

World Class:

25 Years of Central College Travel Writing

Celebrating 50 Years of Study Abroad



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January 1974. I was in Europe for the first time, on my way to study in London by way of the Netherlands. I was a kid from rural Nebraska, studying at a small-town liberal arts college in Kansas; I’d just been on an airplane for the first time in my life. That day I was standing in the newly opened Van Gogh Museum in Amsterdam and could trace, just by turning my head, Van Gogh’s progression from his dark, early works to the active, pointillist-inspired late work—sunflowers, wheat fields, crazy swirling skies. The museum had taken ten years to build, in part because its famous Dutch architect, Gerrit Reitveld, had died shortly after the museum had been commissioned. But also because, when the contractors had started digging the foundations in Museum Square, they’d unearthed a Roman plaza. The effect of the Van Goghs was enough to disorient me a little, but I felt a different kind of vertigo, too. My little town had turned 89 years old the previous summer, and the oldest thing I owned was an arrowhead I’d found one Nebraska day in a corn furrow. Suddenly I was sliding down one of those spinning time tunnels past Van Gogh, the canals, the Rijksmuseum filled with Vermeers and Rembrandts to a place where Romans, 2000 years ago, had lived and built a settlement. In an instant, the world was bigger, older, deeper than I’d ever imagined.

In retrospect it seems a small moment, but it’s one that’s stayed with me vividly for 40 years. Travel changes us in significant ways both large and small, and you’ll find all kinds of those significant moments in the 28 essays we’ve gathered from the last quarter century of The Writing Anthology, Central’s annual compendium of the best student writing. Why 25 years when we’re celebrating 50 years of study abroad? In the winter term of 1990, Dr. Walter Cannon and I spent Friday afternoons in the old student union with the authors of the first three essays in the collection—Brad Dunlap, Laura Galpin and Julie Nelson—drinking coffee and workshopping travel essays in what was the first “official” Travel Writing class at Central. Later that spring we published these essays as a small collection in The Writing Anthology, and student travel experiences have been printed there regularly ever since.

Some of these essays are reports from familiar places: London, Vienna, Granada, Wales; some go further afield to Romania, Bosnia, Ireland and Tunisia; some are set in that most exotic of locations: Pella, Iowa, USA. What all of them have in common is the urge to make sense of the world, to find meaning in the meeting of cultures, to journey out as all good travelers and essays do, and return with something like the truth.

Thanks to Lyn Isaacson, Associate Dean for Global Education for encouraging this project. Thanks, too, to Dr. Walter Cannon, editor and patron saint of The Writing Anthology for 35 years. Lana Goodrich, Circulation Supervisor at Geisler Library, graciously donated her time and technical expertise as did Steffanie Bonnstetter, Central’s Communications Brand and Project Manager. Special thanks to English Department workers Bailey Anderson and Jasmine Fugate for their hard work in designing the overall look of the anthology and wrestling the texts and pictures together.

Keith Ratzlaff
Professor of English

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Ballinamallard

Bradley Dunlap

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Uneasily I climbed aboard the Ulsterbus for Enniskillen and sat alone in a window seat. I forced a cool smile at Aunt Sally who was frantically waving good-bye to me as if I were her only son going off to war or something. I could read her lips, “Good-bye, Brad, bye now, luv.” Already I couldn’t wait for the next two days to be over so I could hurry back to Bill and Sally’s and go out pubbing with Ronny and his mates. Tonight I would miss a big night out. Ronny, Allan, Tim and Ian were getting some beers and driving to Superbowl in Belfast and if they didn’t meet up with some nice local girls there was always the potential of Tim starting a fight. The last time they went Tim got drunk and hit someone and the coppers had to step in. But I would

miss out on any such activity tonight as I would be passing the time a hundred miles away in Ballinamallard at the home of Jean and Dave, longtime friends of my grandparents. As the bus lurched its way through the hazy grey of central Belfast, I worried about how Dave would look and how I would handle seeing him in person. What would I say? Would he know or even be able to understand me? Did I have to see him? It couldn’t be avoided. It was only right. After all, he was my grandfather’s closest friend. This was one of those life situations I was just going to have to deal with. Besides, it was his home I would be staying in. I tried to sort out the story of Dave’s accident as told to me by my mother a long time ago. I could only recall that it involved a gun and that he lost his vision and most of his face. I remembered it was a terrible blow to my grandfather when he first heard of it. Jean and Dave had only moved back to Ireland for a few years when it happened. Grandma wondered if

Dave might not have tried to take his life. He had always been a very high-strung and hard-working man. He made a few bad investments back in the States and, according to Grandma, never got over losing the money. It took a lot of convincing on my grandfather’s part to bring Grandma to see him on their last visit home together a few years after the accident. The two couples had done almost everything together in Cedar Rapids and Grandma’s memories of Dave were very vivid. After Grandpa died Jean tried to convince Grandma into coming home one last time. But as much as she wanted to see Jean, she couldn’t bring herself to see Dave. Complications had since led to Dave losing his legs to infection and she couldn’t imagine facing Dave in that condition. After awhile, Jean got a nurse for Dave and came to visit. I remembered my mom crying when she saw Jean again for the first time. I was pretty young when they left Cedar Rapids and my image of Dave had come more from pictures than memories. The frequent airbrake blasts

About Bradley Dunlap, ‘92

Brad Dunlap lives in Coralville, IA, with his wife Stephanie and two daughters, Natalie and Emma. His first job after Central led to an assignment in Brussels, Belgium, where he lived for 7 years and traveled extensively in Europe. He revisited the Ballinamallard (the scene of his essay) with his mother and grandmother after the passing of Dave. He is vice president of marketing at CIVCO Medical Solutions.

from the coach had ceased and I suddenly noticed we were now rolling into the bright greens of the Irish countryside. I began to wonder how I would get by for three days and two nights in a small village of 200 some people with a 75 year-old friend of my grandma. Could I possibly sustain a conversation with her? Just what was I going to do in Ballinamallard? Well it didn't matter because I was on my way. Besides, Grandma and Mom would never forgive me if I didn't go through with this. Twenty minutes into the two hour journey I was fast asleep.

Jean Brien was waiting for me at the bus stop in Enniskillen when the final airbrake blast woke me. She looked about the way that I remembered her from her visit to the States three years earlier. She was plump, almost manly in build, with a ruddy complexion and very dark thin red lips that were always wet. She had a hint of a mustache and big spaces between her teeth. Sometimes she accidentally spat when she spoke. Despite this, something about Jean was very approachable and warm. She made her way over to me, snatched my bag and smacked a wet kiss on my cheek.

"Ohh it's good to see you, Brad. How're you doin'? How's your mum and gran been keeping?"

"Fine Jean. How are you?"
"Oh I'm fine. I wasn't sure if I'd be able to recognize ya but when I saw the handsome big lad I knew it must be you. You've got your mom's smile, you know. Would you care for a drink or something to eat? You must be hungry. Let's

grab a quick snack. I thought I'd take you to over the hotel for dinner tonight, O.K.?"
"Sounds good."

Jean took me for a coffee and bismarck and we acquainted ourselves with talk about my studies in London and our opinions on Belfast. Soon Jean was curious about how my grandma was holding up, and how my family was doing. She told me about her sons Dave, Eric and Gary and her first grandchild, David.

After our coffee, we made our way back to the bus stop and to the little brown four-speed that Jean and Gary shared. Jean had bought it for Gary, but he had a company truck to drive to work so she used the car during the day for trips to Enniskillen with Gary's two-year old, David.

Ballinamallard is a 15 minute drive from Enniskillen, and, as we drove along, Jean forgot to shift about six different times, getting caught up in explaining her plans for me over the next two days.

"We're lucky to have such lovely weather because when the weather's nasty there's not alot to do in Fermanagh. The country-side around here is beautiful this time of year. I think I'll take you up to the old Manor House and to the lakes. Your grandad really enjoyed the lakes whenever he came. We can have pie and ice cream in the old fashioned kitchen where I took your mom and dad when they were here...." Jean went on with her extensive and well planned schedule for my stay in Ballinamallard. It all sounded nice and fairly interesting, but the pressing question in my mind was still Dave. Should I ask about him or just wait?

As we made our way into

the quaint little village, Jean was quick to point out all the landmarks worth mentioning. "There's Mr. Fisher's house. He owns the company in town that Gary works for. He's been awful good to him. I work with his wife on a lot of charity projects through the church. We've raised over 4,000 pounds for different causes. It keeps me busy. There's our little pub, the one Dave and I used to own, and the hotel, and next door is my church. It's all right here just outside my little door. I've only got to walk two doors to the grocery store and three to the post office. It's very handy for me with Dave, you know. Here we are. It's not much you know, but we like it."

As we pulled into the little lot behind the house, engine revving wildly, Jean eased my nerves a bit. "Dave's been expecting you. He knows that you're coming and he's been anxious for you to get here. It's after 2:00 and that's when I give him his drink. He'll be hungry. You can say hello but he doesn't like people to be in the room when I feed him. Sometimes he spills a wee bit and he feels embarrassed, see. After you say hello I'll show you your room and you can unpack until I come up to get you, O.K. luv?"

I nodded as we entered the door. I could hear a radio tuned in to a BBC talk show. It turned off as the door came shut. Jean whispered, "He may be hard for you to understand, since he's no tongue, you know." Again I nodded in nervous anticipation as Jean announced our arrival.

"Hello Dave. Sorry we're late. I've got someone along for you to meet. You remember Sandra's Brad, he's

a big buck now."

"Yessh." I entered the living room where Dave was lying on his back with a quilt over his waist and his hands folded together as if praying. He must have felt me enter as he held out his hands for me and I took them, but without looking directly at him. His firm grip pulled me down for a hug and I understood him to say, "Hello, Brad, God bless you, son."

Jean helped me through some small talk about what we had been doing and gracefully showed me to my room. "I'll feed this boy now and then we'll go for our dinner in a bit, O.K.?"

That was it. It was over. Not frightening or gruesome or anything. And he wasn't really

that hard to understand. As I was unpacking in the guest room, I noticed an old picture from Cedar Rapids of Jean and Dave outside their house on Memorial Drive. Dave was smiling and wearing a hat, one arm around Jean. They must have been about 35 then.

The next two days with Jean were walks, long talks and stories about the old days in Iowa, snapshots and black and white home movies of my mother as a girl, and stories about Grandpa and Dave getting swindled on their first trip to Chicago. Dave threatened to beat some guy up if he didn't refund his money for a pair of two left shoes. Jean told me about the troubles and an account of

how she had helped to convict two IRA members in 1977. She told me anecdotes from the fish and chips cafe she and Grandma ran in Cedar Rapids. We laughed a lot and called Grandma to tell her about what a great time we were both having. Jean called me her toy boy and told me that the ladies at Wednesday bowls were impressed with my skill at the game. She introduced me to Mr. Fisher and he gave me a personal tour of his company. We were the talk of Ballinamallard. When it came time for me to leave, Jean gave me her Claddagh ring over an Ulster fry and wouldn't take it back. And I wasn't really ready to go.



Between Venice and Paris

Laura (Galpin) Murphy



Relaxation. Finally. After hurrying through the Venice train station searching for the right train, finding out whether we needed reservations or not, finding which part of the train went to Milano, which part goes all the way to Paris, crowding past people in the small passageway of the train with a 38 pound backpack and watching even the sweet leather-faced old women choose to limbo under me rather than squeeze past. Trying to find a coach lacking potential rapists. Then the ritual and painful hauling of my pack far above my head to the luggage rack and then collapse. Breathe. Stretch my neck, take off my boots, stuff my third odorous layer of socks in the boots and stuff the boots under my seat.

About Laura (Galpin) Murphy, '92

Laura Dawn (Galpin) Murphy is the Brooklyn-based Chief Creative Director and co-founder of ART NOT WAR, a creative agency and production company specializing in multimedia for social justice campaigns. She has traveled the country as the National Creative & Cultural Director of MoveOn.org, and toured the globe on a world tour singing with the multi-platinum music artist Moby.

Prop my feet up just to the right of Niici who is curled up like a small cat in the seat across from me, her gigantic blue pack looming above her on the rack, never quite fitting and looking ready to fall and bash her on the head. Experience tells me it won't.

That part is always the ordeal. Then the train begins to move. It usually excites me, but not tonight, not tonight when I slept in the cold train station last night and spent the day in one of the most magically beautiful cities in the world freezing my ass off and I know that tomorrow I will wake up sore and stiff from sleeping on the train in some ridiculous position.

Two men enter our coach and sit down across from each other. There is one seat between each of us. They are old; they are easily identified as "not dangerous."

Niici and I get our handbags down and begin supper. Today we have no surprises, she is thinking. Bread and cheese again. The bread is hard and it hurts my jaw to chew it, the cheese is soft and warm but I'm beginning to appreciate cheese that way. We wash it down with water that we

hope is clean and I pull out a surprise to make us happy—a chocolate bar from Prague that I've been saving. We break it in half and try to eat it slowly but we're both giggling and warm now and the chocolate goes fast. We offer the last bits to the two old men. They decline in German.

"Oh no. They don't speak English," says Niici.

I agree that it's too bad. It's much better to be able to communicate. But then we begin one of our wild conversations—the obnoxious kind that only takes place in the safe confidence of no one being able to understand you. There's something really freeing about that and whenever it happens Niici and I like to use it to our full advantage—being rude to each other and cursing a great deal. After one particularly ribald exchange, the old man to my left begins chuckling softly, trying hard to hold it back until he laughs so hard I think he will cry.

"You...girls!" he says and smiles at me, laughing hard.

"You!" I screech back while Niici howls in embarrassment, "You DO know English! You...you..." and I sock him in the

arm like a buddy that's just told me a dirty joke in a bar and the old man laughs even harder at this. The other fellow looks on in amazement, wearing the contagious smile, but obviously not faking his language barrier.

I can't believe I haven't noticed either of them before this. My people watching skills have been on overkill lately or perhaps I'm just tired, but I notice them now. The English speaking one to my left, who is introducing himself as Claus, is tall, white haired with clear blue eyes. He must be 65 or so. He is finely dressed in a dark business suit and overcoat; he is a handsome man. He has one of those faces that is full of stories. The other man is probably 50—he wears jeans and a short jacket and I notice that his right arm is cut off below the elbow. He has no right hand, but he does have a moustache.

Claus and Niici and I exchange all the usual questions and then Niici fades out. The train is dark and rhythmic tonight and she is very tired.

We sit for awhile, silent in the dark.

"This is your first time out in the world?"

I say yes.

He is looking right in my eyes, even in the dark.

"I remember that. How wonderful everything is. How grand and big. You must be very tired."

I say that I am and ask him many questions and he answers them all. He tells me

about his time in the army, lonely and proud and waiting for letters, his first rampage on Paris and about one lost night in New York with no money and little English. He has been to China and Japan—he has been to Thailand flocked by children begging for money and I ask for vivid accounts of each and he gives them. I nod and nod and fall in love with him in about two minutes.

He asks me about the farm I live on in Iowa. I say that there is a house that my father built and a pond with fish and a small wood and cows and horses and he is very quiet and serious.

"Heaven," he says. "That is heaven to me. I wish for that, to live in a place like that, in peace until I die. But I still must travel for my job."

He looks away from me.

"My wife died last year and I must travel and keep busy, you know? But that is what I wanted for us. You are very lucky to have such a place." He speaks slowly and accurately and straight to me now. "It is good to see the world, yes? But good to have such a place to come home to."

I want to smile at him but I don't because he doesn't have a home now and I imagine he and his dead wife, young and pretty and I say "Yes. I am lucky."

He laughs a little now; he is embarrassed. "It's easy to talk in the dark on a train, yes?" I say that it is and then we are silent. Niici is snoring lightly now—she does that sometimes.

I don't like the quiet, so I tell

him that my father also has a keg on tap on the porch so he can have a cold beer all the time. He laughs and says that my father is a damn wise man.

A knock comes at the sliding coach door. It is the conductor. He opens the door and flicks on the light, asking for our tickets and passports. Niici sits up and rubs her eyes with her fist like a child; the other man fumbles in his pocket for his ticket. The conductor tells Niici and I that we must go to the other end of the train because the train is splitting and this car will not stop in Paris. Claus remarks that he had suspected this.

Niici and I gather our things and haul down the backpacks. We strap them on and Niici says good-bye to them and waits in the passageway. I shake Claus's hand, he holds mine tightly and says, "Take care. Take care." he smiles. I turn to the other fellow and reach out to shake his right hand. I have forgotten about the stump and I shake it. He is pleased and embarrassed and I'm happy that I forgot about it.

We're in the dark passageway, trying to find a sleeping spot until Paris. Niici is weaving—her pack is heavy and she's still half asleep. All I can think is that somewhere, sometime, in Germany or France or Alaska even he will die. He will die wise, unremarkable to most, and alone. I'll never know.

Hill and Earth and Tree

Julie Nelson



I first read of England in James Herriot's *All Creatures Great and Small*. I was twelve or thirteen.

Herriot's England was for me the only England, and I held onto images of stone walls and dazzling green horizons and most importantly, amiably quiet farmers. For years I immersed myself in the Yorkshire Dales by reading and rereading Herriot's four books. When the opportunity arose to travel to Yorkshire, it was as though I were being given a rare chance to enter the realm of literature, a world previously existing only in my mind.

But first I had to get there physically. Prior to this, my experience in independent travel had been non-existent. I hadn't even braved the tube alone, but the Herriot weekend had to be done solo, so various arrangements were made, and I found myself, after a narrow escape

from the clutches of Victoria Station, seated on a two-tiered English bus in the middle of the night. I'd always imagined riding through the dark English countryside at such a height would be a serene, calming experience — I'd lean dreamily against the window as Simon and Garfunkel hummed in my ear and picturesque hills rolled past.

If anything, this journey was to be about the disillusion of reality. The seven hour bus ride was occupied with fits of painful dozing in a smoky, cramped aisle seat next to the most uninteresting man in all of Great Britain.

Arriving in a small foreign village at five o'clock in the morning is a humbling experience. I strolled the abandoned streets of Darlington, England, and for the first time in my life, I experienced what it is to be completely alone. It wasn't unpleasant. Rather, the misty streets and the swirling dark skies seemed to me to be straight off the pages of a Sherlock Holmes mystery.

I was still a long way from James Herriot. My final destination was Thirsk, some

thirty obscure miles away. In some ways my adventure started that morning on the rattling local buses of remote Yorkshire. Boarding such a bus, I was to find, meant pleasant, thickly speaking bus drivers, comfortably unassuming locals, and miles of winding beauty, albeit at terrifying speeds. My arrival in the town center of Thirsk was unceremonious. My planning had delivered me without incident smack-dab in the middle of James Herriot's hometown, but that is precisely where any planning stopped. All that was left was improvisation and hopeful guess-work.

When singing the praises of England, I always include the small signs depicting a small cursive white "i" with its distinctive blue background—the sign for tourist information. Countless times I wandered from a train or bus station, without so much as an inkling of an idea which way to turn, and found a trail of blessed blue signs to guide me. Thirsk was no exception. Within five minutes of arrival, I was being assisted by two elderly men in Thirsk's tiny tourist office. Neither of the men was openly friendly

or curious, but somehow their earnest attempts to find me an affordable bed and breakfast were endearing. The men, I later realized, personified the attitudes of the area. They were kind and helpful as well as unassuming and sincere.

The closest B and B was just up Kirkgate road, only six or seven buildings away, but I passed by it completely, overwhelmed by the simple two and three story brick buildings separated by a narrow road and accented by nothing. As dull as this sounds, it was somehow just right, not showy or breathtaking, but solid and assuring, like the men.

Mrs. Dodd's establishment was no exception, nor, for that matter, was Mrs. Dodd. Without fuss or nonsense, she conveyed a calming sense of

compassion and earthiness. It was maddening to try to grasp just how she and so many others could be so soft-spoken and aloof and yet make one feel so warm and pleased. My room was small and bright; the bed took up almost all available floor space. Several ceramic knickknacks adorned a shelf over the bed, and had I been anywhere else in the world, I would have taken one as a souvenir.

The greater part of my task still lay ahead of me. I was desperate to remain as discrete and un-American as possible, so asking the first available pedestrian to point me to Herriot's surgery was definitely out. I headed back towards the town center, past an ivy covered building, a meat market, a fish and chips shop and several small tourist

shops. After a minimum of searching, I came across a postcard of the famous veterinarian surgery, the ivy covered building back on Kirkgate road. With mixed feelings, I hurried back to the street from which I had just come. Ashamed but elated, I at last set eyes on the genuine home of Dr. James Wight (Herriot), veterinarian and writer. It was two doors from my bed and breakfast, and I'd passed it twice before in the last half hour.

Over the course of the weekend, I managed to walk past the surgery a dozen times, and I even sat in Herriot's waiting room before being chased out by a bustling receptionist. My desperation mounted as I contemplated kidnapping a stray cat, maiming it, and



About Julie Nelson, '92

Julie Nelson teaches writing and literature at Midlands Technical College in Columbia, SC. She holds an MFA degree from Minnesota State University-Mankato. She lives in Columbia with her wife and 3 cats, and they travel as often as they can.

returning to the surgery where I would demand immediate medical attention, but my courage failed, and the realization that I would not be meeting Dr. Herriot left me bitter with disappointment.

I made a half-hearted attempt to salvage the weekend by taking an afternoon's stroll through the countryside with Mrs. Dodd's border collie by my side and absolutely nothing on my mind but the land before me. Everyone has magical moments which they relive in their head, moments which require no reworking or enhancement, so dreamily perfect in reality that they stand on their own. This afternoon was one such moment. Fred lead me quickly through town, and as I released him on the outskirts into a pasture which must have belonged to someone but for the moment belonged only

to its inhabitants, I lived a far away dream of my childhood. For the next four hours, I was inside a book I'd read a half a dozen times. The grass that I walked on, I had walked on in my mind, years ago. The sheep and the horses and the dogs and the people that crossed my path had once been seen and touched and spoken to by a simple man who had the wisdom and the eloquence to capture them in words and to share them in books to be lived and relived as I now did.

At about two o'clock, I climbed an abrupt fold in the green landscape and st down. From where I sat, I could see a great deal—a green patchwork of pastureland and stone walls and trees and sheep.

I thought about being a kid in Minnesota and reading on long bus rides home and spending infinite afternoons with only my dog and a few

acres of hill and earth and tree. And now, to be that same kid, eight years later, sitting in England with a dog named Fred, surrounded by hill and earth and tree. I read from *All Creatures Great and Small* that afternoon, sitting on that hill. The words were the same as they'd been when I first read the book, and yet each word took on a new and special significance as I sat in the midst of their source of inspiration. In Herriot's own words: "Today the endless patchwork of fields slumbered in the sun, and the air, even on the hill, was heavy with the scents of summer.... I couldn't see a living soul; and the peace which I always found in the silence and the emptiness of the moors filled me utterly."



A Postcard from Egypt

Deb (Forssman) Hill

On Monday I found a postcard in my mailbox with "Greetings from Egypt" printed in the upper right-hand corner in white capital letters across a red banner. My mind scanned the list of people I knew but couldn't come up with anyone that would be on the northeast side of Africa in September. I wanted to know.

On the front of the postcard were four mini-postcards. One corner framed the four colossal statues of Ramses II at the entrance of Abu—the Simbel Rock Temple (Ok, I only knew this because I read the description in fine print at the bottom of the back side). These four statues were giant bearded men made of stone seated around the pyramid walls with their feet pedestaled on stone foot rests, every joint stiff and straight

and starched. Next to the temple was a photo of four camel riders in front of the Pyramids of Giza, lined up in stair-step descent. Below the camels was an oriental dancer in front of the Sphinx with yellow stones stacked around her which looked like giant bales of hay. And my favorite—an enormous, turquoise, earthenware hippopotamus with strange black markings, resembling stems and leaves, striped its sides and snout. The hippopotamus was the largest image on the postcard—even larger than the sphinx or the seated stone men of the temple.

