

VANDERBILT UNIVERSITY

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# Vanderbilt International

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Bruges, Brussels. Ten educational and policy leaders and six Vanderbilt delegates traveled to Belgium for a week to learn about European Union (EU) institutional structure. See page 18 for the complete story.



## My Journey to India

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inside

- Creating family ties in **Brazil**
- Strides in pediatric care in **Jordan**
- Doing Business in **China**

# My Journey To India

BY TYLER SANCHEZ, '10

Tyler Sanchez was one of 22 students this past year to receive an award from the Nichols Humanitarian Fund that enables Vanderbilt students to volunteer for local, domestic, or international humanitarian relief efforts. The funds are primarily focused on summer projects or projects during defined academic breaks. Sanchez used his scholarship to spend a month in India working with International Development Enterprises India (IDEI). The following are a few excerpts from Tyler's journal while in India.



Nichols Scholar Tyler Sanchez demonstrates how to use a treadle pump in the village of Gorakhpur, India.

I've always tried to live a life of purpose and have sought meaning in every new experience. Choosing to spend my one-month spring break working for a nonprofit in India was one of the greatest risks I've ever taken. Aside from the language barrier, the cultural barrier, and the fact that I knew no one in India, my task of designing a training manual for IDEI was a tall order. IDEI specializes in developing and marketing innovative and low-cost irrigation systems to rural farmers who otherwise have no sustainable way of irrigating their crops outside of the monsoon season. Living locally in a poverty-stricken area with no hot water, showerheads, or air conditioning, and with sweltering daily humidity, I certainly struggled at first. But after experiencing great kindness and witnessing the daily struggles faced by people in India, it gave me tremendous perspective and an unending gratitude for my own blessings. What began as my greatest life risk turned into my greatest life gift and has shaped my global perspective in a way that I never expected.

#### First Impressions:

"This morning I had the most exhilarating, if not terrifying, experience ever in my life. Rajpreet, a nice lady working at the IDEI office who has been helping me settle in and find my way around

Delhi told me to meet her at the nearby bus stop so that she could help me find my way to the office. So at 9 a.m. sharp, I waited for her there, only to see her appear a few minutes later wearing a helmet and motioning me towards her. I strolled up to her "two-wheeler" (read: Indian motorcycle) and she told me to jump on. Instinctively, I listened, and awkwardly I hopped on, but it was not without gripping the seat with all my might. This was before we even began moving. I had never ridden a motorcycle before and since the rumors about Delhi traffic had proven to be true, I was rightly primed with fear. It was terrifying. Within seconds we were off, zooming through Delhi traffic, weaving in between autorickshaws, cars, bicycles, people, and other vehicles and flying by them. The wind was screaming in my face as I looked on past Rajpreet to the busy street in front. Soon I began to relax a bit, though I think I held my breath the entire seven minute ride (I swear, though, that the journey took at least twenty minutes). Part of me didn't actually want it to end. I felt like the young Che Guevara in *The Motorcycle Diaries* as he and his doctor friend are driving across South America on a motorcycle witnessing the widespread poverty around them. I felt like a silent observer watching a movie about the real India play in front of my eyes. I was completely aware of everything around me, and although we averaged only 40 mph (with a high of 65 mph), everything felt as if it were going in slow motion. My eyes would latch onto a scene of a young barefooted boy walking away from me down a dirt road with a doll in his hand, and then I would notice a black spotted goat tied to wooden stake right on the side of the street.

Often I will imagine music playing in the background of important and defining moments in my life, almost as if my life were a movie playing in real-time and I can sit back and watch it. As we were speeding along, I could hear the song "Hard Sun" by Eddie Vedder from the movie *Into The Wild* playing in the background as we sped by a blurry scene of barefooted people, slum-dog housing, vocal street vendors, and dirt clouds, under a bright sun already beating down in the early morning of this hot and crowded city known as Delhi. It was at the same time terrifying, peaceful, and completely enlivening."

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Farmers in India practice working a treadle pump. Vanderbilt student, Tyler Sanchez interned with IDEI, a company that specializes in developing low-cost irrigation systems to rural farmers.

they say it. If they say the price quickly, in a lower-tone, and look away, they're generally over-charging you and they know it. For me though, I always look at the eyes because the eyes never lie—wherever I've been, they are always the key to the truth.

But certainly not everyone in Delhi is trying to take advantage of you to make a little extra profit. Through various interactions with people during my time here, I have realized that there are a lot of good people in India, people who are honest, who work hard at sometimes less than exciting tasks, and whose personal pride in their job, themselves, or in some higher moral code won't allow them to take handouts, easy routes, or shortcuts. These are people who do the right thing regardless of their financial situation or how easy the take looks—people who take care of each other even when they themselves have so little.

### Growing Comfort, Changing Impressions, and Lessons Learned...

"In a few short weeks I have come to know my small corner of India well and in this entry I may attempt to make larger generalizations about the country as a whole. Let me preface, though, with this: India is a country with various customs, dialects, and people that vary greatly depending on the region. Much like the United States, India is divided into states and to say that all the states are the same is like saying everything and everyone are the same in Tennessee and Wisconsin or that Californians are the same as New Yorkers. Obviously, it is not true, neither is it true for India. Now for the continuation of my adventure...

