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Learning Knowing Being

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Angkor World Heritage

The plane smelled old and musky as if it had been in storage for some time. The bright red seatbelt sat low and tight across my lap as I stared out the window watching the tiny ants drive down the road. The area beneath me looked lush and green, almost overgrown, and filled with history. The loud beep of the seatbelt sign turning on made me jump out of my daydream. The captain said something in a foreign language that I knew was Thai, repeated the same thing in a different language I didn't understand, and finally, in a poor choppy English, explained we were landing soon. I couldn't wait to get off the plane and use the bathroom.

My mother and I were standing around awkwardly just waiting to get our bags so we could check into our hotel. I wondered if this place was going to feel like Thailand, where we spent the last month backpacking, scuba diving, riding elephants, and tasting the delicious exotic meals. As I scanned the room I noticed there were tourists everywhere, most of them standing in line to get their visas so they could enter into the country. I was getting impatient after the long plane ride and now just standing around looking like a mess. It seemed like an hour had passed when we finally got our bags, but I was thankful they were still in one peace, and nothing seemed to be tampered with. Our next move was to get a taxi, but little did we know that there were no taxis, only Tuk Tuks that looked like mini horse trailers hitched to the back of a small motorcycle. It was actually really pleasant, almost like a carriage ride through the small town. The breeze against my face was hot and musty like the beating sun, but it felt better being out in the open, able to look all around rather than confined to a small car. I almost didn't want to stop when we reached our hotel destination.

Backpacking in a foreign country is tiring and hard, always on the move, you have to go, go, go, but what might be the best part, is checking into a new place. After walking around and bathing in the hot sun all day, you get to open the doors to Antarctica. The almost bone chilling breeze is heaven for your sweaty body. There was immediately someone by the door who offered to take our heavy bags off our backs, and by the time we got to the front desk there was already an ice cold drink vivid orange with a dash of blue, waiting for both of us. I sat down and let my mom do all the paperwork with the lady at the desk, and soon enough we were heading to our room on the 7th floor. As the lady showed us into our room, I noticed that our bags were already in there, something that happened at every other place we stayed but I was still not used to. After she left I turned on the TV and my mom went to take a shower. We had a big day tomorrow and we were tired from the plane ride over, so we just relaxed in our room and out on the balcony, where I eventually lit up a cigarette.

The next day seemed to rise with the sun, its burning rays cooled when it hit our air conditioned room. Our first priority was to find a ride, which wasn't hard because we could see Tuk Tuk drivers right out of our balcony window, strung up on their hammocks waiting for a customer to walk by. My mother and I couldn't even make it off the hotels drive in before an elderly man with dark skin and balding hair approached us. “Tuk Tuk?” he asked in a shy voice. My Mom and I both nodded at the same time, and he took off up the street. Not knowing if we should follow him or not my mom and I exchanged confused looks right as the sound of a weak motor bike pulled right in front of us. “Where you want to go?” the man said in an innocent soft voice, holding onto a map in case any of us needed it. “Can you take us to a few temples outside of Angkor Wat? We have a bike tour there tomorrow so we just want to see some of the other ones.” explained my mom. The man looked a little puzzled at first but then held up the map and showed us a few places that we could go. We would later find out that his name was Mr. Chum. He was our driver. For the Four days we were there he was the only way to get around, not that there weren't plenty of other Tuk Tuks, but he waited on us hand and foot, waiting out front of our hotel every day with nothing better to do.

Our first stop was to get a pass so that we could enter the government protected park. After that we took a nice slow scenic ride in our carriage, we stopped off the side of the road. Mr. Chum pointed in the direction where we should walk, and told us he would just wait there. I felt a little bad that he just waited for us in the hot sun, but I was more focused on entering into the ancient ruin temple. We walked down an old dirt path with trees on either side of us. It was a pleasant short walk before we turned the corner and there it was, a big structure that had held together quite well considering how long it had been there. The big sandstone bricks seemed to form under my feet as we continued to walk toward it. As I looked around, there was only a few others cruising the grounds, we were practically alone. I didn't even realize that I split from my mom as I could feel the history in the tall structure. It was built like a large square with steep steps leading up to the top where you could get a full 360 degree view. There were statues of elephants sitting on each corner, and also four rooms on the top to explore. As I entered one, there was a man who lit incense as soon as he saw me, and as I approached handed it to me. Directly in front of me was a tall Buddha statue and I figured this was to pray. Neither of us spoke a word, but the man gestured a raising and lowering motion of the incense and I mimicked him. As I did I could feel the bad spirits leaving my body and burning off, like the smoke the incense left behind. I placed it into a bouquet that had been there for quite some time, with some incense still burning, and ones that had been gone for days. I Thanked him without saying one word, and left feeling good about the setting I was in, and the great people who surrounded me.

I walked back to the area where we entered from, my mom already waiting for me. I couldn't express just how cool this was, and how thankful I was to have been there in the first place. As we got back, we could see our driver, Mr. Chum waiting for us exactly where he said he would be. Before we could get in the Tuk Tuk he had the map out just to show us where he was going to take us next. After offering us water, we got in and started driving off. I couldn't believe that this was just the beginning, and I was ecstatic to see the big show tomorrow.