I flipped the postcard over and began reading:

*Dear Deb,
Ha! And you thought you would never get a postcard from me! OK so it took a while but here is your very 1st one and a beautiful one it is—I might add from Cairo! This place is absolutely bonkers but I really, really love it. So far I have ridden a horse around the pyramids, tried a Feluka*

*boat ride on the Nile, visited the Valley of the Kings in Luxor—that place was awesome but it was 115 degrees there by noon so all we did was lie by the pool! I think I could get used to this kind of schoolwork! This weekend I am going to go snorkeling in the Red Sea which should be really fun! Then our group heads off to Israel and then India! How is school going? I hope you are doing well! Say hi to Posy for me and take care of yourself! Bye!
Love,
Sarah "Goddess of the Nile"*

I could not think of who Sarah was. I knew at least five Sarah's and two Sara's, and I couldn't remember where everyone was and what they were each doing this year. I kept going through each Sarah or Sara in my mind and nothing clicked. Here I was in Pella, Iowa, with a postcard from Cairo, Egypt, and I didn't know who had sent it to me. Sarah, Goddess of the Nile, was going bonkers on a Feluka boat ride in scorching temperatures, and she was wishing me well at school and asking me to relay a greeting to a mutual friend of ours

About Deb (Forssman) Hill, '94

Deb (Forssman) Hill lives in Conway, Arkansas with her husband and two sons. She teaches part-time as an instructor in the Department of Writing at the University of Central Arkansas. Living in the South, she says, has been like living in a foreign country in so many ways.

nicknamed “Posy.” At least I knew who Posy was.

It crossed my mind that the postcard had been sent to me by mistake. But I checked the name again and, sure enough, it was me. I thought that the planet “Earth” and “Milkyway Galaxy” might have been helpful additions next to the “USA” Sarah had written on the card; this obviously had come from someone very far away. The Goddess of the Nile was on her way to Israel and then India, probably with the help of a magic carpet. I felt like an idiot or like someone was playing an early April Fool’s joke. Was I dreaming? This seemed like something that would only happen to Joan Didion. After two days, I finally remembered which Sarah it was.

This whole incident is a glimpse of my generation. Only in 1992, would a junior in college not remember which of her friends was traveling in Egypt and living abroad. I tried imagining my mother back in the 1960’s when she was in college. First of all, she wouldn’t have had any friends studying abroad, because no one did that at the Iowa State Teacher’s College of Northern Iowa back in 1963. And second, if my mom would have had a friend studying abroad, it would have been so unusual that my mom would have known her, stamped her friend’s face from the yearbook on her own memory, and would have probably written the friend every day. I realized that I hadn’t been that shocked about receiving a

postcard from Egypt. I was a bit stupefied when I couldn’t place the Sarah or Sara, but the news about her world seemed to blend together so nicely with her comments about my world that nothing seemed out of the ordinary. Almost anything seemed possible and likely. The strangeness of the postcard hit me later when I realized how unstrange this all seemed.

A couple of weeks ago I received a letter from my younger sister who is a freshman in college. She had just been to a blues concert and wondered if I had ever had the experience. “When I went back to my room after listening to the blues concert, I just felt so happy,” she wrote. My mind stumbled over that line because I was struck by the irony of it; she hadn’t even realized what she had said. The blues, to me, meant suffering and pain. Yes, there was something healing about the blues, a released communal voice of suffering. But still, her reaction seemed odd to me, but not really.

Last Sunday in church I watched a six year old girl seated in front of me, perched on a metal folding chair as the congregation recited the Lord’s prayer. She was reciting it too. I looked down at her pad of paper and noticed the Lord’s prayer scribbled out in her own young hand. At the top of her paper were the words “Hineran— hormone for hypersensitive males in mid-life” printed in bold black letters. I wondered if God would find that amusing or insulting. Would He find

it strange? The little girl’s mother just smiled and patted her daughter’s head as she read from the child’s tablet.

A French friend recently pointed out to me that in the United States we don’t ask “Why?”. We just listen, take everything in, and accept without wondering. We have friends traveling around the world whose names and faces we can’t recall; we have sisters happy about the blues; and we have small children scribbling on tablets advertising hormonal drugs. And no one stops to question this strangeness. Maybe it’s the strangeness that we like. Or maybe it’s that we can’t even recognize what is strange anymore because there’s so much of it. The poet Neal Bowers talks about the “familiar strangeness of our lives.” If strange is familiar to us, then how can we recognize the unfamiliar? If we can’t see strangeness, can we ask “Why?” Why couldn’t I remember the Sarah in Egypt? Why do the blues make my sister happy? And why is a little girl writing the Lord’s Prayer underneath a hormone for hypersensitive males? Should we ask “Why?” to unpuzzle the puzzle or puzzle it more?



Belly Dancers and Saloon Games

Jody Dallas



*“The ever-whirling wheel of change; the which all
mortal things doth sway.”*
-Edmund Spenser

The historic Dayton Station building on the corner of Main and Pike, in “old” Dayton, Nevada, burned to the ground on a winter night in late 1979. Somewhere in the back of my second grade mind I can still smell the smoke as my school bus went past the site the following morning.

I am in Wales. I am on the floor of the sitting room of a 150-year-old stone house on a dairy farm In Newcastle Emlyn. The electric fire is glowing with that orange heat-colour that could burn holes in your wool socks if you get them too close. I am a purist when it comes to fires and I was skeptical of this until it happened once to me. My host, Margaret Evans, is

About Jody Dallas, ‘94

Jody Dallas lives in her home state of Nevada where she is a 3rd grade teacher in Virginia City. Over the last 20 years she’s made a solo cycling trip through France, walked across northern England on Wainwright’s Coast-to-Coast trail, and done a hut-to-hut Alps crossing. Her most recent trip was to Tokyo.

bringing me boxes from the attic with the excitement of a child showing off a stash of toys to a new baby-sitter. From the box tops emerge a cowboy hat with a feather band, belt buckles, baseball caps advertising seed companies and casinos, a turquoise watch band, and boxes and boxes of slides. She also brings out two boards, hinged together, that open up to show a map of the United States. The map is marked with numerous dots and stars all over Nevada and Illinois.

Fifteen years ago, when Margaret was in her early twenties, she spent a year on an educational exchange program organized by 4-H in the U.S., and the Young Farmers Club in Wales. She stayed for two weeks at a time with 4-H farming families in Nevada and Illinois, one of which happened to be the Tennants, family friends of ours. Now in her late thirties, she was getting a chance to pull out all of her treasures and show them

to an interested and captive audience; me.

I don’t remember Margaret from her visit to Dayton. I only know that as soon as Laura Tennant found out that I would be studying in Wales for a semester she insisted that I look Margaret up. Initially I was shy about doing so, as Laura had not written to, or heard from her in about three years. But after a couple postcards and phone calls I was warmly invited to spend a weekend with her at her family’s dairy farm.

The farm is beautiful. It is embraced by the tiny valley of Brongest just outside of Newcastle Emlyn. Stone walled barns that date back 200 years house the newborn calves and an equally large herd of cats. The barns and farmhouse are topped with slate roofs and the eaves are painted a deep red color that somehow adds more permanence to the grey rock. When I arrived, the eighty-eight milking cows were grazing the south pasture, milling with the tranquil pace

of all good things Welsh. A small creek forms the western border of the property at the base of the fern green hills. Stone walls and hedges trace most other pasture and property boundaries.

The Dayton Station was a bar and restaurant, frequented by Marilyn Monroe and Clark Gable during the filming of *The Misfits*,” which was shot partially in Dayton. I remember seeing a picture of her on the front porch of the building. She was wearing a white halter dress printed with lots of tiny red apples, and she was playing with one of those paddles that has a ball attached with elastic. Long time residents take this bit of history very seriously, and when *People* magazine came to Dayton to do an article on Monroe a few years back (*The Misfits* was her last film), one woman proudly claimed to have cooked tacos for the starlet. Imagine, cooking tacos for Marilyn Monroe.

The same strip of false-fronted buildings can be seen in Clint Eastwood’s movie *Honky Tonk Man*. That was during a summer when I was about 10, and I was upset because we were going camping and I wouldn’t get to be an extra with the rest of my friends. Of course, by this time the Dayton Station had burned, and the movie people constructed a jail front on the lot. Now, that too, is long gone.

Although charges were never filed after the fire, the general consensus among residents was arson. The owners left town in a hurry with their insurance money never to be heard from again.

I have a feeling that if they ever come back some redneck would host a proper hanging.

“There was this one afternoon that Laura had a small tea so that I could meet some of her friends,” Margaret tells me. “And there was this one gal that I thought was just the greatest. She drove a white jeep, and the top was off. It was brilliant. And she was a belly dancer— Oh, she was great, honestly the only person I met that day that I remember so well. I wanted to drive that jeep more than anything.”

I laugh, knowing immediately who she is referring to. I feel obligated to update her as to what her belly dancer is doing now. Sadly, the jeep is gone, and she has settled into a life of domestic things: second marriage (the first one, to the artist didn’t work out), building a house, a “real” career as a florist. Margaret seems disappointed.

I can see why there would be an attraction. Margaret herself is quite a character. She is very blunt and honest with a quick wit. She runs the farm with her “partner” (boyfriend) Andrew, and she does not hesitate to instruct him, or the hired men, how things must be done. I laugh to myself when she shouts instructions to the farmhands in Welsh over the noise of the tractors. They shout back the equivalent of “Yes, ma’am” and don’t argue with her.

When Margaret gets out the slides and projector we first go through two boxes of Illinois photos. The scenery and landscape remind me of where I go to school in Iowa. Halfway through the first box I have to stifle my yawns.

This is quickly turning into a vacation slide nightmare, and ironically, I am the one on vacation. The third box, Margaret tells me, is labeled “Nevada.” “Maybe it’ll be a bit more interesting for you,” she jokes.

It is strange the places nostalgia can hit you, both emotionally and geographically, like the way a song on the radio can take you from a stretch of interstate in Nebraska to that bar in Colorado before you get to the second verse; which is like the way a certain smell of furniture polish your freshman year of college can send you sobbing into your pillow with homesickness; and all similar to the way that slides of your Nevada home town fifteen years ago, viewed on a home movie screen in Wales, can send you back to second grade.

When I went to Disneyland when I was 14 I made it a game to try to casually wander into the background of strangers’ photos. I wonder now how many family vacations I have been a part of. Would people recognize me if I made national news? Will anyone ever point me out and say, “Hey, I know her?”

The Nevada slides are great. There are photos of Dayton Valley before the golf course, the subdivisions, the high school, the industries. The elementary school playground is still dirt. The Tennant family is 15 years younger, and there is a picture of my father, the elementary school principal, before his hair turned grey, in the background

where Margaret is giving a presentation to a group of sixth graders.

“Things are so much different now,” I tell her. “The town has grown so much. Do you remember the little road that went over the river and all the way out to the Tennant’s house? There’s a new bridge and it’s all four lanes now. There is even a stoplight in the center of town.” I point out on the screen where sagebrush has been transformed into the posh Dayton Valley Country Club, and where three new schools had been built. “You probably wouldn’t even recognize that side of the river at all. Of course ‘old’ Dayton hasn’t changed. The old timers will never let it.”

“Good,” she says. “I remember it had so much character, just like you’d see in the cinema.”

Whenever I look at pictures of the American west, I look for familiarity in the geography. I look for a point of reference, of recognition, so as to know if I’ve been there before or can name it. I do this when I look at the black

and white pictures of mining town, which have long since been built over or deserted; the geography itself never changes, only the things that inhabit it. I think this is why Margaret’s scenery photos don’t strike me as oddly as the others. Mr. Como traces the same silhouette across the southern horizon that I have seen for years through my bedroom window.

Margaret shows me her scrapbook, too. It is full of ticket stubs and newspaper articles shoved into the clear plastic covers. In the back there is a small bundle of postcards which I start to file through. Most all are from Nevada. Carson City, Minden, Virginia City, and one of Main St. in Dayton. Margaret looks over my shoulder. Something is out of kilter in the shot, but something has been out of kilter is most all the shots, I tell myself.

“What is in all those buildings now?” Margaret asks. “I remember having quite a party at that restaurant on the corner...I can’t remember the name of it, but it is in the this building

right here,” she indicates by pointing to a red brick building almost cut out by the angle of the photo. “Is it still a restaurant? The bar was terrific, I remember there were dollar bills stuck all over the ceiling. I never figured out how they got them up there. One old local fellow tried to teach me, he wrapped the bill around a silver dollar with a tack sticking out the top. Then he just threw it up at the ceiling and there it stuck. The silver dollar fell out and he caught it before it hit the floor.” She stares into the postcard as she continues. “The more I drank that night, the harder I tried, and I had a few yahoos cheering for me too, but I never got one up there.”

I’m on a bus and over the green high-backed vinyl seats I can see wisps of smoke against the deep morning-blue sky. I can smell it too. The bus turns right onto Pike street and the volume of chatter instantly rises. “Look! There was a fire...”.



Bridge to Romania

Kathy Schuitema



We all wore the one nice outfit we had brought on the trip, and each of us had the same rumpled, slightly grimy look to our clothes that comes of having worn them several times without washing, and then shoving them into a bag. We had been travelling for two weeks, and had seen our last shower about three days before. Now here we were, in this cathedral in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, ready to stand up as a choir and perform our music yet once more. We were tired, with the weariness that comes from sitting on a bus day after day, then walking around to “see the sights” when what we really needed was hot food, a shower and a soft bed.

The people here had the same faces we had been meeting for the past two weeks, as we sang in the Czech Republic, Hungary, and Ukraine. They looked tired and worn, with a hint of hard

times suffered in the way they carried themselves as they silently filed into the church and sat on the rough wooden benches. We sat facing them, staring blankly and wishing we didn’t have to stand through the whole two-hour concert again.

We had been told quite a bit about this place. It was rare for an American group to be allowed into this area of Romania. Cluj is located in Transylvania, and the people who live there are overwhelmingly Hungarian nationals. The Hungarian Reformed Church was our connection to the city. Cluj was the home of a Hungarian Reformed Seminary School, and the Hungarian bishop had invited us, the Central College choir, to visit and meet these people who shared our common bond of religion. Living in America, one of the freedoms we prize highly is

our freedom of religion. We really had no idea what price these Hungarians were paying for the same religion we practiced in freedom at home. The Romanian government openly persecutes these

Hungarians, and they have forced them to live in a constant state of fear. We had been warned not to use the few Hungarian phrases we had picked up, and to be discreet in expressing opinions and views of any kind about the political or social system we observed. We were also careful to remember that the performance of the Hungarian national anthem, which we had learned for our concerts in Hungary, would be considered a crime against the government. We took these warnings very seriously, taking care to hide our copies of the song and keep our conversations confined to “safe” subjects. We had often heard stories of the treacherous Soviet system of secret police, so it was not hard to imagine a microphone hidden in every vase of flowers. Indeed, there were countless reminders of the Communist regime throughout the city—loudspeakers hung from every lamppost and were found in every hotel room, for the broadcast of propaganda. In theory, all this had ended with the fall of Ceausescu, but we

saw little evidence to support a change in policy.

Our imaginations worked overtime. We were also haunted by the suspicion of a strange woman who had been following our group all day long, even joining us for the complimentary lunch provided by the people of the Hungarian University. She was short, wearing a thin sweater and skirt as well as dark glasses. She carried a large purse, and she accompanied our group without a word. We became even more alarmed when our city walk was cut short and Figaro, the university student who was leading our tour of Cluj, admitted in a whisper that he thought she might be a government worker sent to watch our activities.

With all this on our minds, it was no wonder that we hoped for a quick, uneventful concert and an early departure for the Hungarian border the next morning. Cluj-Napoca was a grimy city, with drab people, and huge brown buildings that were identical cracker-boxes, with nothing bright or pretty to adorn them. There was nothing in the shops worth buying, and the streets were mostly empty of shoppers.

Our concert began as it had for the past thirteen evenings. We sang several short, classical selections and then went into Dvorak’s “Te Deum,” our major piece. We looked, felt and sounded tired and half-hearted. Out of the corner of our eyes we glanced seriously at a tall man with a television camera. We should have been more excited that our concert was being broadcast to all of Romania, but instead it gave us our most intense feeling of many eyes watching our every

move.

As we sang, our Hungarian audience remained impassive, and without reaction to each of our pieces. Were they just as nervous about Romanian eyes as we were? After we passed the hurdle of “Te Deum,” our longest and most difficult piece, we began to gain a little more energy. The remaining pieces were spirituals that we loved to sing and hear the sounds we made resonate in the huge space of the cathedral. The congregation began to stir a little as we sang “By an’ By” and let our enthusiasm for singing show. Several children seated in the front listened with rapt attention. We began to take more interest in watching the people react to us, and we began to connect with them, making eye contact and smiling. Imperceptible changes of expression showed that despite the language barrier, they knew what the message of our music was.

After we finished our last number, it was time to sing our benediction. It is the choir tradition to surround the audience and close each concert with this song, “The Lord Bless You.” We stretched our group all the way around many rows of pews, and looked at our director expectantly.

From the corner of the church rose an elderly gentleman. He walked with an air of importance towards the pulpit and motioned to our tour guide, Andrea, to follow. He stood for a long moment letting his gaze fall all around the room. Then he began to speak, using his hands to gesture, and

making eye contact with the choir members nearest him. As he spoke, his voice became choked with emotion, and his eyes became teary. Andrea translated rapidly, telling us that this was the Bishop of the Hungarian Reformed Church in Romania, and that he was telling how much it meant to his people to have young students travel all the way from America to show that we share the same faith in God. We began to realize that our voice in Romania was having a much larger impact than we ever could have imagined. We listened as he told of poverty and suffering, and of faith as large and unshakable as the Carpathian Mountains surrounding Transylvania. I felt guilty for letting my own fears and discomfort dictate how I felt about sharing our music with these people, and I saw them in a new light. In our circle, we stood only a foot or so away from the pews, and we were face to face with our audience.

The Bishop closed his remarks, and we looked into the faces of those Hungarians and sang the benediction from our hearts. This, we felt was the greatest intangible gift we could give—asking the Lord’s blessing on this church. We soon learned that there was a far greater gift.

As we dropped hands and stood in our circle, ready to leave, the organ began playing. We didn’t recognize the music, and took it as a postlude, turning to walk out of the church. We expected the people to stand and leave as well. At the first tone of the organ, however, the change in the congregation was visible. Each person sat ramrod

About Kathy Schuitema, ‘94

Kathy Schuitema works as an elementary literacy coach in Ottumwa, IA. She enjoys writing about her experiences as well as teaching children to love telling their own stories.

straight and faced the front not meeting the curious gazes from the choir. Suddenly, on cue, they began singing as one. We stood frozen, shocked at what we heard. It was the Hungarian national anthem! We shot panicked glances around the room, at each other, and at our director. He was as confused and alarmed as we were. We had been told that the penalty of openly singing this song was a long and nasty imprisonment, and we had no intention of testing the theory. Then we noticed the cameraman from the television crew. His camera was at his side, and he was singing as loud as the rest. One at a time, we made our decision. One joined in, then another, timidly at first then louder. Soon, the whole choir had rejoined gentleman. He walked with an air of importance towards the pulpit and motioned to our tour guide, Andrea, to follow. He stood for a long moment letting his gaze fall all around the room. Then he began to speak, using his hands to gesture, and making eye contact with the choir members nearest him. As he spoke, his voice became choked with emotion, and his eyes became teary. Andrea translated rapidly, telling us that this was the Bishop of the Hungarian Reformed Church in Romania, and that he was telling how much it meant to his people to have young students travel all the way from America to show that we share the same faith in God. We began to realize that our voice in Romania was having a much larger impact than we ever could have imagined. We

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testing the theory. Then we noticed the cameraman from the television crew. His camera was at his side, and he was singing as loud as the rest. One at a time, we made our decision. One joined in, then another, timidly at first then louder. Soon, the whole choir had rejoined hands in the circle and we were all singing together. As the congregation saw the American choir join them in singing their anthem, their faces fell and tears rolled freely down their cheeks. The singing grew louder and stronger, and every human being within those walls felt the bond knit between us. As the last notes died away, arms reached to pull us close. Hands touched our cheeks in love, as people murmured thanks in two languages. We held each other and we all cried. It no longer mattered that we couldn’t speak to each other in a common language or that the chasm between our lifestyles was too deep to bridge; we showed that we knew they had suffered and that we cared about their struggle. The people who filled that room on that Sunday are now a world apart. The Americans have gone back to their free land of wealth, and the Hungarians continue to silently live their struggle to be free, day after day. Each group has renewed faith, for they have seen the love that can be built between two very different peoples, through a song that changed their lives.



Change

Stephanie French

“Spare some change please.” A black man with dreadlocks, olive pants and a mangy, tired German Shepherd-like dog at his feet slouched in a doorway between Danielle Patisserie and Kentucky Fried Chicken on London’s Islington High Street. Over the course of four months I passed hundreds of faceless people on my twice-weekly speed-walk from 7 Bedford Place to the King’s Head Theatre, yet this man became one of the few mainstays. From 20 yards away, I could hear him not asking, but rather propositioning the passers-by for their extra pence, and after a couple of weeks I started actually to smile in recognition when I would hear that melodic “Spare some change please.” He always spoke that same sentence in the exact same tone, rising a note for each

of the first three words, then dropping back down on “please.” I wondered at his cheerfulness. While I grumbled about a measly half-hour walk in the pollution and litter, all day long he sat surrounded by cigarette butts and French fry boxes, tirelessly propositioning the pedestrians. I became curious about what made this guy different from the majority of the homeless population. Why didn’t he mumble or scrawl a cardboard “Hungry” sign to hang around his neck? But I never gave him any money— despite the impression he made on me. I would be disappointed if I didn’t see him on a particular day, but I never supported him being there. Just like I never bought a Big Issue from the silent 70-year-old man in front of The Body Shop, even though I always told myself, “That man shouldn’t be standing on the street all day, he should be at home playing with his grandchildren.” * * * “Excuse me, excuse me, do you speak English?” Clare and I were

crossing a large lot empty of everything but cardboard boxes and vodka bottles, to get to our hotel across the street. We had just spent the past two hours at the Moscow craft market milling around rows of brightly colored stands displaying expensive hand-painted black boxes and cheap amber jewelry. After haggling unsuccessfully with stubborn merchants and having old men drop large fur hats on my head in the 80-degree heat, I was looking forward to a nap, maybe a little CNN. I could tell Clare felt the same way; it was the first time she’d been quiet since we’d gotten to Russia two days ago. The market had been a fantastic rush of activity, but our senses were worn out. We turned around. The question, well-pronounced through its thick accent, had jolted us from our daze. A smiling middle-aged Russian woman rushed up to us. I wondered what she could want from us—to practice her speaking skills or something?—so I responded, “Yes, I speak English.” Her face instantly transformed itself. Her bright

About Stephanie French, ‘96

Stephanie French for the last 10 years has been living in Africa doing development/humanitarian work--the last six years in Angola, most recently as the Country Representative for Catholic Relief Services. She has a son, Felix Francisco, and has had spectacular vacations in recent years to Thailand, Brazil and India.

eyes suddenly became pleading, and the woman clasped her hands together. “Oh please give me just one dollar so I can buy some food for my family, we are very hungry.”

My sluggish mind had a hard time trying to comprehend this turn-around. I expected people to want my American money, but wasn’t prepared for this approach—it seemed tricky. In the meantime my hand reached into my pocket and hoped to pull out a one-dollar bill and not a twenty. I was lucky. I handed her the dollar bill.

“Here you go.”
I don’t even remember if she thanked me. I obviously had a dollar to give to her--I was walking back from the market with an eight-piece Marinsky doll, a hand-knitted doily, a leather watchband, and five hand-painted Christmas ornaments. Still, I felt as if she had taken advantage of me, like she had been impersonating her poverty—her English had been pretty good. But then I felt bad for resenting a woman for a dollar. I’m sure it meant a hell of a lot more to her than it did to me.

* * *
Almost every day a brightly-clad black man bopped up and down the paseo in San Sebastian and appealed for pesetas. Almost every day he approached person after person and received rejection after rejection. And almost every day he responded and responded, “Thank you very much and God bless you,” or “Have a nice day, the Lord be with you.” He must have had it fairly rough—the boardwalk was usually littered with

African drummers and elderly couples selling waffle cones or hand-made jewelry. His days could not have been very profitable, yet he never lost his energy or his blessings in the four weeks I spent in the city. Whenever I would see him, I’d say to whomever was with me, or to myself, “Now that’s the kind of person I’d be willing to give money to.” But I never did.

* * *
“COULD I HAVE YOUR ATTENTION, I have something I’d like to tell you.”
As the door between the tube cars clanged shut and I saw the greasy man with severe psoriasis enter our car, my heart and stomach did that I’m-speeding-and-there-went-a-cop-leap-and-drop. I thought to myself, “I’m at my first hold-up. This guy’s going to pull a gun and rob all of us. I hope I live to be smart enough to not tell my parents.” The guy reached into his pocket and pulled out a handkerchief. I tried to sigh invisibly. I don’t think it worked.

