memories that we have. Each child has a unique character and a personality that each bursts with a color that paints this image of Shanghai in my mind. Everyday at Cerecare was never dull. We got to do several events and activities such as talent shows, field trips, and other fun events that the children want to do and something the local community can engage in. The lessons I learned from my time abroad was invaluable. Learning about the the establishment of Cerecare,

and the story of Madame Lu who founded Cerecare is just small things that I learn but I will know will stick to me the rest of my life.

Cerecare is place that made me witness the love and care that we usually do not think about. The genuine care to the children from people like Madame Lu and other staff shows how much this community cares about the children here at Cerecare. It is a very different approach to the Shanghai we all think of. The bustling metropolis, but this Shanghai that I know does not have the skyscrapers or the beautiful lights. The area surrounding Cerecare is a place in Shanghai that to my surprise, does not have a metro station, famous landmarks, tall buildings, or foreigners. It was definitely an unique experience that I did not expect. But what lies here is more beautiful than all of the famous sights of Shanghai. What I remember most and what is the most beautiful things about Shanghai is my experience with these children here. The two months have been filled with all sorts of emotions, the highs and the lows. Through tears and laughter and all that is in between, I got to learn so much about the children of Cerecare. And their stories are those that touch my heart and remind how beautiful a world we live in.

The staff at Cerecare are also unbelievable. It takes a lot of care, love, and passion for people to work in a field like this. And I definitely felt this kind of love from the staff and teachers. The stories and interactions with the staff of Cerecare are also ones that I will always remember and love. What I learned about them and from them will all be memories I have about my journey in Shanghai. I feel very touched that these strangers took me in as family and cared for me like one of their own. I feel like Shanghai might be a giant place to feel like an outsider and get lost in, but I am gracious that the people of Cerecare really did accept me.

The entire journey is something I will remember for the rest of my life. I came to Shanghai with questions and what I got in return were inspirations. Inspirations of self sacrifice,

care, and resilience. I learned how beautiful a smile is and how much it can light up this seemingly dark world. My journey here at Cerecare shifted my career path. Now after graduation, I really do wish to become a pediatric ICU nurse working with children with neurologic conditions such as cerebral palsy. Shanghai still had a lot of things that I am not too familiar with. The culture between here and there is still very different to me. But I felt like this experience of course brought me closer to my roots, but it also made me aware of the world and its diverse cultures. I know the customs are different, but neither customs are wrong. In Shanghai I saw myself doing things I would not regularly do in the United States, such as shouting to get the attention of my waiter or bartering with the shopkeeper. Though these may seem strange for some people, once you learn the history and culture of a city, you have a better understanding for their customs and why they do it. This experience made me learn a lot about my own roots and made me proud of my heritage no matter how different it is. I feel like being at Cerecare just gave me more hope for the Chinese people, the country, and my heritage. Because once you really explore a place, you cannot judge it by what is seen in the news.

Exploring, engaging, and immersing myself in the community abroad this summer has been something that will always be a part of me. I already consider Shanghai a home and part of my identity. The people I was with are some of the best in the world and getting to know their stories and through our interactions, I truly feel like I belong at Cerecare in Shanghai. It will always be a valuable lesson and an integral part of me. I left the comforts of my home in the United States, and through an exciting two month journey, found another home and family in Shanghai China.