

## “No Service”

No Service. Many, if not most, fear the sight of these words at the top of their phone screen. They fear lack of connectivity, a fear that manifests over the absence of the ability to connect virtually with hundreds to thousands of people. These two seemingly insignificant words had a colossal effect on my growth as a person, as I didn't understand the opportunity in this phrase until it was looking me in the face in the vast deserts and rainforest of Peru.

As the bus to the ancient ruins of Caral bumped along the dirt path through the desert and between the mountains, I looked down at my phone. There was no service, something I had always held at the bottom of my list of fears. I was scared of the impact that two single words would have on my ability to contact people in case of an emergency. I looked out the window, clearing my mind of the eerie thought. As we drove further and further away from the city of Lima, the tall buildings and bustling highways turned to small brick and tin homes with dirt roads. The people of the small villages had local shops, where exchanges of food and materials occurred. Children walked home from school along the dirt road, books in hand, eager to wave to the people driving by. Families could be seen farming together in their fields, using the complex irrigation systems that ran the course of the villages, wondrous in their ability to reach all the inhabitants. Children ran through the streets of the town, kicking a small ball, innovatively made from the twisting of plastic bags and sticks. Families gathered around fires outside of their homes to share meals together. Had I looked down for one second, I would have missed an entire culture. I would have missed the opportunity to wave at local children, who had little material possessions, but seemingly possessed insurmountable happiness. I would have missed the opportunity to take in the complex and magnificent tradition of farming in the desert. I would have missed the smiling people, happy at the thought of time spent with loved ones, not with material possessions. I would have missed the tradition of a culture had it not been for this pair of previously unimportant words.

I found myself in a similar position days later on a bumpy bus ride to the Amazon River basin. Again, finding myself in the middle of a vast rainforest, my phone displayed No Service, which in Caral had frightened me. However, now, at the sight of this, I didn't fear lack of connectivity. What I feared most was missing out on remaining in the moment, being relative to the here and now, not the distant then and there that my phone provided. I again saw the local people, tending to cows and fields alike. I saw their smiles and eager waves. I saw the layout of their complex village, houses lining the sides of the streets and beyond. A group of people gathered together to build a shelter for the common use of the community, lifting wood they had probably spent hours cutting in the nearby rainforest. This time, I didn't fear lack of connecting through my phone. I feared missing out on experiencing their tedious and motivated way of life. I feared missing the smiles I had grown to love. I feared missing the astonishing sight of a new people. To think I would have missed everything had it not been for this couple of supposedly negligible words.

In the permanently globalizing world, it seems ambitious to navigate the world without the use of the phone, that is, until you experience it in its most authentic form through travel experience and interaction with another culture. I was not lost without technological use. In fact, I found the most authentic version of myself: the laughs I shared with someone across the world, the smiles I received from attempting to speak their native language, the beaming waves I got from the people who didn't even know my name. I learned these experiences are the things that embody the person I am, not the profile I create online. The phone, I came to learn, does not increase our connectedness, but can often hinder it. Most importantly, I have come to realize that one way to begin your journey to an open, global mindset is to embrace these two remarkably important words and a new destination.