“I’ve got a little entertainment for you tonight. Watch the handkerchief carefully everyone, because before your very eyes it is going to disappear.”
The handkerchief did disappear, but I think I was the only person who saw it do so—the rest of the seasoned tube-riders kept their noses in their books and Guardians, or occupied themselves pushing back their cuticles.
“IT’S NOT MUCH, BUT IT’S BETTER THAN BEGGING OR STEALING, SO I’D APPRECIATE SOME GENEROSITY FROM YOU FOLKS TONIGHT.”
This man was yelling at us

pretty ferociously to expect generosity, I thought, but his tactic worked—I dug into my pockets, and wished I could find more than 23p. I dropped it into the man’s clubbed hand, avoiding eye contact. The well-groomed woman next to me dug into her purse and found about the same amount of change and gave it to him. He mumbled a begrudging “Cheers.” When he got to the far side of the car, she remarked to me, “He scares us to death then grumbles when we give him our pennies.” I kind of grunted affirmatively, but didn’t respond; I was still a little nervous about that handkerchief.

A couple of weeks later I recognized some very raw flaky patches on the back of a head getting on a car at Goodge Street Station. I waited for the next train.

* * *
My first few weeks in London, I thought I’d never get used to all of the people begging in the streets. I never did get really comfortable with it, but I think I’ve thought more about my reactions to people begging than about the beggars themselves. I know part of me felt guilty for being an American spending thousands of dollars during a year in Europe while so many people have nothing. But another part of me was pretty unwilling to give away any portion of those thousands I worked so hard to save. Even though I don’t want to admit it, I think in a way I bought into that American philosophy that if you give to homeless people you’re just feeding their alcohol and drug addictions. Seeing the beer cans and wine bottles scattered around

a street person can make someone cynical, especially if the person says, “Can you give me 50p for tea?” The thing is, I really did want to help them but something, my biases and stereotypes maybe, almost always held me back.

So all year long I struggled with the same questions. Why did I rarely give money to the people who gave me favorable impressions but did to those who caught me off-guard? I guess that one is clear enough. I’ve always been a push-over. If someone comes up to me and asks me to do something—help organize an event, fill in at work—I can never say no. I guess the same goes for homeless people. If they keep their distance I can talk myself out of giving to them with even the stupidest rationale. But my biggest

question, the one that still nags me, the one I cannot answer is, when I gave, how often was I really giving for them rather than to make myself feel philanthropic or righteous?

* * *
“You know what’s so weird about the people begging here in Russia? They are all 80-year-old women,” Clare said, reaching for another Prince sandwich cookie from the package we’d purchased from what used to be called “Food Store Number One.” “They probably only have a pension to live on, and no other source of income, and we all know a pension isn’t enough to feed yourself on.” I washed down a Tootsie Roll with a drink of Coke.

Aimee said, “You know, this one woman I gave money to was so sweet. I put about 1500

rubles into her cup and she kind of gasped and blessed me about three times.”

“Where was this woman? What did she look like?” I asked.

“At the Moskva metro stop. She’s really tiny and wears a shawl over her head.”

The whole next day, I looked forward to giving this woman money. I was excited to see a beggar. When we got to the metro station, Aimee pointed her out. I approached her and dropped about a 1000 rubles into her cup. True enough, I saw her eyes light up from under her shawl. She looked at me for a moment before she mumbled some words and endowed me with the sign of the Trinity several times. As I returned feeling benevolent, Aimee said, “Isn’t she just sweet?”



A Night in Tunisia

Jennifer (Jacobson) Welbaum



I stepped out of the smoke-filled taxi into the rainy night. I was wearing a large blue woolen scarf over my head to protect me from the elements and to cover my blonde hair. Concealing my fair skin and hair color was easier than my height. An American in Tunisia. Standing in front of the chaotic souk market, the labyrinth bazaar with cobbled streets that formed a part of the old walled city of Tunis, I felt out of place.

I was visiting a friend I had met in Paris. Souphie had invited me to stay with her family during the holiday vacations. For me it was Christmas break; for her it was semester break. A major difference between Christianity and Islam. I went with the understanding that I would not be celebrating my

own holiday customs, but that I would be learning about her customs.

We spent two full weeks in Tunisia, most of which were spent in and around the Tunis area. Souphie, Junko (the Japanese girl that had also gone along on the trip) and I mapped out nearby sights that interested us. Most days we took a taxi or bus downtown to the open air markets or the souk. One afternoon we took the train north and saw two different coastal fishing towns that seemed to have been passed over by technology and progress. Junko and I took a three-day safari through the Sahara in a jeep. Riding a horse-drawn cart through a lush oasis, standing on a desolate road to catch a glimpse of a mirage, riding a camel for two hours while

wearing a turban and cloak, drinking mint tea with pine nuts in the middle of a sand dune. Back in Tunis, Souphie’s relatives invited us to eat couscous and harisha with them for dinner. We went to Souphie’s everyday places and avoided the faux-Tunisia

created for tourists.

The night before returning to Paris, Souphie and I sat out in her bougainvillea-filled garden and ate date-filled pastries that her grandmother had made that morning. We talked about my before-and-after thoughts of Tunisia, my reactions to the culture, December 24th without a Christmas tree, and my increased capacity to communicate with people in French. I told her that I had truly enjoyed myself and was very thankful that she had invited me, but that the trip somehow felt incomplete. There was one part of Tunisia I had wanted to see, but hadn’t. I wasn’t sure if it was a sacred Muslim tradition and I wasn’t sure how she would feel about me asking. I felt a certain closeness to Souphie after two weeks of living like sisters, so I asked her. “Can only Muslims go to the Arab bath houses?” She smiled.

The music in the taxi was an eerie combination of lute and accordion. The large well-dressed taxi driver only spoke Arabic. I was glad Souphie was with me and that I didn’t need to translate the French

into English for Junko. She had looked embarrassed when we told her where we were going, admitting that she was “too Japanese” to partake in such a public bathing ritual. Souphie and I went alone.

She had not been to a bath house in more than a year as she had been away at school in Paris. The one she used to frequent had recently closed so we inquired about another. The frail kitchen woman at Souphie’s house told us about a man in the souk who could tell us where to go. Sahira said he worked in the third row of stands in the silk markets and always wore a red felt hat.

We entered the grand gates to the Arabic maze and were immediately lost. Thunder boomed overhead. The sights once familiar to Souphie had been transformed into a dark mysterious tunnel. As the rain began to fall, the shopkeepers haphazardly strung up tarps to protect their goods creating a tunnel effect. Masses of people bustled to take cover from the rain. They pushed and shoved and poked with their broken umbrellas to get where they were going.

Row one: the spice vendors. Curry powder, mace, henna, paprika, cardamon, cumin, chile powder, and saffron. Row two: perfume vendors. Jasmine, lavender, lilac, rose oil, ylang ylang, pachouli, and sandalwood oil. Row three: the silk market began. Tapestries, silk scarves, children’s jeans, American-designed T-shirts, leather slippers, red felt hats, and traditional muslin-white cloaks. Red felt hats. We had found him: the man Sahira had told us about.

Souphie told him that we were friends of Sahira’s. His

eyes lit up. A sneaky grin came across his face making the wrinkles more noticeable on his tanned skin. He asked why we were there. When we told him that we were looking for a bath house he looked disappointed, but told us anyway. He warned us about the winding narrow streets that lead to the other side of the souk where the bath house was located. Although Souphie later told me she knew how to get there, he volunteered to take us there himself.

Fifteen minutes and two wrong turns later we arrived at the arched doorway. Black and white painted stripes decorated the entrance leading to a grey haired woman. She sat on a velvet pillow warming her hands by a small pile of glowing coal. Souphie smiled at Sahira’s gentleman friend and told him thank you in Arabic. “Shucrân.” He went back out into the rain with a slight nod of his head. I had been warned that most of the older generation Tunisian people did not speak French, so I was not surprised when the woman mumbled something I could not understand.

Admission was cheap, maybe the equivalent of a dollar or two. In the evenings only women could enter, and during the day only men were allowed. Bath houses play an important role in Muslim customs. Before entering a mosque, visitors must cleanse themselves, a process called ablution. In ancient times before indoor plumbing, people relied on public baths for this purpose. They also served as a place of community—a place to join together with friends as a

part of a ritualistic ceremony. I saw the bath house as another tie with Souphie. A chance to learn more about women in Tunisia. A forum to hear stories of when her grandmother had taken her to bathe.

It was dark and humid inside. Although it was dark outside, it took our eyes a few minutes to adjust to the dim reddish light in the first room. On both sides of the room stood raised platforms covered with ragged tapestries. Scattered around on the platforms were women of all ages that hovered around cans filled with glowing coal like the woman’s in the entry way. Some were sipping mint tea out of small glasses while others were in the process of dressing themselves. We found an empty corner to place our things.

It was time to get undressed. I felt as though I should feel uncomfortable: I was about to take off my clothing in front of unknown women who didn’t even speak my same language. Strangely enough, I wasn’t uncomfortable. I followed Souphie’s lead and did everything at her pace. Fold up the clothes and place them in our basket, carry the shampoo and soap in one hand, grab a plastic pail with the other, and walk around a corner into the second room.

It was much different than I had imagined. There were two large cement troughs that held the water: one hot and the other cold. It wasn’t a giant bath tub. There were women of all ages. We sat on a bench surrounded by women our own age that were discussing one girl’s wedding plans. They giggled. They helped

About Jennifer (Jacobson) Welbaum, ‘96

Jennifer (Jacobson) Welbaum lives in Northfield, Minnesota with her husband and three children; she also works part time as a Travel Director, running logistics on-site for national and international trips. Before moving to Northfield, she quit her job as a high school Spanish teacher in Minneapolis, and moved to a Southern Spain for 5 months on a family sabbatical.

each other suds up their hair. They filled buckets for one other. Someone asked about dyeing her hair with henna. Another told a story about her mother's elopement. A woman with long, wavy hair asked me to help her comb it. She then offered to bring me a fresh bucket of hot water. They didn't care that I was from another place. They were just

enjoying their bath. Our bath ended and we got dressed in the shadows of the rosy embers. I covered my head again with the blue woolen scarf and Souphie covered hers with a grey one. We found the back route out of the souk that lead us directly to the taxi stand. The music was loud, but triggered a stream of memories. The

smell of the smoky taxi ride, the taste of a breakfast of date pastries and Turkish coffee, the sound of Souphie's mother singing off key in the shower, the feel of the vendor's red felt hat, the sight of a fisherman on the coast with a great catch. So many senses in such a short time. It was still raining.



Take Me to the Gypsies

Karen (Jones) Padidar



Spaniards call it the Harlem of Granada. Or the Bronx. Take off your jewelry, your watch, and leave your money and valuables behind. I was warned by natives. I was warned by foreigners. College students and little old Andalusian señoras all had something to say about going into “that part of town.” None of it was nice. It was as if once one entered Almanjaya, there was no turning back.

So I boarded bus #1 and set off on the 40-minute ride into the notorious gypsy suburb. It was March, cool still and sunny. The road wound past the tourist neighborhoods where the only tall people I ever saw in southern Spain became heretics, praising the gods of *Fodor's* and *Let's Go*. Mosaicked fountains and

plazas lined our path as we climbed up into the crumbling streets near the old monastery, alongside the wired-in prison, yellowed and so closed to the world, and out into the open ramshackle muddle of buildings and hanging clothes that colored the bus route.

I watched anxiously. I had no idea what to expect or even where I would stop. Another volunteer would meet me at the bus stop and somehow I would just know her. Perhaps she did not blend in, as I would not. I knew nothing more than her name.

Through the greasy window I spotted a middle-aged woman stomping upon the pavement. Clad in a baby-pink terry cloth robe and fuzzy slippers, she twirled her chapped hands above her head and clapped them ferociously. The sidewalk was worn where

she stood. A Walkman in her pocket kept the time, but I doubt it was ever turned on. The music was in her head. Her face was gaudy with makeup. Eyeliner and blush, dark enough for harsh stage lights. Clown-red lipstick

traced a mouth twice as large as what was natural. I watched fascinated. She would become a landmark to me. One left turn and two blocks after the dancing robe woman was my stop. Rain or shine, she beckoned laughingly to the driver of our fogged windows. Some riders chuckled, others never seemed to realize she was there. I suppose most just wrote her off as crazy, but she smiled and waved at me oddly in between verses. I had entered Almanjaya.

* * *

The halls were empty, quiet, save for the buzzing of fluorescent slabs overhead. I walked, cautiously clicking on the muddy tiles. Someone would mop them in the morning, only to be dirtied an hour later by the squeaky shoes of a hundred running children. They were not here now. School had been let out nearly an hour ago. The only kids left were to be my students. Not real problems, I was told, just in need of extra help because they could not get individual attention in class or at home. Classroom teachers were already overtaxed or hightailed it out of Almanjaya when their school day ended. Families were too large, too cramped, and had

About Karen (Jones) Padidar, '98

Karen (Jones) Padidar is a teacher who lives with her husband on the Channel Island of Jersey off the coast of France. For a number of years she worked with indigenous species, conservation and sustainability projects in the remote northwest province of Asturias in Spain.

enough difficulties to bother worrying about the eighth child’s math homework. That is why I was there.

I came knowing nothing more about the gypsies of Spain than what the prejudices of Spaniards had “taught” me. That was not much. Stereotypical overgeneralizations with little life experience and I was ready to meet reality behind that door. It shook slightly and I looked around for a draft. There was nothing and no one. I heard a deep throaty voice muffled by the barrier and was sure I had been told the wrong room. This must be choir or dance class. I backed up as the plywood creaked open.

A boy of no more than 10 sat on the edge of a bright plastic chair. He leaned forward, straggly hair hiding his face. I watched entranced. He clapped naturally, fiercely, and his voice rose and fell without thought, without tension. There was something wild and raspy in it. He shook his head back jerkily as he sang and I caught a glimpse. Dark skin, roasted chestnut eyes, he personified the “gypsy look.” His hair was streaked with dingy blond, the rest dirtied brown by the wind and street. It seemed one could scrape words onto his skin like a grimy windshield left to fade. He lacked a bath and his jeans yawned with holes that displayed his latest street scrapes and wounds. That voice, though, that voice captured all the criticisms one could throw at his appearance and forgot them. Laden with Bohemia, it took one in and held one captive. Enthralled, I watched the five other

students in the room chime in, beating rhythms on their palms, none the same, and all fit as if rehearsed. There were no scores or musical notes; no director or accompaniment. They just sang and clapped to pass the time like others would play checkers or basketball.

I wanted this to be some kind of proof that all gypsies are amazing musicians, but that was unfair, naive. Still, never had I felt as I did watching the boy I would come to know as Jonah. It was as if his soul was speaking in the vibrations he sent around that tiny room, and one did not have to understand the words to know the emotion behind them.

The spell was broken as soon as he realized there was a stranger behind him. He was rough and tough and expected one to know it and respect it. He ran around the room flipping the plastic molds of orange onto the floor and demanding the spotlight. The other kids got annoyed with Jonah’s antics. They were used to his showoff style and did not pay him much attention. Instead they turned to me. One boy looked intently, still unsure who I was and why I was there, and asked me to sing. The question surprised me. It was not the type of thing one usually gets asked before name, age and occupation. Still, I was determined to appease, and turned to the group of boys while Jonah continued his race around the room. “What would you like me to sing?” A rush of titles I had never heard, let alone knew, bombarded me. I picked up one of the gaudy chairs

from the floor and racked my brain for the melody I so desperately needed.

I began to sing, softly at first. Jonah still charged around the room and I doubted the kids really cared what I sang or how I sounded. The words raced into my head and my voice sounded loud in the sudden silence. Jonah had stopped and all six faces circled round so close, so attentive, so wide-eyed. I hit the high soprano notes and began the descent of “Oh Shenandoah.” The kids looked at me as if I was not quite real. They had never heard a piece like this before. The song ended and I knew I was blushing before my young audience. Jonah turned to me, laughing mockingly. “What was that?” he demanded. “An old song from my country,” I replied uncertainly, feeling like the child. He sat down and pulled his chair close. “Shut up!” he yelled at the others. His dark eyes glowed, “Sing something else.”

* * *

“Teacher! Teacher!” I heard the cry the moment I turned the corner from the bus stop. A little spiked haired boy was running toward me. “Teacher! Teacher!” I smiled recognizing the face in the bottlecap-strewn alley. “Hola Juanillo!” I waved. “Little John” as I called him, was wrapped around my neck and dragging me to where the other students waited. His great-grandmother had been “payo” and he was lighter than the other boys. He would tell me, “I look payo, but I’m gitano.” I now knew all their names and who was related to whom (pretty much everyone was the cousin or brother of

everyone else) and the baked potato lady actually replied when I said “hello.” This was progress.

We found the other kids and their younger brothers and sisters and the whole big mob of us wandered down the street, some strange Pied Piper effect as little children joined the parade. Everyone wanted to hear English. It sounded so funny to their ears and sent them roiling in laughter.

“Pretend you’re talking to your best friend....” “Sing the Spice Girls....” “What’s my name in English?...” “Do you know the Backstreet Boys?”

I would speak a few lines and then the little gypsies would look up at me in wonder. “How do you know English?” they would ask each week. “It’s my first language,” I would always say. “After Spanish?” At six or eight years old, I realized, it does not seem to make much sense, if any, that people around the world would bother to speak differently than you. In their eyes, English was my second language, because everyone knows you learn Spanish first.

* * *

The sidewalk ended and became a mud path from the school into the neighborhood. Only for a moment, and then cement would greet me again. The kiosk gawked as normal from beneath its slanted tin roof, but something was different today. I looked around for my kids. No Juan or Paco or Isa and the gate to the ominous educational facility where I taught stood very closed and very locked. Where was everyone?

I strolled over to the apartment to find out which students would need extra

help and was attacked by a mass of butterflies and lions and some kind of yet-to-be-identified bug. My students, their siblings, and children who had randomly adopted me as their honorary something or other flanked all sides with face paintings in brilliant greens and gold glitter. “What’s all this?!” I cried.

“It’s fiesta.” “What do you think I am?” “No school today!” “I’m a butterfly! Can’t you tell?!” “Are we still going to have class teacher?” “Why isn’t your face painted?” “Today is a gypsy holiday.” “Are you going to paint your face Karen?” “Did you celebrate at your university?”

I could only smile and compliment the smeared cheeks around me. I was unsure what exactly was happening, but was hopeful that someone would enlighten me shortly. Mari Eugenia, in her constant role as mediator between the gypsy world and the Spanish world, came to my rescue.

“This is the day the gypsies celebrate their arrival in Andalucia. Around the year 900 or 1100 A.D., they came to Spain as nomadic peoples and have been here ever since. Throughout the gypsy communities they sing and dance and play games on this day for their role in history.”

Fascinating and ironic; no one knew anything about it outside of the gypsy neighborhoods. The children saw it as a day off of school, much as the kids in any culture view observed traditions, but to the parents and grandparents it was something much more. Spain often fails to recognize the

gypsies for their contributions to the culture they adopted, and yet flamboyantly displays the flamenco and incredible guitar and vocal talent that the gypsies, more or less single-handedly, saved from extinction. The gypsies originated from the ancient region of Indostan centuries ago, leaving remnants of their culture throughout Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean. Today the peoples of southern Spain are a very different product from their Romanian and Hungarian cousins, but they are united in blood. And today they could celebrate, because they survived.

We had no class, but ran around and played games and colored and sang and drew and became the animals on the children’s faces. I watched the butterflies and birds and lions and bugs around me and smiled at their crudeness and vibrancy. They flew around, half wild, and celebrated who they were and who they are. And so did I.

* * *

I walked further down the street than I’d been before. A dead end that died in an empty lot of rusted bumpers and bottlecaps. Two scrawny donkeys and a small dusty mutt of a pony chewed on weeds that sprouted between the gravel and glass shards. In the distance scraggly bushes competed with bunny ear cactus for the auburn soil muddied by morning rain. Air left damp, but still heavy with humidity, clung to everything. It was the last street of the neighborhood. Beyond it lay only empty waste fields. It was on this street that all my students and their families

lived.

The Sierra Nevadas glowed majestically above the puddles and trash, rising over the poverty of “my” street. Only I noticed. The kids were too busy learning to ride motorcycles at ten years of age, sporting wheelies to impress the girls who would become their wives in four or five years. Younger boys smacked marbles in stick-drawn circles and girls jumped rope to rhymes sung in high vibratos. Iron bars rusted in the wind as clothes dried in stripes. No one minded. Apartments stretched four floors up and the need for phones was nonexistent. Voices are loud enough; buildings close enough; everyone knows everyone else.

My eyes felt raw, as if seeing the road for the first time. Stretching from pavement into potholes, potholes into cracked soil, tracked into every hallway and home with crass words and sunflower seeds. *The sun begins to set, earlier now. Fall is coming.* The soccer teams had had their tournaments and were starting a new season. Competition ran against the other neighborhoods, not within. Well rarely. I watched the glow fall on the tops of the buildings, white and green brick, and gritty balconies that block the fresh light from cramped kitchens and olive oil-drenched walls. In this valley I see the face of acceptance. It is there in the hunch of the baked potato lady, in the ribs of the hungry dogs sprawled on mopped doorsteps, in the grandfather who clamps my hand in his tightly, too full of emotion

to speak. The sun sinks more quickly now, but I run to the edge of the barrio to catch the light before it disappears behind the bald mountains. One can see it here as nowhere else in Granada.

* * *

She sat in an armchair beneath a sick tree that bent from the heat or poverty. Stuffing oozed out of the arms and there was no seat cushion. I could not tell if she was sleeping or dead the way the flies buzzed around the greasy bun smacked lopsided on her gray-streaked head. A toddler ran and jumped on the sagging lump and she barely moved, just sort of grunted and shifted slightly. Beside her were the remains of bright toys discarded some decades ago. I crunched on the gravel and tried to introduce myself, unsure if there was much point in doing so. Somebody’s grandmother, somebody’s mother, somebody’s aunt, somebody’s wife, and I was just the teacher who came three times a week to teach her grandson or great nephew. Besides I was foreign and spoke Spanish with a funny accent.

I leaned forward smelling the sweat dried beneath her patched apron. Her bruised nails were gnarled into fingers that lay crossed to support her heaving breasts. Furrows and wrinkles cut her face into a cubist painting, and I could only say, “Hello, I’m Karen.” One eye opened halfway. I smiled and repeated my stunning introduction. She opened the same droopy lid a little further, but did not budge. Two kids attacked each other and screamed at her feet. She was babysitting

her grandchildren. The two became four and a fight broke out around me with the proper proportions of blood and cries and punches. She looked sideways at the woman sitting sound asleep on a bench beside her and mumbled something indistinguishable to me. I think it was just as foreign to the other, but she nodded. Satisfied the woman turned back with that one-eyed glance and gave me a toothless half-grin. Honored, I watched the children destroying each other on the pebbles beneath me and joined in their game.

* * *

Bzzzz! I set the doorbell ringing. My backpack was full of goodies for the little students to whom I had to say good-bye. It was difficult to believe that almost 10 months ago I had walked into this world a stranger and now I knew the families of my students, the social workers, the mechanic, the grandparents. I was waiting at the door to Roberto and Edu’s apartment for perhaps the last time. Somehow the puddle of pee in the hallway, the slamming doors, the kids playing soccer in the lot, the buzz of motos up and down this last street of the neighborhood seemed familiar and I would miss it.

Door 2C opened and I walked into the *piso* where we had planned so many lessons and organized projects and games for the kids. Backpacks were strewn amid posters for drug and alcohol prevention, cartons of toothbrushes and hot chocolate donated by the Red Cross, and a mountain of soccer balls. *Kiss*

kiss, kiss kiss. . . my favorite social workers, Roberto and Edu, were there to greet me. Suddenly the bell rang again and I heard the voice of Mari Eugenia, the volunteer who I had taught and joked with all these months. She was no longer a lone figure waiting for me at the bus stop. Behind her rushed Lidia and Paco, Juanillo and Charo, and all my students with cards and presents and embraces. I was

surrounded by their glowing faces. We munched their lopsided cake among the flash of cameras and spilt isoda as I read their creations out loud. Each had drawn animals with greetings in English, and they giggled as their characters came to life. They took me out into the street that had seemed so foreign, so “rough” at one time. There in the middle of the neighborhood raged a sparking bonfire with all the

parents and grandparents singing and clapping in the flames. Hugging and kissing me, they thanked me for my time and energy, for teaching their children, and loving their children. Juanillo’s mother smiled shyly, chiding him for crying all night because I was going. Her calloused hand took mine, “Why do you have to leave?” I had no answer.