Last week I electrocuted myself. Man, did it hurt! I had set the bulky metal heating rod in the water bucket to warm the water for my daily standing bath (which I've affectionately come to call it) and 15 minutes later, I went back to check and see if the water was warm enough. I naively stuck my hand in the water only to feel the high-voltage shock of electricity snake towards my elbow at lightning speed. Never do I want to experience that again! You may be thinking, well at least you have water, right? Well, not the other day. The entire side of our dirt street was without water for 10 hours from 8 a.m. to the evening. This happened because only one single metal tube feeds water up from the ground and it failed us that day.

But for all that has seemingly gone awry in India, there's much I've come to love about Delhi. For one, it keeps you on your toes. You're never quite sure if someone is giving you a fair price or if they're trying to take advantage of you because you're a 'rich American.' For example, when getting price quotes in street markets or when taking rickshaws (basically big bicycles with two seats in the back that act as taxis), you always have to make your best effort to read the drivers' body language when they give you the price—everything from the subtlety in their facial expressions to how quickly they say the price, to how loudly or softly



### A Final Thought

Over the weekend when I was out walking around Delhi with Bijit, the man I live with, he stopped three times to give spare change to disabled beggars on the street. He didn't stop to talk to them; he just acknowledged their presence and pulled some coins out of his pocket. We as Americans have so often conditioned ourselves to not see what is plainly in front of us. It is refreshing to know that there are people like Bijit out there who even with his very limited income (he rides a bicycle to work and lives in a very poor area of Delhi), are doing the right thing on a daily basis. He is doing more than his fair share of good. Every time we stopped and Bijit gave the beggars money, I felt a sick feeling in my stomach—it was guilt. I always used to think that it was wrong

for people to give money to beggars because they were likely just going to use it for drugs or alcohol, and sometimes that may be true. But the truth is I was wrong, and the ill feeling in the pit of my stomach that day proved it, because it's so much more than a question of giving or not giving... it's a question of humanity, and it is people who will ultimately decide if they want to answer that call. As for me, I have answered mine: I know now that I can do more, I can be more, I can give more of myself, I can be more righteous, and I can be a better man."

**Once again, a heartfelt thank you to the Nichols Humanitarian Fund for making this journey of service and learning possible.**

## NICHOLS SCHOLARS AT VANDERBILT BY SHELLEY MCFARLAN

"I remember Bob Geldof saying 'demand things of the world and if they don't do it then change the world to suit those demands,'" said Ed Nichols recalling the speech that Geldof, singer-songwriter, philanthropist and activist, gave during Senior Class Day in 2008. According to Mr. Nichols, that is the goal of the Nichols Humanitarian Fund: to help and encourage Vanderbilt students to become better citizens of the world and broaden their thinking by volunteering for humanitarian efforts.

The Nichols Humanitarian Fund was established in 2006 by the E.C. and Lucile Hamby Nichols Trust in honor of former First Lady Laura Bush's speech to the Vanderbilt class of 2006. Ed Nichols, a Vanderbilt Law School graduate, and his wife, Janice, wanted there to be a companion fund to the Nichols Chancellor's Medal that would provide students with awards to cover their educational, living and travel expenses.

"They're young and should be exposed to all kinds of cultures, lifestyles, religions, and standards of living. We want to encourage students to step outside their comfort zone, and there is no way to do that without actually being there. We want to provide them with the opportunity to do what we couldn't do. We are fortunate enough to be able to do what little we can through the fund."

Since 2006, over 45 students have

received awards from the Nichols Humanitarian Fund. These students have served in communities all over the world, including Australia, Costa Rica, India, Nicaragua, and South Africa. Support from the fund is primarily focused on summer projects or those that occur during defined academic breaks.

In Summer 2006, the Nichols traveled to Kampala, Uganda, to see the work that some student recipients were doing. "There are so many memories from our trip to Kampala, but what we remember most is the students who we met and have come to know. These students worked tirelessly in hospitals, hospices, and orphanages showing great compassion towards community members. We were able to witness the courage and determination of children and families left in cities ravaged by deaths from AIDS. When I think



Ed and Janice Nichols

about how remarkable these students are who work in these communities, I know that things will get better and be okay. We'll never forget them," commented the Nichols.

Janice traveled to Melbourne, Australia, during the summer of 2008 to be a part of the Vanderbilt Initiative for Scholarship and Global Engagement (VISAGE) program and participated in service activities hand-in-hand with some of the fund recipients.

"The students and I learned about global warming and water desalination. We saw for ourselves how little water they had and how precious a resource it is."

Throughout their travels with the students, the Nichols were amazed by the people in the communities who offered what little they had, whether it was food or a mat to sit on. As a result of these experiences, they have come to appreciate all that they have in the U.S. and are committed to giving students the ability to do things that they couldn't do when they were younger.

"These students have their whole lives ahead of them to use these experiences positively, to make a difference. We encourage Vanderbilt alumni to make their next vacation an active learning experience. By donating to student scholarships you will receive the reward of a lifetime that will keep giving in the future."

To learn more about the Nichols Humanitarian Fund, visit [www.vanderbilt.edu/nichols-prize](http://www.vanderbilt.edu/nichols-prize)