I do not believe that the

On Happiness

Deidra Zegers



touch of a baby’s hand can teach us the secret significance in life and I put no trust in those people who look at a pasture filled with morning dew and feel the presence of their future spouse and lover whom they have not yet met. I do not believe that a trip across the Atlantic and a trek up a mountain is the only thing needed to help us overcome our inner fears. I know many travelers who claim to have had these meaningful life-changing experiences on their trips abroad and when they tell their stories, I have to push down a feeling of irritation and annoyance.

I suppose I am just bitter because on my trip to London I never talked to a homeless, legless, hopeless man in the rain on a cold November night, and I didn’t join a group of spirited strangers dancing without reserve under a moonlit sky. I did know people who claimed to have had these experiences

and although I mocked them, it is possible that I was secretly jealous. I wanted to be the type of person who could either jump into those experiences or have the experiences thrust upon me. I honestly don’t know how I would have responded to an elderly woman crying at my feet. It never happened.

The closest I ever came to the life-changing experience that many travelers speak of happened on the front steps of my internship on the very first day I was to work there. It wasn’t raining and the birds weren’t chirping. It was freezing cold and the wind was whipping my hair into knots as I jammed my chapped hands deeper into my coat pockets. I was walking the short distance from the tube stop to my internship and listening to a tape in my headset. The tape was from my best friend back in Iowa. I could picture her sitting on the hardwood floor in her bedroom talking into a little

tape recorder. Heather and I had been friends since we were six years old, and although we went to different colleges

and lead different lives, we always remained close and had always made time to spend together. She had called me two weeks earlier at five o’clock in the morning. She never quite took the time to figure out the time change, so I wasn’t alarmed when my roommate woke me up to tell me I had a phone call. When I stumbled to the phone and picked up the receiver, I could hear Heather sniffing. We made small talk for about 30 seconds before I finally asked, “So, what’s wrong?” She started to breathe faster and choked out, “I’m getting married.”

She was really crying then and I just stood shocked in the hallway of the hostel in my sweatpants and tee shirt. I waited a few moments and then sighed deeply and asked, “You’re pregnant?” She was still crying and it seemed like a very long time before she mumbled, “Yes.” My first feeling was of relief, at least nothing was terribly wrong. We talked for over an hour that night. She asked me to be the maid of honor in her wedding and I had to decline—I explained to her

that there was no way I could afford to fly back to the states for two days and then fly back to London. She was sobbing by this point. “Yes, I know, but couldn’t you just fly back here and stay? The wedding is going to be the middle of April, you would only miss a month.” I told her I would think about it and we hung up. I didn’t think about it.

Heather and I had always said that we would be in each other’s weddings. We didn’t talk about it very much, but it made good sense—we had always been next to each other in the most important times of our lives. This is the woman I ran to when my parents were fighting or my sister was hitting me. This is the woman I talked with for hours at a time telling each other things we would never dream of telling anyone else. I never laughed harder or smiled more than when I was with Heather. We had been friends from the age of six to the age of 20 and we never lost that feeling. It is sort of the same feeling you get when you have been sitting up on a bumpy, crowded bus and you are exhausted and the bus stops at your house. You climb off the bus and open the door to your house and collapse into your own bed with your own blanket and your own shape. It is real and it is honest.

But, for all the honesty and realness in the world, I wasn’t leaving London early. There was no way. I went through all the motions of calling my parents and having my travel agent sister check on flight costs and everything, but I knew I would never do it. It wasn’t necessarily that I didn’t want to go home;

I did want to go home and be with my friend. She had dropped out of college, she was getting married, and she was pregnant—I wanted to be with her. But, it simply was not an option. I felt as if I were being asked to sing an entire opera by myself and then denied a voice to use. I could not leave London because I hadn’t figured it out yet. I didn’t know what everyone else seemed to know; I hadn’t had the life-changing experience that had struck my other friends like a bolt. Back in Iowa, I had seen the faces of students who had been abroad when someone asked them about their experiences overseas. It was obvious which ones had figured it out and which ones had not. The ones that had figured it out just sort of looked out into space and smiled an odd little smile. It seemed as if these people could almost wish themselves into another place. Those who had not figured it out simply grinned, “It was the best. I got wasted every night! What a party!” I refused to be that person.

So, when I popped the tape that Heather had made for me into my headset, I was a little nervous about what she was going to say. I had told her that I was definitely not coming back for her wedding; it was just too expensive to switch the departure date on my ticket. Now as I hit the PLAY button, I feared a guilt trip. Of course, there was nothing of the sort from Heather. She was upbeat and funny and genuine. She told me of all the wedding plans and how everything was going. Then, she began to talk about how much she

would miss me on that day. I could feel my face tightening and then she played a song called “Pray for Me.” I didn’t know the song, but the words made me think about our relationship and how it was changing—“Here is where the road divides, here is where we realize...the road He chose for me is not the road he chose for you.” I started to cry. I looked at my watch and started to walk faster because I didn’t wish to compound my problems by being late on the first day of my internship. I was walking and crying and feeling very sorry for myself and very pathetic. If I were a loyal friend, I would quickly pack my bags, hop the first plane back to the states, and never look back. If I were a true traveler and adventurer, I would instantly abhor the idea of going home early. I would light up a cigarette, tell the world to go screw itself, and explore the mysteries of London. I did neither. I just half-ran down the street blubbering to myself.

When I arrived at my internship, I climbed the steps to the building and looked at my watch again. The tall brown building was tucked neatly between a used bookstore and a deli and I was finally out of the wind. Strangely, I didn’t feel much warmer. I had a few minutes to spare, so I decided to just get myself under control sitting on the cracked stone steps leading to the door. I was still very much out of control about two minutes later when a tall woman arrived toting a large gray bag on her shoulder. She stared at me through the folded-up collar of her thick

About Deidra Zegers, ‘98

Deidra Zegers graduated with an English major in 1998.

black coat and I explained that I was the new intern. I didn't explain why I was having a nervous breakdown on the front steps and she didn't seem to care. She told me to buzz up when I felt like coming in.

As the door closed behind her, another woman walked up. I was in the same crouched position on the top step and I gave the same explanation for my presence. By this time, I was beginning to get a grip on myself and I was seriously regretting my little fit. This woman didn't seem to be too concerned, but she stood on the bottom step and looked up at me.

She was making me very uncomfortable so I just started talking to fill the awkward silence—I told her briefly about my situation and about how I had never truly considered going home because I had to stay in London and be with myself for awhile. I told her about my quest to figure it out, whatever the hell “it” was. I told her about how I had gone against what I had been told to do by others (my friends thought I was an insensitive wench) and how I didn't care about going back. I think she was getting bored and she climbed the steps and stopped beside me. I had just spilled out my life story of doing what

was expected of me and I was very tired and irritated with myself for causing the whole spectacle. I stood up and picked up my backpack. By this point, I was convinced that I could do nothing to save face with this woman so I just blurted out, “I really don't even care. I want to be happy.” She turned her key in the lock and sighed; she sounded much kinder than she had looked and I felt a little relieved. Then, she suddenly turned around and smiled at me for the first time. It was a toothy smile. She laughed a little and said, “Yes. I guess you figured it out.”

Steve Ybarrola and Keith



Hymn of the Basque Soldier

Danita Browne

Yanner, anthropology and political science professors, are in charge of a study program in the Basque country of northern Spain. The program lasts for a month and is offered every other summer. Both are encyclopedias about the Basque culture and political situation. Steve Ybarrola, besides being of Basque descent himself (hence the last name), did his doctorate work in anthropology with a case study on the Basque culture in northern Spain. The result is he's a Basque fanatic in his classes. He shows the film *Euskadi: Stateless Nation* every chance he gets. It takes both hands for me to count all the times I've seen it. Each time a class watches it, someone is sure to groan. (I'm not the only one who has seen it multiple times.) The film covers the plight of the

Basques and their struggle to create a state which would be the physical embodiment of their nation.

While taking classes directed by Keith Yanner, I came to understand the political turmoil in the Basque region of Spain. Most people don't understand the difference between “nation” and “state” and how these terms can affect people of diverse origins within one political identity. Generally speaking, most people think the two are synonymous. Spain, for example, is not a nation, but a state. The State of Spain blankets many nations such as the Basques, the Catalans, the Galicians, and so on and so forth. These various nations are groups of people who believe themselves to have common bonds such as history, blood, and homeland. It's like a huge extended

increasing desire to be sovereign from Spain. *Euskadi: Stateless Nation* covers the use of violence by the paramilitary organization called ETA towards gaining Basque independence. Similar to the provisional IRA in Northern Ireland, ETA has a long history of violence against the Madrid government (since the dictatorship of Franco). It's numerically small, but disturbing, membership casts a long shadow over the generally serene and beautiful Basque Country.

Whenever I watch *Euskadi: Stateless Nation*, the thing that always strikes me is when groups of people stand, fists in the air, singing “The Hymn of the Basque Soldier.”

*We are Basque soldiers
We fight to free Euskadi
We are ready to shed
Our blood for her
A war cry echoed
To the summit of the mountains
Advance soldiers!
Everyone behind the flag*

The song, almost haunting in the lilting way it is sung, is in the language of the Basques: Euskara. Euskara has no ties

About Danita Browne, '99

Danita Browne lives and works in Chicago as a consultant in the benefits administration outsourcing industry. She is in her first year of being a Cubs season ticket holder, and has plans to go on a European museum binge next year.

To borrow from Ybarrola's classes, they are “fictive [imagined] kin.”

According to these ideas, the Basques are a nation. However, problems have arisen with this nation's

to Spanish, in fact linguists cannot trace it to any Indo-european language at all. (One myth is that it's the original tongue, broken apart at the Tower of Babel.) Every time I heard the song, I wondered at how ETA radicals would go so far, risking death or imprisonment, to oust the Spanish state.

After so many classes containing information about the Basques, I felt almost obligated to participate in the Basque program that my two professors talked about so much. Books and discussions offer only so much, and I wanted to see the situation first hand. Thus I found myself living in San Sebastian for a month in the summer of 1997.

Day after day, we wandered around the town of San Sebastian, looking for that mystical answer to "Who is Basque?" Answering that question was our basis for being there, and most of us felt like we were failing miserably. How could we possibly understand what made these people believe they were Basques? The people themselves had no definite answers. More often than not, they would stare off into space for what seemed like ages before they could begin an answer. The answers we received were so different from one another that often we didn't know how to reconcile them to each other. "I just am Basque." "I was born here." "It is in my blood, I have 16 appellidos to prove it." "I speak Euskara." "I fight for our freedom."

It was a labyrinth of intangible human emotions. However, the disparity in

the answers began to show us how these people were being torn apart from within. The Basque culture is unique and beautiful. The people have taken tremendous steps towards gaining complete autonomy from Spain, but they can't go further because they can't present a united front. Political parties can't work together because of different ideologies. Radical Basques accuse moderates of "selling out" to the Spanish state. In the midst of our field research, I found myself thinking gloomily how this place could become another Sarajevo, with neighbor fighting neighbor, or families stretched upon the rack of political ideology.

For us however, the last half of June and the middle of July passed leisurely. There were no terrorist attacks like so many hypochondriac parents, relatives, or concerned southern Spaniards warned us would happen in a place with resident "vigilantes." Things were so quiet, most of us worried about being able to dig up enough information to complete our political and anthropological studies. The last week, ironically enough, found our schedules booked with important interviews from informants who seemed to drop out of nowhere. It was also the week ETA decided to make an unwanted appearance.

ETA kidnapped a city councilman from the Ermua metro stop in Bilbao on Thursday, July 10. The handsome 29 year-old man was an easy target. He took the same route to and from work every day. His name was Miguel Angel Blanco. Miguel's flaw, seen from the radicalist

view, was that he belonged to the wrong political party. He was a member of Partido Popular, a party of the Spanish state. Most Basques belong to Basque nationalist parties such as PNV, EA, KAS Alternativa, or Herri Batasuna (often negatively associated as the political arm of ETA). Miguel was a pretty small fish as a city councilman, but it made no difference to ETA. Their ultimatum: Miguel would be executed in 48 hours unless the Spanish government agreed to bring all Basque political prisoners to penitentiaries within the autonomous region of the Basque country.

By law, ETA had every right to demand this. The Spanish state is committing a crime by imprisoning Basque political prisoners outside of the Basque autonomous region. Frequently, the Spanish state moves these prisoners like pawns on a chessboard from one prison to another without informing relatives. Each side ends up provoking the other in a macabre dance. The state withholds prisoners, ETA kidnaps and executes, the state, ETA, the state, ETA.

Saturday, the twelfth of July, was the day I was leaving to return to the U.S. At four o'clock, I would board a train to Madrid and leave San Sebastian. Four was also the hour Miguel's fate would be decided. That day, a mass rally was held in the streets of Bilbao. I watched the telecast of the rally and was stupefied by the sheer thousands of people who crowded the streets of Bilbao. They were all there in support of Miguel. He was not the first one to be harmed by ETA, but this

time, as newspapers like the *Chicago Tribune* stated, the crime seemed to rape the soul of the Basque country. Not even the local journalists could understand the mass outpouring of grief and rage at ETA's action. Speeches were made condemning the actions of ETA, and begging them to let Miguel go while they still had a chance to do something right. At the rally, Miguel's sister and fiancée stood above the crowd, tearfully addressing any ETA members who might be listening.

That morning, Jake, Danielle, and I made our way to the Plaza de Buen Pastor. Jake and I had seen signs posted throughout the old part of town saying a rally would be held there at noon. We were a few minutes early and there was no one

there except for the regular number of people going about their daily business or sitting at outdoor cafes. We sat down at a bench to the left and front of El Catedral de Buen Pastor and waited. I noticed that the people on the steps of the church gradually began to come together along with scattered people from the plaza. More menacing perhaps, was the gathering of *Ertzaintza* police in full riot gear around the perimeter of the plaza. Their blue and red uniforms stood out against the small crowds of people who had come to see what would happen. The *Ertzaintza* wore dark navy blue ski masks to hide their identities.

I felt oddly detached, as if it was all a huge figment of my imagination. Why would I be standing in a plaza surrounded by heavily armed

police? My sense of adventure didn't normally extend this far. I wondered how hot the police must be in their full riot gear in the middle of a hot July morning. The *Ertzaintza* paddy wagons were parked strategically around the plaza and I watched the men wait expectantly, their loaded tear gas guns resting at their sides. I began to think we had taken an unnecessary risk by sitting in the middle of the plaza. I started thinking about how much I would hate to feel clouds of tear gas strangling my breath and vision even more than the car exhaust I disliked.

Undaunted, the people gathered in the plaza. They clutched a banner with a lantern pictured on it and the words *Euskal Presoak Euskal Herria* printed beside. It meant something like the "Basque



Country imprisoned.” They stood silently for a few minutes. Then they began chanting three words that made my mind recoil in disgust. “*Gora, ETA, mil-i-tar!*” They were shouting in support of the terrorists’ actions. And this was the day Miguel, an innocent person, might die? I couldn’t understand it. Slowly, an *Ertzaintza* officer circled the group of chanting demonstrators with a hand held video camera. It was a scare tactic. It meant, “We know who you are. We have you on videotape. We can come and get you when we want.”

The *Ertzaintza*, of course, do know these demonstrators. They are their neighbors, their co-workers, maybe they are family. They are all Basques. And they are instilling fear into each other.

I watched as the chanting people turned away from

the camera. They were defiant. Then, they stopped chanting and began singing. Their fists were raised and, unbidden, the words and cadence of the song I’d heard so many times before in my American classroom came to me. They were singing “The Hymn” and about being prepared to shed blood for Euskadi. This time, they were shedding Miguel’s blood. I was sickened. It was no longer a meaningless, distant video of a place somewhere in Europe. I was there, the demonstrators were not 70 feet away from me, and ETA had just kidnapped a man 44 hours ago, and he would die. He would die for no better reason than because he was “expendable” in the eyes of the Spanish state. Unless ETA managed to grab King Juan Carlos I or President Jose Ma Aznar, there was exactly a snowball’s chance in hell of the Basque political prisoners

getting back to the Basque Country. Even though I am an American — an outsider — I was left with a bitter taste in my mouth.

Later that afternoon, on the train to Madrid, I talked to a woman who was hunched over listening to her radio. They’d found Miguel dumped on a road in La Sarte, a village just outside of San Sebastian. I didn’t know the words in Spanish for “shot” or “stabbed,” so I pantomimed my questions to the woman. I thought she said he’d been stabbed. The next morning, in the Barajas airport, I saw the newspapers. There was a picture in *El Mundo* of Miguel on a stretcher, oxygen mask over his mouth, being rushed to a San Sebastian hospital. He was in a coma; hours later he would be removed from life support, brain dead. He’d been shot twice, execution-style, in the back of the head.

It was just like any other



Tuesday that spring. I was studying in London for the term and only had classes on Mondays and Wednesdays. So on Tuesdays, I worked at my internship at the Royal Hospital Chelsea. And like all other Tuesdays before it, I walked out of the Sloane Square tube stop, past the Dillon’s bookstore, and turned left down Lower Sloane Street towards the hospital. It was only about four blocks. I passed the pub, the Rose and Crown, that I always ate lunch at, and where later that afternoon, I would meet Jeff and Erin for lunch as usual and order the same sausage and onion bap with chips and a pint of beer as I had done the previous weeks. I approached the hospital gate, and I pressed the button and a voice from the small black speaker asked who I was and

Dying at the Royal Hospital Chelsea

Charles Graham

I told them my name. A loud buzzer sounded and the large metal gate opened to let me in to the hospital.

The Royal Hospital Chelsea is no ordinary hospital. It is a special place for British pensioners, retired British veterans who fought in World War II and some from WWI, to go when they have no one else to take care of them. Most of these pensioners are seventy or eighty years old and, I was told, there was one who was 109. The entire hospital area is very large and covers about four-square blocks, and most of it is made up of the living quarters and barracks. The hospital was founded in 1682, during Charles II’s reign, but James II expanded it and added two more courts to house all of the pensioners. Queen Elizabeth opened a new infirmary in

1961. The infirmary is a small, white building and the doors open to the lobby with a desk and secretary to the right. I turned left down the hallway to the third door on the right with the sign

“Physiotherapy” above it.

I worked in the infirmary, in the physical therapy department, and I performed a range of treatments from electrotherapy to ultrasounds to massage therapy. The same pensioners came in every Tuesday for the same treatments.

I would talk a lot with them about their personal histories of the war or just anything about England. There was just something that intrigued me about this country and its culture, and I wanted to know more. And some of the pensioners wanted to know about America. Some of them had been to the United States before, but many of them hadn’t. Those who hadn’t been had plenty of American jokes to make up for it though. (Did you hear the one about the American, the Irishman, and the Scotsman?) After their treatments, almost all of them stayed for a few extra minutes in the physical therapy room for tea and biscuits.

I walked into Mr. Serneels’ office at about 9:30 am, the usual time for me. Mr. Serneels was the physical therapist I was working for at the hospital. I started by shadowing him for

About Charles Graham, ‘99

Charles Graham lives in West Des Moines with his wife and two children and works as a Physician Assistant for Des Moines Orthopedic Surgeons. With two young children, traveling has been limited Disney World and family vacations, but he looks forward to taking his kids overseas someday.

about fifteen minutes, and just as I was about to start an electrotherapy on a pensioner, Mr. Serneels told me that a pensioner had died the day before. This pensioner had been a regular in the physical therapy department on Tuesdays, so I had seen him many times. I was shocked. And although now I can only remember his first name, I will never forget his face.

Henry was a quiet man who kept mostly to himself. He was a short old man; he must have been in his eighties. He had thin, white hair on the sides and back of his head because he was balding on top. He had been getting treatment for his legs, and so he always walked with a cane and his back was hunched over. He, and most of the other pensioners, wore the same thing every day: navy blue slacks, suspenders, and finely pressed blue shirts. Henry had a red stripe down the side of his pants, signifying that he had been a higher-ranking soldier. He also had an oddly shaven white beard that came down from the side of his face to the corner of his mouth and then formed a mustache. His chin was clean-shaven.

Henry had died on a Monday. He was drinking a pint of beer and died right

there in the pub. I asked some of the other pensioners about it. They just laughed and said, “That’s where I want to die, the lucky guy.” At first, I thought that they were being discourteous, but then they started talking about him and all the things he had done and everything he enjoyed most -- like playing cards in the pub and taking care of the plants and flowers in his room. Then I realized that they weren’t being disrespectful to him; they were celebrating his life instead of mourning his death. This is the first time I truly realized that death doesn’t have to be such a sad and grievous time in the lives of someone’s survivors.

The Royal Hospital Chelsea isn’t just a hospital for the pensioners. It isn’t just a place to help heal them or a living residence. It’s the place they go to die. Although it isn’t written, there is an understood “do not resuscitate policy” among the doctors, nurses, and staff of the hospital. This is a place the pensioners can go to be with other men who went through the same things they did during their military years, and they can die having the respect of their peers. Henry was a sergeant in WWII, and many of the other pensioners did

have a lot of respect for him.

I hope that when it is my time to leave this earth that I have a good death. One that is respectful and painless. Henry had a decorated military career and died surrounded by men who knew this and respected him, and he also had a pint of beer in his hand and died painlessly. When I die, I want my family and friends to be there to celebrate my life, as Henry’s friends did at the Royal Hospital Chelsea. I believe that life is just one of the trials and tribulations that we must go through to get to a higher or better place in the universe. I would want everyone to be happy that I had moved on to something better.

At noon, I met Jeff and Erin at the Rose and Crown down the street for lunch. I ordered my usual meal and drank my pint of beer. I didn’t tell Jeff or Erin about Henry, but he was all I could think about during that lunch. I believe that Henry wanted to go peacefully and didn’t want anyone to cause a big commotion over his death, so I kept my thoughts and feelings about him to myself. I hope that Henry is happy wherever he is, with a beer in hand.



“Paso de Sevillanas!... pata!.. cruzar!...”

Sweat dribbled down my neck as I struggled to move my body into the positions ordered by our dance instructor. I had no idea when I signed up for lessons that learning to dance the Spanish folk dance, Sevillanas, was going to be so difficult. It was only 20 minutes into our first lesson, and already I was thinking that signing my life away to the Marines would have been an easier choice. At least the drill sergeants would have been less severe than our Sevillanas instructor. To make things even more difficult, my body was responding in the usual uncooperative manner it resorts to in any situation that requires coordination. Every time I attempted to appear graceful, I caught a glimpse of myself in the full-length mirrors around the walls.

About Kari (Griggs) Staub, ‘99

Kari (Griggs) Staub lives in North Liberty, Iowa where she teaches Spanish at Prairie Point Ninth Grade and spends her summers working for the Concordia Language Villages in Bemidji, MN. Since college she’s been back to Spain a few times, and also traveled to Mexico and Jamaica. She married this past year.

Sevillanas and Cruces: Preparation for a Spring Festival in Granada

Kari (Griggs) Staub

My arms didn’t seem to bend right, my feet never stepped in the right direction; even my build seemed wrong for this endeavor. My shoulders were too broad, my frame too big-boned: I looked nothing like those willowy Spanish girls, petite and graceful in their frilly dresses. I scowled at my reflection, gritting my teeth as I positioned myself back into the starting position.

My friends and I had signed up to take the lessons for the traditional dance to prepare us for Dia de la Cruz, a spring festival in honor of the Holy Cross as an emblem of Christianity in Spain. While the holiday was celebrated all over Spain, we had been told that Granada was the best place to be for it. Supposedly, the plazas of Granada were best suited for the dancing because not only were they spacious, but they were numerous and close-together, to allow for easy migrating around the city. Part of this holiday consisted of the erection of elaborately decorated crosses in all the plazas of the Granada. The other part consisted of

the celebration, the dancing in these plazas throughout the whole day and late into the night. We had seen demonstrations of Sevillanas performed—men and women in elaborate gypsy costumes seducing each other to the music, without even touching each other. We admired the way the women’s arms rose and fell, the wrists constantly twirling gracefully. And we loved the way it seemed to create a certain poise in the men, with their more exacting arm positions and precise footwork. It was a beautiful dance in four parts, or pasos, and it was one aspect of Spanish culture that we weren’t going to miss.

The music swelled throughout the hall and my comrades and I tried frantically to find a beat that was slow enough to our liking. To the untrained ear, Sevillanas music is seemingly uniform. . . without real rhythm or lyricism. However, the Spanish know (and we soon learned) that each song has its own distinct rhythm and mood. It is not always possible to find the beat simply by listening to the

music—its rhythm must be felt and interpreted through the dance that accompanies it through its four verses. While one song can be sad and sensual, the next could easily be joyful and raucous; and the same dance accompanies both. At this moment however, our first lesson, we had no idea how to tell the difference. We did not have “feel” for the music yet. This was a fact that did not go unnoticed by our instructor.

“STOP!” she cried, starting the music over and joining us on the floor. As the music started again she began clapping, her hands raised even with her right ear as her hips swayed rhythmically, a cigarette pursed in her brightly painted lips. She demonstrated the *paso de Sevillanas*, the foundation of the dance, and we attempted to imitate her graceful style. That part seemed easy enough. All it really required was for each person in the pair to take a slight step toward the other, then step together with the other foot, and then step back. We completed the maneuver like pros and, satisfied with our progress on this basic movement, she told us to go ahead and add the other steps. I looked at my partner, Tammy, in alarm. I was positive I was going to do something wrong and mess us both up.

Sure enough, we weren’t even halfway through the first *paso de Sevillanas* when the music stopped again and we all froze in position. “Tú!” she screeched, pointing at me with her newly lit cigarette, “What do you think you are doing there?”

She started to walk toward

me. Oh no, I thought, what had I done? I could feel my face start to redden as she approached me, her face expressionless. The Doña was about 50 years old but moved with the energy of a 20 year-old. Her sleek black hair was pulled back tightly into a ponytail that hung down her back. Her thin lips were painted a garish red which emphasized the wideness of her mouth, but not enough to overcome her huge, almond-shaped, Spanish eyes. Those eyes narrowed and glimmered as she stopped directly in front of me, taking a drag on the cigarette. I towered about a foot over her, yet she terrified me with a glance. She repeated her question, bellowing, “*Qué haces?!?*”

“Uh. . .” I stammered, looking desperately at my friends, trying to notice how their positions differed from mine. Suddenly it occurred to me, and I looked accusingly at my raised left arm. I knew perfectly well that she had just showed us moments before that in the *paso de Sevillanas* position, the left arm is down. I quickly lowered it, attempting a sheepish, innocent smile at the Doña. She continued to gaze at me gravely, probably trying to decide whether or not to humiliate me any more. Then she placed the cigarette in her pursed lips and turned away, barking something that sounded like “*Otra vez!*” around the cigarette before going over and starting the music again. We were starting over yet again.

“*¡Izquierda! Derecha! VUELTA!*” she continued to scream at us for the rest of the two hour lesson as we

all wildly scrambled to step with first our left, then our right foot and do the quick turns in time to the music. By the end of the lesson, we were all exhausted when she stopped the music for good. We flopped down onto the hard wood floor of the dance studio, breathless and defeated. She stood in the middle of us, her chin slightly raised, a slightly amused look in her eyes as she surveyed the damage. “*Hasta la semana que viene!*” she said in that same loud voice, waving her cigarette at us in a gesture of good-bye. I couldn’t believe my ears. She didn’t seriously think we would come back the next week, did she?

But we did go back, week after week, until we had all four pasos down and could do them in our sleep. Over those weeks we became accustomed to the Doña’s screeching and yelling, and by the end we had even established a kind of relationship with her. We learned to read the expressions on her face and knew which ones meant she was frustrated with us, which ones meant she was really laughing at us on the inside, and which ones meant that we had pleased her.

And then May 2 finally arrived—La Dia de la Cruz. Armed with our Sevillanas lessons, we danced in the streets with all the Spaniards like pros. In our minds, anyway. We had decided long ago that Spaniards were born with some kind of rhythm that we Americans just didn’t possess. I was further convinced of this point when I witnessed a three year old doing Sevillanas in heels in one of the plazas. We rounded

a corner and there she was, her little dress floating around her as she moved in perfect rhythm, an angelic smile on her tiny face.

Despite our small inadequacies, we danced through the afternoon and into the evening, ambling from plaza to plaza. The Spaniards welcomed us in each plaza, pleased to dance with the students who had come to study their culture. The men who asked me to dance with them didn’t make any comments when I made mistakes—they would simply smile at the end of the song, kissing my hand and thanking me, and then disappear into the crowd. As the day wore on I realized my mistakes

didn’t even matter—those who did notice were too drunk on wine and the magic of the day to even care.

Around two in the morning we abandoned the city plazas and stumbled on aching feet through the narrow cobbled streets of the Albaicin, an old neighborhood on the edge of Granada. We found an abandoned plaza that had a nice view of the Alhambra, the old Moorish fortress that overlooks the city, and perched ourselves on a wall to rest. I stared at the stone walls of the Alhambra, imagining how the kings and queens of the past could have sat up there listening to the same music we heard at that moment. Suddenly I could

think of no better place in the entire world. Spain had become home to me. I was no longer there to study—how could I after living that wonderful day? Somebody popped open a bottle of wine and we passed it around. I listened to the folk music drifting up from the city below us grow fainter as more of the people straggled home to bed. The festival was ending, but we stayed in that plaza the rest of the night, gazing at the illuminated Alhambra and waiting for the sun to come up and announce the arrival of the new day.



The Sky Over Our Heads

Lorena Fernandez-Quinones



Tossing and turning in my bed, I try to concentrate again on the image of the moon tonight. It was so vast. I hadn't gone too far in my nightly bike ride, only half an hour of idle pedaling through the darkest streets in town. The waxing moon was so enormous, shedding the most delicate silvery light—over roofs and trees, over the pavement, over my hands on the handlebars. It was a transparent night, only limited by the dim, muted silhouettes of the white houses, the upright dark contours of the branches and the leaves. A night so immeasurable, and at the same time so present, so close. And just one star in the sky, single, separate, composed under the magnificence of the moon. A couple of weeks ago the sky had been flooded with stars, the Milky Way unrepressed and exuberant with the new moon. I rode out into the country and left

far behind the town lights. In the undisturbed dark of a farm in Iowa, I pinned down the Pleiades, Venus, Arturo, but there were so many, so many unidentified stars.

In the lounge, when I came back from the beautiful night, I found a book: *King Lear*. Probably someone forgot it on the couch. I snuggled on the sofa, distractedly considering watching TV while browsing casually through the pages of the Penguin edition. "According to my bond," I read. Isn't it amazing, how Shakespeare used a fairy-tale setting for a treaty on human nature? "Once upon a time, there was a king who had three daughters...." The classical formula, with even a terrific storm when the king went mad—as if the wellbeing of the king elicited a response from the sky.

Discovering the remote between two cushions, I flicked through the channels without paying much attention, till a

familiar image dragged me back a couple of channels—I was right, it was *Titanic*. The ship was already

sinking and the passengers who managed to get into the lifeboats speechlessly witnessed the tragedy. And the night was so calm and serene, the stars glistening in the remote arctic sky.

Some five years ago, I recall, in Spain—my hometown, Palma, turned off the city lights, ready for the biggest fireworks ever seen on the bay. It was *La nit de Sant Joan*, Saint John's Eve, a bonfire in every little village and every town and every city along the Mediterranean coast. A second of awe, and then so many stars uncovered their presence. I thought, that's even better than the promised magic pyrotechnics. But a rumor stirred the crowd, and all the faces turned to the northwest end of the bay. In the distance, something else was also uncovered by the switching off of the lights: a blazing strip of flames outlining the mountains. La Trapa, the Masanella, tainted orange demarcating the profiles so well known. The summer heat had unleashed an inferno, helped by the recent drought. The fumes blurred the horizon there, but as my gaze traveled upwards the stars reappeared,

composed, calm and collected. Unreceptive, unconcerned about the tragedy that was going on here on earth: the mountains were burning, and the sky was so cool.

I stand up and go to the window seat, and face the night. Sometimes I sleep with the curtains open, I like to see the sky. But I think again about the fire in La Trapa and of the unconcerned sky above. That was not a movie; maybe when the real Titanic sank the stars were indeed as detached as when the mountains in Majorca were burning to ashes, or maybe not. The paradox lies in the fact that it doesn't make any difference. There is no direct relation between what goes on here, to us, and what happens there, in the sky. Nature doesn't care about us. Downpours only escort human tragedies in fairy tales—poor, poor King Lear without a kingdom, without a crown.

I look through the window. Now it definitely seems it's going to rain. One of my housemates said so as she came into the lounge, smiling, carrying with her a gust of fresh night air as she closed the front door. She talked excitedly, ceaselessly, telling me where she had been, what she had done. Then she displayed her newly purchased tee shirt (the word "Turtle" and a drawing of the smiling animal in question). Isn't it lovely? It was a bit expensive, yes, but part of the money goes to this organization that prevents the extinction of these and other animals. There was plenty of choice of tee shirts, you see, turtles and pumas, rhinoceros. Yes, yes.... Well,

it's getting late, I have to go to bed, so—good night. But in my room I sat by the window, and stared again at the sky. All these "Save-the-Whales" proceedings, what for? Yes, to soothe the conscience, but how? We pay a fee, and the turtles on some islands in the Pacific get some more days before being sold for their shells or their meat or both or whatever. The human race is capable of selling everything—fair enough, then, if we try to care a little bit more about what we are selling, about what we are destroying and feel so guilty for.

But then—a long, long time ago, there were dinosaurs. That was before Kings ruled the earth, even before dragons first ran off in the skies. Yes, dinosaurs were here before the human race, and they disappeared before the human race showed any sign of waking up. We didn't play any part in the disappearance of such animals. However, we are playing an undeniable part in the tragic disappearance of turtles, lions, whales, that's true. Our great grandchildren will have to look in an archive to see what one of these animals looked like. And there is the tragedy: we assume, with our total and complete responsibility, that we are above nature. We are so important. There is something grand about being responsible for such a loss.

Magnanimously, we lament it beforehand—so sure we are that it is our fault, that we will go on while they won't. And it's true, we are the ones killing rhinoceros and turtles, but if we were not here they would probably end up disappearing all the same.

Though it seems impossible to really conceive our world without us, as it seems hard to conceive that the world will go on, despite the human abuse of it—we will also disappear.

Above, the sky goes on, impassive. Sometimes it's clear, sometimes it rains; sometimes there is a drought, sometimes there is an inundation. And it has nothing to do with human designs, nor with human behavior: it happens regardless of our presence on earth. Fairy tales are just fairy tales, even King Lear. We are unimportant to the sky over our heads. What does the sky care about a madman defying its power, be it a King or a beggar? It doesn't care. If by any chance the stars can be taking any notice of what is going on down here, they probably are not curious about watching what happens to these uninteresting, industrious creatures who build intricate structures—that lately have even managed to go outside the planet. (Sheeew, and the stars see how a space ship travels to the moon. Sheeew, and it goes back to the Earth. And then, silence).

I go back to the lounge to see if the book is still there, but it's gone. I'm trying to sleep, and the sound of the rain is not soothing tonight. There's light in Stephanie's room. She seemed so happy with her tee shirt. Maybe I too should buy one. I knock on her door and ask if she remembers seeing any tee shirt with a white elephant drawn on it. She frowns, Aren't they already extinct? Yes, I think, and twirl my hair. But, anyway, the money will help the other animals all the same...?

About Lorena Fernandez-Quinones, '00

Lorena Fernandez-Quinones taught as a Spanish Language assistant at Central during the 1999-2000 academic year.

Wooden Statues Made Flesh: On Seeing Jesus, Good Friday, Acanceh,

Mexico
Emily Plum-Güçlü



The sweat lingered on my face as noontime came and the crowds pulled toward the main street in Acanceh. I had never seen such crowds, enthused with a common moral purpose, moving with the same unhurried excitement as if the world were beginning and ending, but it didn't matter since they had all been there before and would survive again. It was my first time in a different country, floating through realities bound up with language and spices and space. The youngness of my hands showed, I knew that, and had them shoved in the pockets of my stylish khaki pants on this fabulously sordid and hot day. My hands were soft, inexperienced,

unwounded. I had never been so hot.

I came to the main plaza in Acanceh, Yucatan, Mexico, on Good Friday to see the most talked about and anticipated event of the religious year. In Mexico, as in many places all over the world, Easter is a time to meditate on Jesus' life, and to reenact his journey to death on the cross — to stage a Passion Play. Olivia, a friend of mine, had been working on the popular play at Acanceh for several weeks. So, along with some other friends living in Merida, the capital city of the Yucatan, I took the bus out to the country to see what all the excitement was about.

My mother, who is Mexican, had tried her best to raise me Catholic in a small

town in rural Iowa, USA, and I rode the bus this day believing I had a good idea of what the Friday before Easter meant to the people of Mexico, a primarily Catholic country. I understood the Stations of the Cross; I had been to Church before. What

I didn't know was that I had never before taken in a scene with my whole body, truly open and wide, awed by the colors and lingering smells, by the rough rocks on the ground. This day in Mexico was my discovery of that vastness, of that seeing.

I had even been in a play at Church. When I was in middle school, I was chosen to act the part of the Virgin Mary in our play for Christmas at my hometown church in Iowa. I refused the role because the script was written in cursive writing, and that made me nervous. I can remember the dusty smell of the blue robe I wore, and the wave of heads stretched out from the feet of the huge hanging wooden Jesus behind the altar to the back of the Church. My life then was much like the role I ended up playing — condensed, limited. I stood so close to him on his cross, waiting behind the curtain for my turn to walk out and be the "water maiden," to say nothing. And, it seems, I never really *looked* at Jesus up there, never stared mouth

open and breathless.

But this day of the whip and the dripping sound of my sweat and the crowds shifting in the breeze was Good Friday, and I was standing in a plaza in rural Mexico. The Passion Play melted around me in the heat, singed and wrapped itself so close to me, fusing me into that surreal area between reality and the acting out of it. I was transformed. I was no longer a foreign visitor passively observing the weighted significance of this day as it might manifest itself in others. I had become, quite actively, a "Member of the Crowd." The Roman Guards in full costume brought Jesus to a balcony on the side of the plaza and tied him up, stripping him of his robe. One

of the Guards held a long whip and practiced snapping it against the side of the building. I stared at that whip as it curled and bit the strong stone wall.

Was that man really going to whip Jesus? Wasn't this a play, an act of what happened, meant to entertain us with created pain, with special effects and a sound board? I acted confused, as if I could not understand my own realization that there wouldn't be anyone sitting behind a curtain making sounds like a whip with a stick and a leather coat. That, in Acanceh, life isn't coated over with plastic reconstructions of pain and passion; there would be no Styrofoam rocks to throw.

Now, the blood of Jesus blotted the air of my tumbling

thoughts, joining in the alternated background of whitewashed wall and whip, then only whitewashed wall. There wasn't a gushing of blood, like in the movies, but drops, slow rivers, trickling streams. I had never seen anyone beaten or hit before, and it shocked me — the way flesh submits on a hot day, the way the curved back muscles clench and vibrate with the hit of the whip.

My screams emerged like strangers from a far off place, filtering through the thick air of that dusty afternoon. They came through a new voice I didn't recognize until the woman standing next to me joined in and, suddenly, we were both screaming. The youngness of my hands showed as they strained to



About Emily Plum-Güçlü, '00

Emily Lupita Plum-Güçlü is the owner of Emily Lupita Studio, an art & design studio based in the greater Atlanta, GA area. Her latest book, *The Artist's Alphabet: 26 Words to Encourage Creativity*, was published in 2013. Since studying abroad at Central, Emily Lupita has spent over seven years traveling across five continents, including three years in Japan and leading multiple study abroad programs to Mexico, Ecuador, Spain, and Turkey.

stop the whip in the tightened air, finding only emptiness accompanied by the dulled sound of pain and the void left by Jesus not screaming.

No one paid attention to my captivity, to my inability to free Jesus. I couldn't hear anyone except the woman next to me screaming, and she was doing it with such fluidity — in Spanish, in elongated, rehearsed prayers. My screams were all reflex, all cutting and short, all in English, all alien to the scene — not learned through passion, but from CPR training sessions, bad TV talk shows, and violent five dollar movies. I had never seen the way the knees bend as the body lunges forward, as the wrists fail, as the elbows scrape down the wall. I had never seen a body so exhausted, defeated against warm stone blocks, the crown of thorns clutching the skull. I had never seen a body retaliate with such strength, shoulders first, towards the air the whip has only just left, and only just come to again.

The crowd moved and I, a solitary grain inside it, resisted and failed against the kneading rhythm of pushing feet, pulsing and rising on this scorched day in Acanceh. As the momentum swayed, I tripped on the side of the hard-edged sidewalk and fell to the street, lying breathless among bare feet, leather sandals, and white tennis shoes. Standing, I saw wooden planks pass by, the smell of sweat and mangos and the chiles in small plastic bags going with them.

I followed Jesus too as the smell of the mangos and the chiles in small plastic bags

floated up and wrapped themselves around the graying branches of the tallest tree near the plaza.

From above, the birds and the caterpillars could see that Jesus had fallen, and the crowd couldn't stop, and he was trampled, the planks splintering between small chunks of road. I could only see the dirt cluttered on my glasses and the small fine hairs gathered on the neck of the man in front of me. The "Women of Jerusalem" came pushing through the crowd, the blue cloth of their robes stepped on and torn. Dust was in my nose, the corners under my ears, and the thin linings of my eyes. My hands and knees were bleeding from my fall although I didn't feel them as I also pushed my way through the crowd, blue robes encircling me.

Now, Jesus was lying flat on top of two logs nailed together in the shape of a cross. The Roman Guards tied Jesus' wrists and ankles to the ends of the cross then swayed and tilted it up to the sky, some pulling ropes and others pushing at the base of the cross. Jesus held onto the ropes, wriggling and balancing himself. I stared at Jesus then. He had his eyes closed against the sun, concentrating. The welts on his legs blazed out like flames, and I noticed how the ropes were rubbing into his wrists as the cross swayed. I discovered, then, that all the hundreds (thousands?) of times I'd walked past a statue or memorial or hanging cross, I had never seen the *person* there.

The crowd melted, restless, around and between me.

Behind us, just as we all turned to look, it seemed, Judas jumped with a rope around his neck from the tallest tree, and the birds, scattering from the branches and flying among us, burst the air into small droplets of mango and caterpillar and blood as I and everyone around me gasped so fully for breath that it felt as if the entire afternoon was sucked from the village. Dusk fell suddenly — Jesus still wriggling, Judas still hanging, and the camera crew standing in front of us still shouting at each other for not getting it all on film.

* * *

Olivia walked next to me on the street, the small plastic flags put up in the plaza during celebrations gathering in the folds of her blue robe. "Did you like the play? We all worked very hard on it." I was still walking somewhere without knowing where.

We came to a cement house with yellow curtains and a big table with embroidered napkins. As we stood in the doorway, the family noticed us above the sounds from the TV near the couch, and began talking to Olivia in excited voices about what a good job she had done playing the part of a "Woman of Jerusalem" in the Passion Play.

As they talked, I continued walking through the dining room and sat down on a stump just outside the back door. This was the cast party, I realized, recognizing the Roman Guards without their red and gold uniforms, and the women still in their blue robes. Lines of people came and chose fish from the buckets near my feet, the

sharp silver glare of fillet knives, and the dull, fleshy sound of filleting seeping from the *palapa* shed in the yard.

No tienes hambre? "Aren't you hungry?" Jesus asked, his blue baseball cap pushing down the curls caked in blood, a fresh change of clothes already sticking to him in the heat. He was sitting on an overturned bucket next to me, grinning as the green, molded smell of day-old fish and freshly scrambled eggs wound between us making the moment hazy and light-headed. "Here," Jesus said, "have a fish taco."

As I wrapped my fingers over the top of the tortilla, Jesus closed his palm around them. I knew he noticed the youngness of my hands, how the fresh cuts seeped out of lines made only from bending. He was young too, twenty or so — my age. But the youngness that I shared with him felt so distant —

hidden between the cracked folds of calluses already thick from years of work.

We sat and said nothing, pausing to breathe in the heat as the warm taco cooled, his rough palm and swelled fingers resting gently around mine. It seemed that with each breath we were somehow communicating through this touch at a time when complete exhaustion of emotions made intelligible only this, only touch.

I didn't know Jesus was so young. I didn't know Jesus wore a baseball cap and tennis shoes, and grinned! I sat in awe of the closeness I felt toward this person I had never met before — in awe as my vision shifted and I saw the dangling, crowned man in the plaza, the images from old paintings and movies, the stone-bodied statues, and the wooden heads of my hometown crosses all mix together, somehow painting themselves into the face of this young man leaning at

my side, looking at me in my bewilderment — looking up-close at *la gringa*, really seeing her, whoever she was (whoever I was) to him. I could not talk to him, lingering in this moment of touching hands in Acanceh on this fabulously hot and sordid day, but I know we spoke to each other in a sincere way that is, perhaps, best said with silence.

I watched him as he got up from the bucket, cringing from the now drying wounds, his strong arms curving handsomely at the shoulders, head bent and swaying to the music from the radio in the doorway. A group of his friends surrounded him, all talking at once, almost lifting him from the ground with their greetings. He looked back to me, and smiled. I never saw him again. He must've been from Acanceh or a nearby town; he seemed so familiar there, so comfortable, so known.

Gogarty's Circle

Jenny (Stahr) Fee



We were checking into the Four Corners Hostel, and Carey was stopping any passerby to ask where we could find a real Irish pub. So far we'd heard only rave reviews for dance clubs featuring American music, and from Australians in town for the big football match, not Dubliners. This was reason to panic. We had a single night to hear an authentic singing of "When Irish Eyes Are Smiling," one of our goals for this semester abroad.

We were both just enough Irish to feel an obligation. My great-grandma, Catherine Crowley, had grown up in County Cork. I'd never known her, but still tried to honor her memory by learning to make soda bread from scratch. I could also manage an impressive rendition of "Lord of the Dance." Carey couldn't trace her roots. She only had the word of her grandmother,

who spoke with a thick Bronx accent and took her poodle to the orthodontist. But Carey believed that, no matter how far removed we were, visiting the motherland would give us a "sense of coming home."

The desk clerk, a 20-something with cropped red hair and green eyes, was busy rummaging through a drawer for our room keys. Two minutes earlier he'd introduced himself by pointing to a framed photograph of a man with three chins. "What do you think of this poor fellow, our employee of the month?" I'd only stared, and Carey had leaned in closer, apparently inspecting the image for the punch line. "That was me only seven and three-quarter months ago. Who might have known all that blubber was hiding such a delicious specimen of a man?"

Now he held out the keys to us, grinning. "'Tis a fine thing to see the band playing at Gogarty's. You'll certainly get an earful of the old, grand stuff."

We raced up all four flights of stairs to stuff

our bags under our beds. As much as we wanted to shower and primp for a night on the town, we didn't have much night left. It was nearly ten o'clock, and pubs started to close at eleven. We galloped all six blocks to the O'Shea's district, named after Dublin's oldest pub. The air was cold, and I remember mentally cursing Carey for insisting that we shouldn't wear our coats, that we would stand out as tourists. But then I noticed how the River Liffey was glowing silver in the moonlight. Every few seconds, we would run through a crowd of drunken blokes shouting about football scores. I don't remember if they were celebrating or complaining — just the sound of the Irish lilt struck me as music in itself.

The first floor of Gogarty's Pub was just a mass of foreigners — funny how I heard Americans here and classified them along with Germans and Swedes. Their voices were barely audible above the same thumping techno music that I'd danced to in the clubs in London. I thought of Grandpa. I could picture the Celtic cross

hanging in his dining room, and his single photo of County Cork, taken by a niece of his when she'd studied abroad. Grandpa had never been there himself. Of course he hadn't expected me to trace my roots to a pub. What would he tell his golfing buddies, or the other choristers at St. John's? This place was too much like a disco, which was too much like America. This was heresy.

Carey grabbed my hand, pulling me along as she raced up a staircase. On the landing, we were greeted with a chalkboard announcement: "Tonight 9 to 2. The Famous Gogarty's Band." This room was much smaller than the one downstairs, and initially we just choked on cigarette smoke and squinted against the shadows. There was a crowd here, too, but locals every last one.

Even though it was nearly eleven on a Saturday, I got the impression that they'd all just stopped by here for a pint after work. Just across the threshold, a woman in her seventies wore a pink chenille housecoat, tilting a tall glass of Guinness to her lips. A teenager leaned against the bar, dressed in a gray school uniform, his eyes steady on the stage at the far end of the floor. He shifted his weight from one foot to the other, as though he were slow dancing without a partner, and sang along with the band's ballad rendition of Lynyrd Skynyrd's "Sweet Home Alabama."

Carey was already at the boy's side. She turned toward the bartender and asked his opinion on whether or not she looked like the type of girl who would enjoy a Guinness. She asked if she looked like

part of the circle at Gogarty's. When he didn't understand, she went on minus the hair-flipping and big grin. There was sudden desperation in her voice. "Could I be Irish?" she asked. "Would you see me across the room and think that I belonged?"

Didn't she hear the music? Didn't she recognize classic American southern rock? I couldn't fathom how she'd want to continue in this rip-off, this shenanigan. I was about to tell her so when the band changed tune without even breaking to play something completely unknown to me, deep voices drawn out over a staccato beat. The five men on stage reminded me of the bikers who used to gather for annual reunions at my neighbor Harv's house, all long hair and leather, and with tired, lined faces that my grandma would attribute to "fast living." They were perched on three-legged stools to form a complete circle. The lead singer and the harpist faced me. I had to push through the crowd to get a better view of the fiddler, piper, and drummer. They played a reel called "Finnegan's Wake," and the crowd would always join in for the chorus.

*Whack fol the darn O,
dance to your partner.
Whirl the floor, your trotters
shake;
Wasn't it the truth I told you
Lots of fun at Finnegan's wake!*

I saw old men and boys stomping out jigs on tabletops, and young couples holding each other by the elbows, twirling round till they fell to floor. Everyone

would sing, even if they didn't know the exact words, and the band would speed up the tempo towards the end, as though challenging the dancers to keep up. It was a building crescendo that dropped off to near silence after the word "wake."

Someone would always manage to fall behind in the lyrics while they concentrated on stepping in time. But that was part of the fun. It was expected, even hoped for. When this happened — and after every chorus it did — the song would be put on hold and the guilty party would have to climb on a chair and accept a dare from the crowd. There were shouts like, "Strip off your jumper, Nelly!" or "Tell us 'bout the time you fell in the Liffey!" I'd always try to guess which dare the person would choose — it ultimately depended on his or her degree of drunkenness. These breaks would last anywhere from a minute to a quarter-hour, and "Finnegan's Wake" must have lasted 40 minutes in all.

And to think one man, Tim Finnegan, could cause such a commotion. He was the subject of the song, a drunkard who had died from falling off a ladder. At his wake, his friends had started arguing about whether he made a handsome corpse, and a brawl had ensued, complete with fists and bottles of whiskey flying.

*Then Mickey Moloney ducked
his head
When a noggin of whiskey flew
at him,
It missed, and falling on the bed
The liquor scattered over Tim!
The corpse revives!*

About Jenny (Stahr) Fee, '02

Jenny (Stahr) Fee has worked as a newspaper reporter and now operates a small farm outside Indianola with her husband. This year she realized her travel dream of exploring the Nevada desert—an adventure she will of course write about.

*See how he raises!
Timothy rising from the bed,
Says, “Whirl your whiskey
around like blazes
Thanum an Dhul! Do you think
I’m dead?”*

Of course I couldn’t understand the full meaning — half the time the words were Gaelic, or else lost in a crash of drums and stomping feet. And then came the random Lynyrd Skynyrd or Elvis Presley tune in between sets. I couldn’t decide whether I was proud to hear “my type of music” getting such a response across the ocean, or disappointed that America had snaked its way into Irish pubs of all places. But I decided that “Free Bird” and “Love Me Tender” become Irish with the pipes

and fiddle in the background, a thick brogue echoing through the microphone. Two and a half hours later, I was practically on stage with the band, teetering on a stool of my own, gripping a glass of cider in one hand and a coaster in the other. It was a flimsy green rectangle with “Gogarty’s” imprinted across the bottom in gold, and practically stolen merchandise. That’s how it felt anyway, because I’d slid it from under another woman’s glass when she wasn’t looking. I probably could have found one lying idle somewhere else in the room, but I couldn’t chance it. I couldn’t think of a better souvenir. Carey joined me and, during an intermission before

the final set, asked if we shouldn’t buy a Gogarty’s CD, or take some pictures with the band. “I’m broke,” I told her, even though I had a dozen punts rattling in my purse. “Finnegan’s Wake” probably wouldn’t have sounded so impressive rattling from my stereo speakers. “Well, give me your camera then, and we’ll get some good shots.” But I’d lost it somewhere in the course of the evening — and was strangely glad for it. Had we taken a picture, the whole room would have seen and realized that we were outsiders. And — call it the luck of the Irish — that’s something we’d almost forgotten ourselves.



I was standing on a small ledge overlooking the Seine, about a mile from the Eiffel Tower, when I first thought about home. It was nearing dusk on my first day in Europe. We were waiting for nightfall because the Tower is covered by thousands of basketball-sized light bulbs. I’m not certain what the place was named, but I took it to be another old plaza and building turned museum and tourist trap. There were lavish fountains lining the interior of an immense, horseshoe-shaped drive leading to the staircases on either side of the smooth, gray wall where I stood. The sculptures were mainly unabashedly nude human forms with a few lions and horses obediently guarding the plaza. On both sides of the entry, there were gently sloping avenues about 200 yards long that

led up the hill. I stood on the 30-foot wall, watching boys play roller hockey below me, ignoring the trinket merchants hoping to sell me something that was most likely stolen. I looked up across the Seine to the Eiffel Tower, down at the roller hockey and finally back to the German family with the unruly children on my left, wondering if Hitler had anything against hockey or if Louis XIV would have been tossed off the tower rather than guillotined and knowing that De Gaulle never stood for unruly Germans. Dusk finally settled in; the last vestiges of day blazed from oranges and pinks behind me to be lost in the navy and purple behind the Eiffel Tower. It was the pink that reminded me of home. My great-grandmother had a pair of pink shoes in her closet that she never wore. She said it was because she had “walked the streets of Paris in them.” I looked at my shoes, smudged white and brand named, without a hint of pink, wondering if she had stood right at this place almost a half century earlier. We buried her in

On Smudging of Shoes

Matt Sieren

those shoes. She was beautiful and reserved and old when I met her at my birth in April of ‘78, and the same at her death in June of ‘93. I kissed her hand goodbye at the church, promising to see Paris. I was impetuous and arrogant at birth and no different at 15, when promises were called vows and considered sacred, especially when made to the dead. In Paris that day, looking up from my shoes, I knew that I didn’t want to be buried in them. The sky had darkened completely to shades of blue and the lights became visible. I nudged my friend Josie and pointed at the Tower. It was an amazing site and only the most jaded tourist would think otherwise. Two weeks later we returned to Paris for our flight and went back to the Tower for our last sunset in Europe. Beneath the Eiffel Tower, there’s an open, circular area about 50 feet in diameter filled with tiny white rocks. I knelt down and took out an empty film case, filled it with rocks and carefully put it in my coat pocket. Josie looked down at me. “For Anna,” I told her, “my great-

About Matt Sieren, ‘01

Matthew Sieren is currently between trips after having recently returned from wandering Europe and walking The Camino de Santiago. He works for Landmark Luggage in West Des Moines, Iowa helping people learn from his travelling triumphs and mishaps.

grandmother.”

A week later, I pulled into my grandparent’s new driveway for the first time. On that warm June morning in Ottumwa, Iowa, it was disorienting to drive past their old, two-story house, knowing that it wasn’t theirs anymore. They had lived there 42 years. The new house was smaller and rested on a couple of acres just outside of town. I walked in, finding my father, uncle and grandpa installing new floors in the kitchen and bathroom. I asked grandpa to take me to his mother’s grave. He nodded and went to get his coat without asking why. We were soon driving the back roads to the large cemetery at the north edge of town, talking about my backpacking trip through Europe. We passed through the cemetery in his truck, grinding across the universally narrow gravel roads that must be called for in the zoning code, and parked in the shade. I knelt down and pulled the film case out. I asked his permission to spread them out on her grave, telling him that since Paris had meant so much to her, the least it could do was give a

few rocks in return. He smiled very seriously and said, “That would be just fine.”

After I finished, he introduced me to the assorted relatives that were buried in the area: his uncles, his three siblings who died as infants and his father who had come through Ellis Island as a child. Noon came and with sweat beading from our arms, we decided it was time to go. We went back through town, passing the cemetery close to his old house. By chance, a hearse was crossing our lane to enter with dozens of cars following like thoughts chasing the past. Grandpa pulled over and turned on his headlights saying that he always stops because “It’s only right to, even if folks don’t nowadays.” It’s strange that six months later I’d be a pallbearer, riding in the second car of grandpa’s funeral procession, silently thanking the 30-something man in a rusty Ford Escort for pulling over and getting angry with the old woman in a white Cadillac who just couldn’t wait for us to pass. The hearse had to stop. It was three days before Christmas.

I lay in bed that night wondering where grandpa was and could only come up with the word “home.” I didn’t believe my house was home anymore than a spider believes one junction of silk in its web is home, and I wondered just what all the spaces between those junctions really were. That morning at the funeral I felt at home, just as I felt at home standing on the overlook in Paris and most importantly, as I feel anytime I take the first step on a trip to anyplace other than now. Maybe that’s where home is — in the open spaces. Maybe home is felt most acutely when another junction is added to our web so that we can get another perspective on those spaces in between. I do know that home isn’t a place where we bury ourselves like moles, nor is it a cradle to leave. It’s a place where roads begin and end; a place appreciated only when seen from those roads. Anna was right about her shoes and maybe I should reconsider. Smudged shoes have at least been somewhere.



Miroslav, an older Bosnian man with glasses and graying hair, sits in the corner listening to headphones. He repeats, “I’m sorry, she can’t come to the phone right now, I can take message? Can I take a message? Can I take message?” His pencil scratched quickly across the worksheet, and he looked up at me and waved.

“Good morning Sarah.”

“Good morning Miroslav, *dobro jutro*.”

A Monday morning at the *Des Moines Register* Learning Center. Eight students from the English as a Second Language class sit around two tables, working out of workbooks and practicing conversation. Lola, a Mexican woman, makes a poster of different types of verbs to hang on the wall next to the

Learning a Language

Sarah Joynt

map of the world. Pushpins stuck into the map indicate everyone’s home countries, Bosnia, Mexico, Senegal, Cambodia, El Salvador. On the chalkboard, someone has been practicing writing greetings. “Hello. Nice to meet you. How are you? Good morning.”

We spend most of the morning talking about what it was like when the students first arrived in the United States. Kristine, the teacher I volunteer for, asked me to plan some lessons for a new class that she was teaching through the Bureau of Refugee Services. The class will be for “beginning beginners,” refugees just arriving without any English at all. I ask the students for help.

“How many of you knew English before you came here? Did what you learned help you when you got here?” About half of the students raised their hands.

Refija answers, “When I came here, I only remember how to say, I would like to buy new car.” She is studying English so she can become a translator for other Bosnian refugees.

“I study English for five

years in school,” says Lola. “But when I come here, I remember... nada... nothing.”

“I knew how to say, ‘would you like to grab a bite sometime?’” says Refik, pushing his dark hair off his forehead. It’s still the only thing he can say perfectly. Everyone laughed, knowing most of his English came from watching movies listening to conversations at the restaurant where he worked.

“What are some of the things new refugees need to learn first? When they don’t know any English yet?”

“How to find jobs and get apartments,” answered Refija.

“How go to the grocery and how take the bus,” said Lola.

“Anything. Hello. How are you, my name is Refik.”

We talked for most of the morning, and as I sat there, I realized that I hardly noticed anyone’s accents. I tried to remember the first few weeks of tutoring before I understood the strange blend of English that we speak. It’s a mix that probably only works in this room, with some common Spanish and Bosnian words that no one really understands, but that

About Sarah Joynt, ‘00

After traveling Europe and Asia, and living in strange, exotic lands such as Japan, Pittsburgh, and Chicago, Sarah Joynt is the new Teen Librarian at the Rochester, MN Public Library. When she’s not doing cool stuff with teens in the library, you can find her reading, daydreaming about her next literary-themed vacation, or exploring southeast Minnesota with her dog, Russet.

are part of our everyday language. Approximations really, and I wonder if I even use the words correctly, but my students smile when I greet them, “*Hola, dobro jutro*” and tell me that I am doing it right.

Sometimes I feel slightly guilty when I say “good morning” in Bosnian or use my basic Spanish to explain a word. Kristine wants the students to speak English as much as they can, and I wonder if I am somehow encouraging them not to use what they are learning. But at the same time, I feel like they appreciate effort, even if it isn’t the “right” thing to do, even if I do make mistakes.

I remember my first day tutoring at the Learning Center. The students came with questions prepared for me as part of their conversation class. Someone asked me to tell them about studying in Wales. They wanted to know if I had to learn a new language, and if it was hard. I told them that everyone in Wales speaks English, but only about 30 percent of the population speaks Welsh, so I didn’t really have to learn much Welsh when I studied there. They were stunned. How could people who have lived in a country their whole lives not understand their own language? I told them about visiting a Welsh school near England’s border. The students have one hour of Welsh instruction a week, and for most students, that’s all they ever hear.

“We reviewed greetings while I was there. Would you like to know how to say good morning in Welsh? *Bore da*,

Elena. *Bore da*, Refik.”

“*Bore da*,” the class repeated.

“But why don’t they speak Welsh?”

I wanted to have a nice way to explain that the English wanted to be able to communicate with their neighbors to the West, and Welsh is a tough language to learn, so they wanted the Welsh to learn English. But the real situation is more about conquest. The Celtic people who originally lived in Wales were conquered by the Romans, and were invaded by the Normans and the Britons. Wales hasn’t been under its own rule since the 13th century when England took over. Somehow the Welsh were able to keep their language until the late 19th century, when the English decided the Welsh had too much power. The English were afraid the Welsh might want to take control of their country again, like the Irish were trying to do. Maybe there wasn’t a nice way to say it after all. Students caught speaking Welsh in class were beaten, and had to wear a heavy wooden sign around their neck as an example to other students. The “Welsh Not.” The only place a person could speak Welsh and not be punished was in the home. But for some people, it was more important to fit in to society and get a good job, and so they stopped speaking the language all together. Native Welsh speakers see non-Welsh speakers as people who have forgotten the most important part of their culture. For native Welsh speakers the language is the culture, and the most important part of their identity.

I noticed some of the students nodding when I mentioned Welsh becoming the language of the home. I asked the students what they thought. Lola said she only spoke to her children in Spanish, even though they were learning in English at school. “The kids already forget sometimes,” she said. “They don’t remember the words. But they have to practice. When they speak with their grandparents, they don’t know any English. That’s good, I think.”

“Sarah, what word means a ship and a hobby?” asks Morlu, a Senegalese woman who was a teacher in her home country and now works as a custodian at the mall. “It’s for the vocabulary. For my GED.”

At least once a day someone asks me a question about English that I didn’t know how to answer. Why do we use *do* when asking a question? How do tag questions work? (You understand them, don’t you?) I make up answers, “do helps let people know you’re asking a question.” I make up answers that didn’t make sense. “Tag questions are used when you want to suggest to someone that they should answer the way you state it in the question.” I don’t want them to know that I don’t know. I hate answering the vocabulary questions the most. There are so many words like “craft” (a ship or a hobby) that I use every day that I can’t even define. And I’m supposed to be the expert on English, right?

I didn’t know I wasn’t an expert before I started tutoring this past winter. I’ve spoken

English all of my life; I felt sure that I could explain it to others too. But, I have realized that there are a lot of rules for me to learn, and I am much less confident.

The letter sits half-buried on my desk. I can see only the return address and the first sentence peeking out from under a pile of papers. “Dear Ms. Joynt, It is with pleasure that I inform you that you have been selected as a participant in the Year 2000 Japan Exchange and Teaching Program.”

Japan. To teach English. A friend of mine accepted a position with the Peace Corps last week. She will teach English in Romania for two years. Another friend has applied to teach English in the Czech Republic, and another has applied to teach in North Africa.

I have mixed feelings when I tell people my plans for next year. Without fail, when I tell someone I will spend a year in Japan, they ask, “How much Japanese do you know?” Then I have to lower my head and shrug my shoulders and smile sheepishly before answering, “Well, none.”

And the next question is always, “Well, why do you want to go then?” I want to spend time learning a different culture, something really different. I want to see a new part of the world, and I want to feel that nervous, excited, sick feeling of not having any idea what exactly is going to happen next. But I have never studied Japanese,

and my knowledge of life in Japan is very limited, so I make sure to tell them that I think the best way to learn something new is to completely immerse yourself in it. I think that is as much to reassure me as it is for them because my explanation doesn’t always seem adequate.

Something else strange happens when I tell people my plans to go to Japan. Almost everyone I have spoken with has known someone, a friend, a sibling, a third cousin, who has gone to Japan to teach English. Something about this bothers me, even though I am about to accept a position doing the same thing. I think of the thousands of fresh college graduates boarding planes in early summer bound for Japan and armed with English. Sometimes I worry that we are doing something that we shouldn’t be doing. I remind myself that the Japanese government runs the program, and it’s different from English-speakers forcing their language onto others, but I still worry.

The JET program gives Japanese students a great opportunity to learn English from a native speaker. And I wonder why the United States doesn’t have anything like it in its school systems. Learning languages is important. Learning any language helps you to have a better understanding of people, and learning it from a native speaker is probably the best

way. What worries me is my arrogance. Our arrogance. We don’t have to know any Japanese in order to teach English in Japan. Part of me knows that I will probably be able to survive without much Japanese at all. I plan on learning while I’m there, but do other people go with the same attitude that I have, or do they go to teach English because people from other cultures should know English as opposed to any other language?

I made the announcement to a class of five Bosnians. They wanted to know my plans after I leave school. “In July, I will go to Japan to teach English for a year.”

Kristine was excited. “My brother taught English in Japan. He married a Japanese woman, and they live in Chicago. I know one sentence in Japanese. I’ll teach it to you. She drew a set of lines on the green chalkboard in purple chalk. “*Bidama o shmashyo*. Would you like to play marbles?”

A murmur went around the table, and the voices grew louder and more excited until everyone was talking at the same time. They were gesturing and laughing and looking at me. “English? Please? I can’t understand.”

Refija, looked at me and laughed. “They are saying you are one of us now. You will be when you go Japan. Hello my name is Sarah, how are you. Would you like to play marbles?” And she was right, so I laughed too.

Mother Mari

Jennifer (Kreinbring) Stefanowicz



Snorting for air, Stacey and I finally wobbled into the apartment building. I prodded the back of her sweaty Gap T-shirt as a signal to rest. The three miles we had just hiked from the Alhambra had trampled our idealized visions of Spain. Mari had refused to drive us to see “foreign” architecture, maintaining that she would not support *los mendigos sucios* (“dirty beggars”) and insisting that she could not bear their stench. If we wanted to check out a bull fight, however, she would be *encantada* to accompany us.

We leaned against the urine-scented walls of mail boxes for a few minutes, breathing through our mouths. The Spaniards seemed enthralled with peeing on the walls of cathedrals, walls of the sacred Alhambra, or the outside walls of Porta-

About Jennifer (Kreinbring) Stefanowicz, '02

Jen (Kreinbring) Stefanowicz lives in Connecticut along the shoreline where she teaches high school English and Spanish. She and her husband are both Spanish teachers, and spend their summers traveling as much as possible (ideally to Spanish-speaking destinations).

potties. It even reeked of piss inside the Metro. Although public restrooms beckoned them from the street corners, the Spaniards preferred this tomat method of marking their territory.

We tramped up the four flights of stairs and collapsed at the door to our apartment, but we discovered that we weren’t intelligent enough to open it.

“*Entra!*” Mari bellowed from behind the door. Once again, Stacey rammed the dungeon-style key in the lock. It squeaked and flipped over. Still locked.

“So far, Spain *muy sucks*,” Stacey huffed. I hunched down to eye-level with the lock, attempting to discover why the key Mari had given us wouldn’t open the door. The door frame, as if mocking us, was in the shape of a keyhole. Stacey jiggled the key furiously, her blond ponytail swishing.

We had arrived yesterday and spent three and a half “practicing” unlocking the door, with Mother Mari commanding us. “*Doblela! Otra vez! A la izquierda! No, no!*” We flipped it to the left twice

and then to the right, trying to release the five deadbolts. Mari screeched obscenities, unable to comprehend why this was so difficult.

“*Hay un problema?*” Mari squealed from behind the door. For the past seven minutes, we had been assuring her that there was no problem. We were great liars. She hovered on the other side listening to the key flip uselessly in the lock, humming and waiting for us to confess our idiocy.

“*Mis chicas estupidas!*” she finally flung open the door grinning, giving us a kiss on each cheek and wrapping her flabby arms around us in a polite hug. She was five foot two and 140 pounds, a typical Andalusian mother if she hadn’t dyed her hair a blinding copper red. “*Cómo estáis?*” She snatched our coats and scurried down the hall without waiting for a response. Her red hair sparkled in the glow of the Virgin’s candles lighting the hall.

“Did she just call us stupid?” Stacey hissed, clenching my elbow. Her blue eyes glared after the bobbing red halo.



Mari screamed something unintelligible and hustled back to the kitchen with a smile. If we had known more Spanish, we probably would have been offended. “*Vamonos! Vamonos!*” She herded us forward, still babbling in Spanish. As she peered at us, her eyes accented by layers of mascara and purple eye shadow, glinted with the flames of the candles.

“*Quieres conocer a El Abuelo?*” she inquired, shoving us into a small room at the end of the house. No one had mentioned that there was a grandfather yesterday.

“Okay,” I agreed. I would learn later that responses weren’t necessary; Mari usually had already decided and her “questions” were merely informing us of what we were going to do. I wondered why no one had mentioned The Grandfather yesterday.

“*Aquí está El Abuelo,*” she pronounced, pointing at him as if we weren’t intelligent enough to see that he was the only person in the room. We peered into the dark room, illuminated only by *Quién Quiere Ser un Millonario* (Who Wants to Be a Millionaire) on the television. He was crumpled in a green recliner, a ball of purple and wrinkled flesh with a nodding head. A golf ball-sized goiter jutted from his neck. He glanced at us, licked his crusty lips, and spat on the mauve carpet.

“*Hola, abuelo,*” I began, screaming so he could hear. “*Soy Jessie—*”

“*Estupida, es catatonico,*” Mari shouted, “*No puede oír ni hablar.*” He was senile. She slapped my head lightly and laughed before waddling off down the hall again.

“Why did she introduce us to him if he can’t hear or talk?” I

muttered to Stacey. (Mari didn’t speak English.)

“She called you stupid,” Stacey reminded me. “*No habléis en inglés!*” Mari reprimanded from the hall. “*Después de cenar, váis a practicar mis con las Haves!*” she shouted, shaking the keys and laughing.

“*Gordita, venid a comer.*” I poked my head from under the four quilts on my bed, vaguely aware that someone was insulting me. I couldn’t figure out why “mom” was yelling for “the little fat one.” The yellow quilts on Stacey’s bed were neatly folded into triangles and stacked at the foot. “Ass-kisser,” I thought, pulling my covers back over my tangled hair.

I had stayed up late with Stacey, convincing her that Mari was “like an ice cream cone dipped in chocolate coating—only hard on the outside.” It was apparently a poor metaphor.

Stacey merely sobbed harder, thinking of how cold Mari must be on the inside. She was a sophomore in college, two years behind me, and was already panicking over how she missed her mami’s chocolate-covered toast and how Mari would probably never buy Nutella chocolate spread for her.

Mari kept hollering for the little fat one, so I finally decided to haul myself out of bed and trudged out to the table for breakfast. “*Buenos dias,*” she smiled, kissing both cheeks. She pinched my tummy roll and handed me an orange. “*Come fruta.*” Eat fruit. I sat at the tiny table and peeled the orange while Mari scuttled from the stove to the cupboard, making herself *café con leche*. She was dressed in black from from her lacy shawl to her black panty hose covered toes. I guessed she was headed to mass. She finally plopped down beside me, still smiling. For as cruel as she was, she sure smiled a lot.

“*Que piensas de Franco?*” I blurted, eager to make intelligent conversation and win her over. The only history I knew of Spain was a little about

their former dictator, the brutal Franco.

“*Pues, era un lider magnifico,*” she declared, her eyes gazing upward in reverence. I laughed. She whacked me with her rosary and began yelling that few people talk about how great Franco truly was. Not only did he bring the sin-ravaged country back to the Catholic Church, but he also lowered the crime rate. “*Voy a misa,*” she mumbled at last, slipping into her black shoes and snatching the rosary off the table.

As Mari banged out the door and locked one, two, three, four, five of the deadbolts, I heard mews. I flipped open the locks (much easier from the inside) and peeked into the hallway just as Mari slipped into the elevator. Stacey was knotted up in a corner, hiccup-crying.

“She locked me out of the apartment!” she sniffed. “She said I couldn’t eat until I figured out how to unlock the f****g door!”

* * *

“*Toma,*” Mari ordered, handing me a plate of fried bananas. I placed it neatly on my orange placement. She grinned

at me with the “Eh, you’re all right, I guess” look. After six days, I’d gotten used to her eccentric opinions on Mad Cow Disease (it’s a trick conceived by pork producers), women, and America. She swore that Americans can buy guns at any QuikTrip and they usually let their three-year-olds play with Uzis and hand grenades.

She sat down beside me in front of the black and white television, pumping up the volume and changing it to channel 17 to watch *The Simpsons*. We stared at Bart and Homer wandering into the woods and little Maggie getting snatched by a black bear because no one cared enough to watch out for her. Mari sighed. Better than any *48 Hours* piece, *The Simpsons* revealed the true American way of life. I nodded my head and imitated a sigh.

Stacey slunk to our room and yanked her journal out of her backpack, growling about “getting stuck with a red-haired wacko” and whining that the Spaniards were vulgar....



We crossed Embankment Bridge like Londoners. It seemed even when they were strolling, something inside them whispered, “go, go, go” and at some point during the last four months that voice had somehow found its way into us, like a virus or the words “pop in.” We suddenly found ourselves walking fast and merging effortlessly, phrases like “straightaway” and “bloody” falling out of our mouths and appearing in our dialogue like they had always been ours to keep. And that’s what I am most afraid of about going home. What can I keep? How much of London is actually mine and how much of it must I return or barter to go home?

I cross the Thames with Westminster and Parliament behind me and try to make my eyes bigger, like a traveler’s version of Little Red Riding Hood. I want to see it all, to breathe it and touch

it and taste London in the bittersweet way that people have when it is the last time for anything. The city is still gray despite the sunshine. Sunshine at home seems solid. It is not to be questioned. Sunshine is yellow and present and expected, but in London it is fragile, translucent. Sun is always to be interrogated and suspected of deceit. Sunshine in London seems almost mean, like a lover who will inevitably leave again. I can never really enjoy the rare sunny moment because you are never allowed to relax in it, cannot enjoy it, ironically, because you are supposed to enjoy it so much.

It is our final night in London. We, the roomers in the Vandon House, are celebrating by having a cruise down the Thames in a lovely little boat. There is a glow that surrounds us, dressed in clothes that we thought would reflect our new knowledge,

our accomplishment of surviving. And I feel somehow like the narrator to our collective story. I feel like I can see past this

Last Night

Sara (Richardson) Perez

night, can see this is Chapter 16–The chapter in which The Vandon House Residents Have A Fancy Night Out. We are reaching the end of being outsiders to the city but also the end of belonging to each other.

We are all so young. Even though we have learned that it is best to avoid Victoria Station any time between 3:00 and 7:00. We have learned the secrets of shopping at Sainsbury’s, of Crumble Corner and Caramel Surprise. We have booked trips and ridden night trains through the Alps. We don’t hesitate pushing our tube pass through the machine; we can even sneak others into the station. (The true test of knowing a city is to be able to be delinquent in it.) We have learned that sometimes Dads die. And that our passports get lost. And that peanut butter here is horrible. I have learned that children are children despite their location on the globe. We have discovered that cruelty and kindness both exist in this city and within ourselves.

I have walked past a man on the sidewalk by the Easy

About Sarah (Richardson) Perez, ‘02

Sara (Richardson) Perez lives in Des Moines, IA and teaches literature and creative writing at Iowa State, GrandView College and Simpson College.

Everything nearly everyday and have not looked in his eyes one time. “Spare some change, miss.” He has a brown dog and I feel sorry for it every time. And I wonder what kind of person I am to walk by the man and feel sorry for the dog. We have learned to walk past the man shouting Bible verses wearing a suit and tie in the walkway between Palace Road and Victoria Street. I have trained myself to not even hear. His words hit my ear and fall, as if the Bible from this man, sweating and desperate, is simply crazy. I have learned to not see him as a Christian, have done my best to blur or erase any similarity to me, have forgotten our words are the same. We have learned the meaning of home, so much larger in its absence.

And now we will return, a plane will coast in and give us back. Our lives will continue, heading in directions that none of us expect in this moment. I look around the room and at my “fellow students.” As the narrator I know that she will marry the wrong man completely and

that he will be an insurance salesman, which he will hate with more passion than he feels for anything else at all. She will write things that she never shows anyone, will keep the 2010 Pulitzer Prize book in the bottom of the third drawer of her desk. He will gain weight. She will never make it to New York. He will become depressed and ponder jumping off anything at all. She will have four beautiful children and have married exactly the right person at the right time. He will be rich. She will always try to be someone else and he will be sorry, not for anything in particular, just sorry.

We are still young enough to believe that all that’s ahead of us is golden. We do not really believe in odds or statistics. Would never believe that five of us will get cancer and two-thirds of us will get a divorce. In Chapter 16 no one declares anything life changing, it is not revealed why he no longer loves her or what it is she’ll never tell. We sing loudly and eat British food that we still only pretend to like. We drink excessively

and sit much closer than necessary and we laugh. And at this part of the story no one likes the narrator at all.

I stand alone on the front deck of the boat and watch as we pass under the London Bridge. I can hear the music inside and my friends’ voices, singing loudly and off key, land softly on my ear from inside the boat. The wind blows my red wrap off my shoulder and my hair into my eyes. I can count the stars I can see here on one hand but tomorrow I’ll have a sky full of stars and none of London. This moment is clear and heavy, so much weight on remembering this exactly before everything changes and ends. I can hear footsteps behind me and turn to smile. I am led onto the dance floor into the mass of bumping singing people. All of our voices golden, our feet golden, our glances full of all things gold, for now. And as I start to sing along, the narrator rests the pen softly on the paper and turns out the light.



30-April-2003

Sarah (Vander Linden) Zagami



Waiting in line for tickets at the Leiden train station, Ayesha, Ethan, and I whisper excitedly, trying to keep our voices low so that our English doesn't attract attention. It's no use. Ethan's wearing Nike tennis shoes, jeans, and a windbreaker; surely they've already labeled us. Americans.

Leiden Centraal is busy this morning, and our line is hardly moving. Dutchmen with briefcases, university students with backpacks, none of them are wearing tennis shoes. Although it's the end of April and 75 degrees outside, the Dutch are still wearing dark colors, mostly black and brown, and some of them still have their winter coats on. The train conductors must be sweltering as they pace the length of the station in their royal blue sports

About Sarah (Vander Linden) Zagami, '04

Sarah (Vander Linden) Zagami lives in Antananarivo, Madagascar with her husband and three children. In addition to caring for her children, she enjoys traveling the country with her husband providing member care for their 40 colleagues serving with Africa Inland Mission throughout the island.

coats with the gold train insignia. Finally, it's my turn to approach the counter. "*Een dagretour Deventer alstublieft*—one round-trip Deventer please," I say with a smile and much too much enthusiasm. "Ahh...you're going to see the Queen!" the ticket man chuckles in clear English. He's got us pegged—a trio of American students with high hopes of meeting the Queen of the Netherlands. The dream itself isn't so far-fetched. After all, it's *Koninginnedag*, the Queen's birthday, and she's visiting Deventer this year.

Our professors told us we could see Queen Beatrix if we went to Deventer; so we're on our way. Of course, none of them will be going. They'll watch it on TV with their families and go out shopping at the flea markets afterwards.

My professor, Oscar van den Wijngaard, explained, "The cameras can get closer to the Queen than I ever could, and this way I can watch celebrations in multiple cities at once." But since we only have one chance to see the Queen, he encourages us to make the trip to Deventer.

Except for the brief clip on the evening news, my Dutch flatmates won't watch the procession. When I told them of my plans to see the Queen and showed them the Internet printout with the Queen's schedule for the day and a list of festivities in Deventer, they laughed. They couldn't believe I was putting so much effort into going to see the Queen. Most of them had never seen the Queen and if they had, they weren't very enthusiastic about it. To them the monarchy is useless; a tradition that has lost its significance. As far as they're concerned, the monarchy is no longer of any value to the political well being of the country. Nonetheless they were quite helpful, translating words I didn't understand on the website and identifying the trains I would need to take to arrive in Deventer on time.

On *Koninginnedag* there are the flea markets in every city across the country as well as many smaller parties and plenty of live music. It's become a tradition for people to clean out their houses and sell whatever they don't want on the street. I'm told

you used to be able to get a genuine Delft plate for only a couple of guilders on Queen's Day, but bargains like that are hard to come by now. Most of what you'll find for sale is junk. But it's still popular to shop the flea markets. The Dutch are proud of being cheap; they even brag about it. It's what they're known for.

My flatmates invited me to stay in Leiden to shop at the markets there while my American friends begged me to go to Amsterdam with them. Amsterdam is the liveliest place to be on *Koninginnedag*. It's a drunken fest with broken beer bottles, litter, and vomit coating the streets. The party continues all day and into the night. Oftentimes you end up stuck in Amsterdam when the trains stop running because of danger caused by carousing, vandalism, and the pulling of alarms. A couple of years ago, tear gas had to be used when the crowds outside of Amsterdam Centraal Station became violent. While this all sounded quite exciting, being stuck in Amsterdam with a bunch of drunks didn't appeal to me nearly as much as seeing the Queen of the Netherlands parade through Deventer. Wasn't the holiday more about heritage and culture than drunken parties?

Like the Fourth of July in the United States, the real meaning of the holiday seems to get lost in hustle and bustle of unrelated activities. Kiddie carnivals and firecrackers have about as much to do with America's independence as flea markets and drunken parties have to do with the Queen of the Netherlands. Mostly it's about having a

good time; remembering your heritage is secondary.

On the train to Deventer nearly everyone is wearing orange in honor of the House of Willem Orange who was the first king of the Netherlands. One lanky young man has his wooden shoes on! This is only the second time I've seen wooden shoes in Holland. The other pair were on the feet of a farmer who had come into Leiden to do his shopping (where I come from, wooden shoes are worn every May for our own Dutch festival, a celebration of a rich Dutch heritage).

While April 30th is not actually Queen Beatrix's birthday, she designated it as Queen's Day in honor of her mother, Queen Juliana, as her own birthday is in January when it is much too cold for a street party. It seems everyone is enjoying the time off work to celebrate this national holiday. These days it is more a celebration of national identity rather than paying respects to the monarch, but there are still plenty of people on their way to Deventer to honor the Queen. The train is much louder than usual with people hollering back and forth, engaging in lively conversation. Typically there is a low murmur, but now there is nearly a roar.

After slowly making our way around a toppled freight train near Apeldoorn, we arrive in Deventer. I'm going to see the Queen! We don't have a Queen in the United States, but even if we did, the country is so large I would never catch a glimpse of her. Even though I've learned a little about the monarchy

during my classes in Leiden, I'm still not sure I understand why they have a Queen, and some of my professors don't understand either. It seems to be a tradition more than anything else. At least, that's what my professors tell me. Like most Dutch citizens, they have differing opinions on whether or not the Queen is really necessary. After all, the Prime Minister and parliament make most of the decisions for the country though the Queen is the one who actually signs the laws into effect. She also chooses the *formateur* who is in charge of forming a new government, but outside influence is said to have a great effect on this decision. Regardless of the role the present-day monarchy plays in the Netherlands, this celebration is an important part of their history, and I'm happy to be a part of it.

We follow the crowd as it moves through the station and out into the streets of Deventer. We don't know where the festivities are but don't have to. Just follow the throngs of people. There's a parade going on with a band blaring and some red costumed animal—a dragon maybe? Following close behind are dancers in shimmering spandex suits. I don't have any idea what this has to do with the Queen, but they are having so much fun, I can't stop smiling. We keep pushing through the crowd until we can't go any further. Apparently this is the route the Queen and the royal family will be taking through town. We maneuver through the swarm of people, pressing closer to the street. I keep my eyes on Ayesha's back, afraid

I might lose her in the masses. A few minutes later we’re at a standstill with nothing to do but wait—wait for the Queen. There’s a little boy next to me atop his father’s shoulders waving the red, white, and blue striped flag of the Netherlands. Nearby is a teenage girl, perched on a ladder with a crown on her head and orange balloons all around. She must have a perfect view of the parade route, but I’m on my tiptoes, straining to see over the people ahead of me.

An hour and 15 minutes later, we’re still waiting, so close together we can hardly move. A petite, blonde girl in front of me asks for water; she looks dizzy and flushed. Ayesha offers her water bottle just as the girl starts to faint. A man reaches out to steady her then ushers her out of the crowd. A short, fat man elbows me in the back as he vies for the empty space. I’m pushing back, perturbed by his assertiveness, afraid of

being forced farther back from the street.

The sun goes behind the clouds, and it starts to rain. I brought my umbrella but can’t move enough to get it out of my bag, much less put it up. We’re packed in like sardines, but I find it humorous. I wink at Ayesha as the rain begins to fall harder. She smiles back. A little while later, a Dutch chorus—a birthday wish for the Queen—is started and spreads through the multitude of people. This must mean she’s getting closer. I try to sing along but am having difficulty understanding the song. Smiling at the little boy next to me, who knows all the words by heart, I hum along. The rhythm is slow and steady, patriotic. It starts to pour. I’ve got my camera ready but am trying to keep it dry. The people behind me are shouting for folks to put their umbrellas away— *Paraplu weg! Paraplu weg!*

Oh—the royal family is here! Is that Queen Beatrix in

the red hat? I raise my camera in the air, and snap—hoping for the best! She’s right by the crown prince—a handsome young man who looks about as Dutch as they come, blonde hair, blue eyes, tall and lean. In less than five minutes the procession is over, but I’ve seen the Queen! Ayesha and Ethan weren’t so lucky; they lost her in the crowd. The rain hasn’t let up; it’s coursing down my face. The three of us look at each other, dripping and laughing. We’re wet and shivering, but it’s been worth every minute.

As we turn back towards the train station, Ayesha grabs my arm and pulls me beneath her umbrella, pointing at the orange inflatable crowns for sale inside a shop. For a euro apiece, we can’t help but buy one. Ethan just shakes his head, embarrassed. On the train platform, Ayesha and I blow up the crowns, and crown ourselves Dutch citizens for the day.

Pearls

Marlene (Heider) Neal



*I fear to cease, even knowing that at
the hour of my death my daughters
will
absorb me, even knowing they will
carry
me about forever [...]*

*Like those old pear-shaped Russian
dolls that open at the middle to
reveal
another and another, down to the
pea-sized, irreducible minim, may
we carry our mothers forth in our
bellies.
- Maxine W. Kumin*

Yesterday was All Saints’ Day. The first two days of November are full of mystery in the customs of my church. My home country, Austria, used to be Catholic heart and soul, as they say, and I was of course christened Catholic, as is right and proper. All Saints’ Day to me means graveyards, candles, and tranquil cold air. In a weird and wonderful tradition the members of

my town Neusiedl am See gather in the cemetery to celebrate a mass. Then everyone moves back to the graves of their families to light candles and pray.

As I child I loved this procession: the way the cemetery was scary at dusk, the thousand red candles, the wax that messed up my gloves. I stood at the grave of my dad’s family, trying to picture my grandpa. I stood at the grave of mom’s family, thinking about her grandparents who both died young. I had loved no one under those flagstones.

Thursdays are the worst and the best days of my week as a language assistant at a college in Iowa. Worst, because they are full of work until four o’clock - best, because my weekend starts then. In such high spirits I returned to my room one Thursday in September to see that my parents had called me. I called back immediately and greeted my dad happily, ready to chat right away. But he just said, “Marlene—Grandma,

today she....” I held my breath. I knew what had happened. Still, I had to hear it; I had to hear my dad say it, so that it would be true. And he did.

Motionless I looked at the top drawer of my wooden desk. In it was a white leather pouch containing a pearl necklace. I stared at the drawer; then I got up and lit the only candle in my room - “Light a candle for Grandma,” my dad told me on the phone. “Everyone in our family dies on a Thursday,” my mom had said. So the funeral will be on Saturday. “There’s no need for you to come home,” my dad added; there’s not enough time anyway, I thought. I sat on the carpeted floor of my dorm room and lit the candle, even though this is not allowed according to campus rules. Then I stared at the little flickering flame. I sat there in tears, thousands of miles away from home where there was so much pain and grief right now. My fingers touched the carpet, my hands pressing on it hard. I wished to sink into it, I wanted the ground to open and swallow me. Take me away from here, I cried to

About Marlene (Heider) Neal, ‘07

Marlene (Heider) Neal teaches English and history to students aged 10-19 in Vienna. She and her husband Toby, whom she met at Central, travelled the Balkans last summer. She was a German Language Assistant during the 2006-7 academic year.

the candle. Take me home.

The penultimate time I met my grandma we took a little walk by the lake; it was a warm day and I drove us out to the strand. We entered the beach at a place we had never been before and got lost on the camping site there. I was embarrassed as I felt responsible for the success of our little trip, and it had not turned out as planned. My grandma seemed to have a clear mind that afternoon and knew exactly what was going on. She had always taken a keen interest in telling people what to do (her sons called her “The Sheriff”) and so she directed me this way and that, until we finally found the lakeshore by team work.

The last time I saw her, a few weeks before I left for America, I try to blot out. From the moment I stepped into her room I knew that this was not a good day for her; her smile was absent and blank. During this visit I fully realized the degree of nursing my grandma already needed, how helpless she sometimes was, the everyday things she was unable to do herself. It hurt me especially to see that she could not go to the bathroom by herself any longer. It was not easy to say good-bye—the idea that we would never meet again was in the back of my head. I looked at her and tried to figure out how to say farewell.

“So you’re going to America?” she asked. “You have to visit our relatives there!” I was going to Iowa and my grandma’s great-cousin lives in Seattle. I laughed. Then I kissed her on the cheeks, as always, and

took my leave. Five years ago, at Christmas, my grandma Helene was still living in her own apartment down the road from our house. We went over to celebrate and exchange presents; she had the same gift for every one of her ten granddaughters: a beautiful pearl necklace, cold, shiny, precious.

I hold it in my hands right now and think about her.

“This is going to be the last present I will ever give you,” my grandma said. And it really was, no more gifts at birthdays, no more at Christmas. Her Alzheimer’s would get worse over the years and she would not recognize us anymore. Until the end my grandma always somehow realized that I was related to her; I look like her side of the family: “You’re my cousin, aren’t you?” she would ask.

Maybe she already felt that it was hard remembering birthdays and names when she gave us the necklaces. It seemed like she wanted to arrange a final exceptional present for us that we would always keep close to the heart. A gift that we would one day show to our own granddaughter and say, “Look, this was a present from my grandma Helene. She was a diligent woman who brought up five children although her husband died early. I think that she wanted me to give this necklace to you one day.”

When my friends came into my dorm room I must have looked very strange, dressed in black, pressing pearls in my hand, sitting in the middle of the room, staring at a candle. “We will go to church

with you on Sunday,” they said and organized that we would go together with our “mom” from the International Students’ office, Peg, who cares about us at all times. My friends calmed me down, but I still slept very badly that night, full of these memories in the dim light of my room.

“Grandma said good-bye to me in my dreams at dawn,” my dad declared over the phone the next day, “I felt it.” He sent me an e-mail with the obituary announcement that was hanging in shop windows, at the church, and in every living room of our extended family right now. These announcements fix the certainty of death for me, and here it was, simple, white and black—*Helene Heider, geb. Mihalek, ist von uns gegangen. In defer Trauer, Liebe und Dankbarkeit ihre Kinder im Namen aller Verwandten.* Helene Heider, born Mihalek, has passed away. In deep sorrow, love and gratefulness: signed her children, in the name of all relatives.

On Sunday we went to church. I was amazed by the fact that all my Latino friends were absolutely on time, ready to go at exactly the minute we had agreed on. Smilingly I assured them that I was feeling a lot better and casually I talked to Peg about the Catholic Church and community in the town. We arrived very early, and Peg introduced us to a few church members; then we went into a side room of the chapel. I was astonished to see a place that looked so much like its Austrian counterparts.

This was exactly what I had hoped to find; a room to

light little red candles in the memory of my loved ones. Peg and I started to light candles and I felt my hand shaking before my match was anywhere near the wick. Silently tears ran down my cheeks and dropped on the back of my hand; I pressed my eyes together and tried to get a grip on myself.

I stepped out of the small room into the main part of the church. The building was very new by my standards, probably not older than 30 years, and the walls carried illustrations of Jesus’ way of the cross—just like in my church home. We sat down on a bench in the middle of the main aisle. Slowly the members of the parish started to fill the benches; Peg greeted some, smiled at others. I was amazed at all the young

people and families that attended mass. In Austria that is only the case at important festive days.

Everyone settled down and the mass started. From the moment the choir sang I was crying. The people that did not know my trouble probably thought I was crazy, but for me it was a funeral. My grandma had died, and I was there to bid good-bye to her. “The Holy Spirit is strong in this church,” Peg said understandingly. I have grown up in a Catholic country, I attended Catholic schools, I have been to countless masses. But never have I ever heard a more honest and believing statement than hers.

So this year on All Saints’ Day there was an event on my American campus to honor the Day of the Dead. An altar

was created in the way it is done in Mexico, with candles and pictures. Later that night I remembered this and went to my room to get a photo of my grandma. I put it on the altar that stood there solemn and lonely, surrounded by candles and flowers. There were just a handful of photos and names on the altar. I set Helene’s picture near a candle in the back corner, imagining how people would see it the next day. She was holding a present in her hand, smiling wisely and openly at the beholder.

“How pretty she is,” one of my Spanish friends said. I resolutely gulped back my tears and nodded proudly.

Finding Myself in Vienna

Andrea (Montrone) Levine



Chapter 1: The Beginning

It is a very strange sensation to inexperienced youth to feel itself quite alone in the world; cut adrift from every connection; uncertain whether the port to which it is bound can be reached, and prevented by many impediments from returning to that it has quitted. The charm of adventure sweetens the sensation, the glow of pride warms it; but then the throb of fear disturbs it...
-Jane Eyre, Charlotte Bronte

I followed five of my fellow study abroad students through the foreign mazes of concrete streets and buildings that made up Vienna's inner city. Brightly lit storefronts stood out in the darkness. Besides the walls of long, five-story row houses I couldn't see anything but the dark sky directly overhead. These impressions of city slammed into me and then rolled away.

About Andrea (Montrone) Levine, '09

Andrea (Montrone) Levine lives in Beloit, WI with her husband where she works as program coordinator for Big Brothers Big Sisters, and writes for the Visit Beloit blog. In 2013, she visited Vienna for the first time since studying there.

The only relief I had was that the others were leading the way.

That morning my whole study abroad group had been in Schwabisch Hall, Germany, where we'd just spent two months getting to know other international students and taking intensive German classes in a town of about 30,000 people. Schwabisch Hall was small and quaint, a tightly knit downtown surrounded by houses sprawling out into the nearby hills. From my dorm it was just a five-to-ten minute walk to the market in the main square, the grocery store across the Kocher River, the Goethe Institute for classes, and the shops and quiet cafes downtown. It took me just a few days to learn how to get everywhere I needed, yet the town had enough unexplored shops, and beautiful country side, and

small hidden staircases between buildings and under busy streets that the town never lost its secretiveness and charm. Everything was more compact than my hometown of the

same size, and while I missed the strips of grass bordering the sidewalks and the wide open spaces, it was comforting to have in a very small area all the places that I needed. Within the first two weeks, I felt like I knew the city.

That had been my first experience in a foreign country. Now it was time for part two of my study abroad experience: nine months in Vienna, Austria—a new country and my first time living in any city bigger than Schwabisch Hall. Vienna had 1.7 million people. Looking at the map the day before the move, I was terrified. I was homesick for my family, but instead of going home I was going somewhere huge and overwhelming. What was I thinking when I thought it would be a good idea to come here? I hated concrete and people. I didn't like big cities.

After a day of travel, I was in a temporary dorm room in Vienna. I had no idea where I was in relation to anything else and I was hungry; so when some people from my group headed out in search of a restaurant, I tagged along.

Somehow I ended up in the

inner city with them. After a long walk that circled and backtracked, they found the restaurant—Cafe del Europa. It was nice, seemed a bit touristy as well as pricey, probably due to it being almost in the exact center of the city and close to the old shopping district. I felt conspicuous, in my hoodie and with my companion's water bottles next to the fancy plates of food.

It was probably 11:00 by the time we were done. We took the *U-bahn* (subway) to get us back faster. I remembered subway travel from a four day trip I'd taken to London at the end of my first month in Germany. The first ride had been a rush. The train sped into the station blasting the waiting passengers with a gust of air, and we would step in, minding the gap. I was on the famous London Underground! A few rides later I felt myself already becoming a regular. But I was so glad that it was not part of my everyday life, so glad that in a few days I could leave the Londoners staring at the colored lines of the Underground map. Now I too was trapped in a city with subways, with the blank-faced, zoned out passengers, the constant slowing and speeding up, the fake night under ground. I would have to get used to it. Would I? Would I grow to like it, to miss it when I left?

Back in my room I scribbled in my journal about how much I hated the city: the concrete, the people, the public transport, the hugeness and impossibility of it all; "I fear that I'll hate it and always be miserable. I fear that I'll like it and lose myself." Yet,

it was worse being stuck in my room with no clue what was outside, down the street, across town; the whole city was in shadow, it didn't exist yet in my mind. At last, I slept, letting myself drift into the unconsciousness that matched my knowledge of the city.

The next morning, it was my turn to navigate Vienna. I pulled out my map and the directions to my school's study abroad office, where we were all supposed to meet for the city tour. I pulled my courage and hope together and walked out into the sunlit streets of Vienna.

Chapter 2: A New Language

My roommate Lea was the stereotypical blonde-haired blue-eyed Austrian. She dressed up every day as all the Viennese do. She claimed that her nice tops, the plaid and khaki pants, the blue-jean jacket, were all casual wear, but they were not casual. They were not sweatpants, hoodies, or T-shirts with university logos. She never wore sneakers, sweatpants or pajamas outside. When she went out, she was always ready to greet the day. She liked to party—going out nights and coming back at three in the morning, drinking, dancing. She was "cool." Yet we were alike, we came to learn. We could understand each other. We were both perfectionists, very serious about school work and excited about learning languages (German for me, Russian for her). She was a huge fan of *Friends*, we had ten seasons in common already.

She became my benchmark and supporter when it came

to living in Vienna. The first week I came back from exploring the city to find her lying in bed watching TV. That was when I learned that Vienna was new to her too. She didn't know her way around and all the new-ness was tiring her out.

When we had an info meeting for the dorm, she translated afterward what was most important, because she knew I couldn't understand much. That was when I learned that she had studied abroad in Macedonia. She knew what I was going through, and advised me to enjoy it, because afterward I would miss it.

Even when I had trouble adjusting, she comforted me. Late one night, when I was crying from being overwhelmed, homesick, and lonely, she talked me through it. She gave me advice several times when I was struggling; she reminded me to take things step by step and not think about the distance, using the *Friends* analogy of Chandler taking a shower, putting on his tux, and then actually taking on the thought of getting married. Another time we sang the song from Monty Python's *Life of Brian*—always look on the bright side of life! Her cell phone alarm woke me up every morning playing, "Don't worry, be happy."

One day, a couple of months after that first scary day, I was feeling homesick and overwhelmed. This time, Lea seemed frustrated with me when I talked to her about it. I left her alone and went to the kitchen. When I came back, she was on the phone with her mother, speaking

Austrian dialect. I sat down at my computer and got online. No new email. I tuned into my roommate’s conversation for a moment, curious how my comprehension of dialect was coming along. I began to concentrate really hard—was she talking about me? I felt like a spy. Since most Austrians understood English I had no chance to feel like I knew a secret language, until now.

I concentrated on her words. She was talking about being frustrated with some “she,” someone who kept getting upset. “At first I could understand it,” she said, “homesickness and all that. But it keeps happening again and again and no matter what I do, it doesn’t seem to make a difference.” The more I heard, the more I was sure it was me. My face heated. She kept talking with me right next to her! I’d heard enough. I left, feeling defensive and lonely, my one friend and support was not someone I could rely on.

Weeks later, as we were cooking dinner together, I mentioned to Lea that I was understanding more dialect.

“I’ll have to watch what I say around you,” she said with a joking lilt in her voice.

How could I fit in here? No matter how much German I learned, it would never be *meine Muttersprache*, my native tongue. When the Austrians on my floor began yammering in dialect, I would be automatically shut out of the conversation, just because I couldn’t understand.

Chapter 3: Tricks of the Toilet

My best friend back home

had asked me to check out German toilets for her, because she has a strange fascination with bathroom things. This developed in my head into an unusual fascination for bathrooms myself. I figured I would take her at her word and develop a collection of any oddity in bathrooms that I discovered. Viennese, Austrian, European - there were all kinds of secrets and bathroom rule nuances. I never experienced any hole-in-the-ground toilets, but what I did find was enough to make me homesick for American bathrooms.

The first thing for a would-be toilet goer in unknown territory is finding one. Arriving in Germany I knew the word for bathrooms was *Toiletten*, yet I searched in vain to find one. Eventually I asked and was pointed to a door that seemed to blend in to the wall like the janitor’s room in high school. The door did in fact lead to a bathroom, and I soon after learned the secret: the letters “WC” (water closet). That’s European for bathroom. This came in handy in Slovakia, when I was surrounded by people who knew neither German nor English. In a lightbulb moment, I wrote “WC” on a piece of paper and showed it to a Slovakian. He pointed, and I scampered off to the bathroom, smiling with a pride I had not known since being potty trained.

Another trick I learned was to look in unlikely places. Unlikely, that is, to an American. In Europe, bathrooms tend to be upstairs, downstairs, sometimes outside or in another building. The buildings weren’t built with

space or convenience in mind, but they do look a lot niftier than American modernity! Even the McDonald’s are in fancy old buildings and the Burger King near the *Kartner-strasse* has an inlaid ceiling that really belongs in a mansion or museum.

After finding the bathroom, there is more to watch out for. There may be someone loitering around the bathroom or sitting at a table next to a dish. This is the cleaning person and he or she expects payment for the use of the toilet, the usual fare being 50 Euro cents. If there is no person, this function may be taken over by a machine demanding the same. In downtown Vienna there is an Opera toilet that’s specially decorated to make the customer feel that they are peeing in style and splendor, with waltzes playing in the background. It’s only 10 cents more expensive than the drab bathroom less than three minutes walk away with the grumpy looking cleaning lady. A toilet without a payment trap may be found in a restaurant or cafe, but these often demand 50 cents as well, or perhaps a receipt. I once was at a McDonald’s that checked for receipts and (though I had one), I was unnecessarily outraged. I am an American; I demand that my McDonald’s come with free toilets! And free ketchup, while we’re at it!

After getting bathroom access and relief, there comes for most Americans the automatic reaction to reach for the silver handle to flush. In Europe there is no such handle. Instead, there are various mechanisms for

flushing, and they change from toilet to toilet, a wonderful game if you care to think about it that way: sometimes you flush by pressing a button on the wall, sometimes a button on the top of tank, then if there is no button there is a chain to pull or one that I have heard best described as a “pully-up flushy apparatus.” After figuring out the button on the wall, the next toilet will present you with what looks like a button on the wall, but the actual flushing mechanism is a button on the floor that you press with your foot. One could spend an afternoon searching behind, under, above, and pushing, pulling, kicking, trying to get the darn toilet to flush! I found one in an Italian airport that I spent 10 minutes searching before pronouncing it unflushable, only to find out from a friend later that there was a lever hiding out behind the toilet tank!

The mistake I made the most often was drinking too much water to begin with. It seemed so natural in the U.S. After all, I learned from my mother and health teacher that it was good for me, and every time I went out to eat I could drink as much water as I wanted — free! Europeans must live in a constant state of dehydration. It’s their weapon against the bathroom difficulties. The culture helps them out in that regard. Water fountains are like rare oases in the desert. Reusable water bottles are almost impossible to find, even in a big city like Vienna. Restaurants charge for bottled water and, though tap water is sometimes available, I was told at least twice that

they didn’t have tap water. I wanted to ask how they did dishes without it. Other times I got nasty looks for asking. I stopped asking for water and started ordering wine instead—it was cheaper!

I learned to go on the bathroom offensive. I made sure to carry change, or at least extra toilet paper, at all times. They were almost as important as my map, or even the keys to my room; they were like keys to my bathroom.

Chapter 4: Breaking Point

Just when the caterpillar thought the world was over, it became a butterfly.
- Anonymous

I sat in my Austrian History class one day in the beginning of May, trying to keep control. I wanted to scream. I tried to concentrate as the professor began his lecture in the now well-known classroom in the middle of now well-known Vienna. A battle-worn, scuffed-up veteran, I wore invisible body armor to protect me from whatever foreignness was left in the city, but it had led to an unexpected war inside myself. My armor was also a cage, trapping me with feelings I didn’t know I could feel. Inexplicable hatred and rage, sadness, which made my blood grow dense and my whole body constrict.

These feelings had plagued me for weeks, morphing and attacking me in different forms. I thought that the first semester had been hard, but the second semester I would know the city and have friends and could enjoy myself. I did know the city and have

friends, but I was more miserable than ever. Why? One day, a few weeks later, I was in my room, sick with unhappiness. I called the friend I’d planned on meeting that day and told her with a shaking voice on the edge of tears, “I’m sorry; I really don’t feel well today.”

“What’s wrong?”

I floundered in my response. How could I explain the deepest troubles of my soul and the radioactive nature that had taken over it, breaking me down from the inside? “I don’t know. It’s a bunch of feelings I can’t even identify, that’s what’s so frustrating,” I tried to explain. She paused, and in the silence I feared her thoughts. She must be disappointed; she wanted to have a fun afternoon and I’m canceling on her. Who would want to be friends with someone so chronically miserable? She’s going to give up on me. Like Lea.

She spoke. “You should come anyway, get out of your room. It’ll help.” I doubted this, but I couldn’t stay in my room anymore. I agreed to come.

I stalked down the street toward the nearest subway station. The anger was back, exploding in little bursts that blasted me forward. I wished someone would ask me for money or a cigarette lighter so that I could yell at them, so I could let it out, “*Ich hasse dich! Ich will nach Hause, ich will gar nicht hier sein, lass mich doch endlich Mai in Ruh!*” I wanted to tell everyone how unhappy I was. Yet the little voice of reason, clinging to the edge of the steering wheel, feared what would happen afterward when I returned to reality.

That was the worst part— not just feeling angry and unhappy, but having to hold it, hide it.

I muttered to myself, letting the words I wanted to scream at people be at least voiced, taking slight comfort in the one outlet I had developed in the last seven months: thinking aloud. No one knew me, so I could act a little sketchy; I could give my ears a voice to hear so I didn't feel so alone. I could whisper, but no more. Who knows what would happen if I screamed and threw a fit on the streets of Vienna. They might arrest me. Put me in the hospital. In the psych ward. But I wouldn't let them, I wasn't crazy. Or was I?

The culture had entrapped me. The people, so many people, blank and expressionless, the city, so many buildings, so many bars holding me in, letting the pressure build up, and I started to understand how people could go insane. I was scared to let the feelings take control, but wanted less and less to fight them.

I snapped the handle of the *U-bahn* back and flung myself inside. I got a handle on my anger and turned it into tears. I let my hair dangle in my face and wrapped my arms around myself for comfort. I was in the grip of emotions beyond my understanding, emotions that had begun to erase my self-consciousness as I let the tears fall and began to shake and heave, sobbing, surrounded by strangers; my thoughts fed my tears and the anger behind them, "You don't care do you? I don't exist, you don't see me!" To the man across from me, "Men are supposed to

feel uncomfortable when women cry. Am I making you uncomfortable? I hope so!" To the old woman in the back, "Are you a nice old woman? Are you a mother? Do you feel for me?" A foolish hope arose, the thought that she would actually approach me. If she would, I would hug her, I promised myself. But they were in another world where they couldn't hear me, or they didn't care. They really were hard-hearted. Could that really be true? I didn't want to believe it, but—

"*Was ist los?*" the man asked me. Someone had asked me what was wrong!

Surprised, I answered in German, "I've been away from home for seven months and I'm homesick."

"*Ist es wirklich so schlimm?*" he asked. I wasn't sure what to say. No, it wasn't really that bad, but I still felt like it was.

I gave some answer, but what I said did not matter. What mattered was that he asked. His stop was the next one. Before he left I thanked him, wishing I could tell him truly how much it meant to me. I thought about hugging him as I had promised, but reasoned against it. The next stop was mine and I stepped off the train to meet my friend, eyes still swollen, but dry.

After that day, I no longer felt the crazy feelings or the anger; I finally got past the culture shock. I accepted Vienna and the people for what they were: Viennese. Austrian. European. It was one thing to be in class learning about other cultures and how the people at their base level have the same needs as we do, but meeting them and believing it fully and truly

was something else. In my time there, I had developed a separate part of myself who knew how to act Viennese. Deep down, though, I knew I could never be fully Viennese, never be fully Austrian, never know what it was like to grow up there, to belong there, or understand the culture and tradition that they have written in their unconscious. I had thought it ridiculous that, after nine months, I still could not understand or accept the culture. I could accept it now, but I had learned that I could never fully understand or belong. I belonged in a small town like Schwabisch Hall, but one where people spoke English and there were free bathrooms. I belonged at home in small town Iowa.

Chapter 5: The Foreigner

If variety is the spice of life, routine is the bread of it.
- *The Carousel*, Richard Paul Evans

May slipped into June and finals, accompanied by the realization that I only had one week left in Vienna. I lounged on a white couch in the room of the study abroad office that I liked to think of as my living room, although it was 20 minutes walk from my bed. Across from me sat Joshua, another student in the program. I was flipping through the notes for my Austrian History final, not really looking at them, thinking how nice the last few weeks had been. It was a good life, filled with the everyday pleasures of going outside without a coat, having a picnic on green grass, seeing tulips in some flower beds, seeing

other people in the kitchen, and sitting in Central's office reading *Jane Eyre* with the quiet company of another American doing sketches for drawing class. The absolute best parts: having friends in Vienna, and having reasons to get out of bed in the morning. My thoughts were startled by an odd sound: a strange woman was knocking at the window. I looked, confused, at Joshua, not sure what to do. He went to answer the window. The woman was from Germany, she said, and didn't know her way around. She wanted directions somewhere and asked if it was on the floor above us.

Joshua answered in German, "No, that's the *Sprachzentrum* for German language classes." I edged closer to the window, interested in the new comer.

"I thought it was nearby. I thought I'd look around—" she continued but my mind stopped on the word she had used for look. *Gucken*. I knew that word, I'd heard it before, but I'd never used it myself. All the Austrians said *schauen*, and that was what I had learned. It was odd listening to this woman because she spoke High German instead of the Austrian accent or dialect that I had become used to. Although it was easier to understand, it sounded foreign. She used words that I didn't know. Then I realized: this woman was a foreigner. She spoke my language, but she was the Britain to my America. The language was essentially the same, but the words and accents betrayed her heritage, her nationality. Ten months ago, Germany had been my Europe home and

Austria was foreign. Slowly, subtly, my allegiance had changed. My mind returned to the conversation.

"Oh, I see," she replied.

"And what is this here?"

"This is our study abroad office."

"Study abroad? Where are you from?"

"United States," Joshua explained. "We've been here a semester—"

"A year for me," I put in.

"And we're leaving next week."

"Really? I wouldn't have known." She looked at me, "You look Viennese with that skirt." I flushed with pride. Me, the girl who 9 months ago felt so obviously American in this big city, looking Viennese! "You both have a safe trip home," she said as she left. Not long after, I left the office myself. It was a beautiful day, as sunny as my very first day of exploring on my own. With only one week left, I wanted to spend every spare moment enjoying the city. I wandered through the park in the courtyard where I'd had my picnic the very first day. I planned to have another picnic there before I left, at the very same table by the playground, where I could watch the children again and this time understand their Austrian German. It would be just like a movie; I loved the symmetry of it, the tradition. Soon I would be home, in my world of old traditions, but I would bring new traditions with me, such as wearing skirts, asking for directions, and taking pictures of toilets.

The courtyard was green grass speckled with trees and people who liked beautiful

sunny days. There were students studying, talking, sharing a beer, reading a book, older people on the benches, chatting, and woman with a headscarf accompanied by a child, wandering among them, asking for money. I followed the sidewalk around the square, passing the Universitats Brau, the Billa grocery store, and rounding the corner on the far side. I knew it well after nine months; it had become my backyard, though a lot more public than my backyard growing up. It was my special green space, a step beyond my living room, where I could often find other people I knew: my program director on a Billa run, Lea on her way to her Russian class, and my German language instructor from first semester heading off to a coffee house for her last class with her 2nd semester students.

The coffee house that my German class had visited on our last day, the Welt Cafe, had become my favorite *Kaffeehaus*. I hoped to make it there once more before I left, as well as to Zanoni and Zanonis for some gelato. Italian ice cream sounded really good in the heat, especially *Haselnuss* and *Hinbeere* (hazelnut and raspberry), my favorite flavors. Perhaps I would be able to find a friend interested in ice cream. I turned at the next corner, went through the archway, and out into the sunlight.

A Garden of Ruins

Sara Phillips



I had to squint and shield my eyes as we approached Tintern Abbey. The sun would dip every so often behind some bit of wall, but would flare a second later brighter than before. *Don't look, don't look.* The blinding light pressed against me like a wall. Go back. As I passed through the gate through the light, the intensity died down, leaving me blinking in the shadow of a mighty structure open to the sky. But I still couldn't quite see it; it was silhouetted against a halo cast by the sun. I could make out its outline, in the shape of a cross, three points visible to us, each capped with a triangle instead of lying flat, the peaks pointed towards heaven, and there was the light, beaming through the glassless windows. But when I went inside everything became clearer.

I felt as if I had found a secret garden, a special place you had to work to reach or

find, and a beauty that could only be beheld from inside its walls. But no...I shook my head, this was not a garden. This was a ruin of a once great monastery. The Cistercian brothers had dominated the economy of the Wye Valley; most of the land belonged to them and they worked it diligently. It gave them a lot of power and influence in the area for centuries. But it had all been lost with the dissolution of the monasteries by Henry VIII in 1536. As I walked around there were signs saying what that room had been. The monks ate here where now stood nothing but incomplete walls, and in place of a floor, grass peppered with stumps of stone covered in pale lichens where columns had held up the once lofty roof. There must have been a table and chairs and perhaps a bell to call them to dinner. Over here was where the abbot slept; if this was the abbot's room, I thought, I don't want to see the rest. It was small and narrow and most of the walls were gone, but the remembrance of them was still there. Just

standing in the doorway I was starting to feel overwhelmed. Yet he came here every night to reflect and sleep. I could almost feel him sweep past me. But that is not the only hold this place possesses, not the only reason people come here. This other reason sang through my head, as I made my rounds, good little English major that I was. Wordsworth wrote here.

But he did not write about here. He mentions the trees, now turning to gold this time of year, and hedgerows, and the quiet sky. It could be anywhere. Yet even these were just a backdrop for his emotions, memories of his sister and their youthful days, and for his current ruminations,

*Oh! Yet a little while
May I behold in thee what I was
once,
My dear, dear Sister! And this
prayer I make,
Knowing that Nature never did
betray
The heart that loved her; 'tis her
privilege,
Through all the years of this our
life to lead
From joy to joy.*

All of this, but nothing of the powerful Cistercians and the abbey they left behind. But, although the full title is "Lines Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey," it is commonly referred to as simply "Tintern Abbey," as if the poem was about the weathered walls and gaping windows, as if there could have been no poem if there was no abbey. Why?

I came to an abrupt stop and nearly careened down a staircase in Caernarfon Castle, one of the many other ruins I visited during my time in Wales. It presented me with a choice of corridors to explore. I peered down each one, trying to remember if I had already been down one or the other. A middle-aged, helpful looking woman emerged from one of them. "Are you lost, dear?" she asked me, misinterpreting my indecision as helplessness. "Yes," I replied with a grin, "and that's how I like it." She looked a bit befuddled at my response. "Thanks though," I concluded, and set off down the other passageway. I never knew what would be around the next corner; every passageway was like a secret. In my head, the sounds of my footsteps were drowned out by the clanking of armored soldiers rushing to defend the castle, or perhaps replaced by the shuffling of a servant girl's nervous footsteps as she negotiated her way to her master's chamber with a simple candle illuminating the ominous dark.

I passed a room I might have entered. I peeped my head in and saw that it was a large display about the investment

of Prince Charles, the official ceremony naming him Prince of Wales. Bright colored billboards were plastered over with black and white photos and informational blurbs and TV screens blared footage of the blessed event, more than one going at once, getting tangled up in each other. Too noisy. I preferred to go to that wall over there, and to lean over the edge and imagine the presentation of the first Prince of Wales in 1284; King Edward holding his first-born son, who came into life in that very castle, over the ramparts and proclaiming to the conquered Welsh on the ground below that he had given them a new Prince of Wales to replace the one he had just defeated. In my imagination, I was up with Edward on the wall, glorying in the moment, and the next second I was staring up at the cruel king, sharing in the numb disbelief of the Welsh defeat.

When I stood atop the Queen's Tower I recalled a story from the *Mabinogion*, a collection of Welsh folk-tales. A castle had appeared where there was never even a pile of stones before, and the wonder of it called to Pryderi and he went inside. There he found a magnificent fountain with a golden basin and hanging chains extending up, up, and up to heaven knows where, disappearing into brilliant light. And the beauty of it was so great, what could he do but reach out and touch the golden basin? His hands sealed to it, and his feet could not leave the floor and he could not speak a word, the hold, the majesty, was so great. And Rhiannon went to find him and beheld the bowl

and the chains and her son transfixed and what could she do but reach out and touch the golden basin? And then there was a thunder clap and a great mist and when it cleared the castle was gone, and Rhiannon and Pryderi with it.

But I was still there and I could see the chains and the basin there before me and what could I do but reach out and touch it? One touch and I could be lost forever, in this moment forever, this moment of wonder and beauty and otherworldliness. The modern city below was already lost to me, obscured by ancient mists. The basin was what was real—what was now—and I believed that with one touch I could just stay there. But the mists were parting, rent by the blade of some insipid little ring-tone. I wrenched my phone out of my pocket. I would like to say I tossed it over the ramparts, but I know you wouldn't believe me. Not that it didn't occur to me, but as the damage was already done, I may as well answer, I thought. A friend wanted to know if I was finished wandering around the castle and if I wanted to meet up with her and find a place to eat down in the town. "You go ahead," I told her, "I'm going to be awhile."

I was a different sort of lost in Penrhyn Castle a few weeks later. We had been given audio guides to direct us, but it was the audio guide that doomed me. It had not been clear to me at what point we were supposed to turn it on—in the entryway, or the room just beyond it. I hovered in the doorway of that room

About Sara Phillips, '10

Sara Phillips graduated with an English major in 2010.

and pressed 1 on the number pad hopefully. Through my headphones my guide, she introduced herself as Martha, spoke to me in a thick Welsh accent, so thick that I could barely understand what she was saying. But I was able to glean something at least; she had been some sort of servant there and this had been her favorite room, though I couldn't quite make out why.

I stopped paying attention and looked at all the fine furniture (Penrhyn is a recent castle, lavishly built and decorated by the Penrhyn family who owned the mines and reaped a fine profit at the expense of their workers). I suddenly realized that Martha had moved on to talking about the furniture, instead of herself. But most of it was still unintelligible to me and I wasn't learning anything by standing there and focusing all my attention on understanding her.

I crossed over to the other door and pressed 2, assuming that was the logical point to switch tracks. I was delighted to find that Martha had deposited us with another household retainer, one that spoke more clearly. "On the mantelpiece above the fireplace is carved the head of a boar." Aha! There was the fireplace, and there was the mantelpiece, but there was nothing resembling a boar there. And the tour continued, describing things to me that I could not locate around me. I entered the next room and tried number 2 again. Nope, nothing matched up. I eventually turned it off and

wandered around at my own will. I was free to go where I wanted but my mind was cluttered with an endless parade of vase upon vase, mantelpiece upon mantelpiece, gaudy grandfather clocks, end tables dripping lace, velvet curtained four poster beds and portraits of I didn't know who. Martha and her friends knew, but they weren't telling me.

Finally I found my way out and escaped into the grounds. I followed the signs to the gardens and as I walked there my mind cleared. Even before I got there I was enchanted by a tree; its branches were dipping down and touching the ground where wild flowers seemed to grow more freely than outside the protective embrace of its branches: a fairy ring. Just inside the garden walls was a white latticed love seat, overgrown with fiery red ivy. It looked like it had come right out of some old romance novel. How many promises had been kept and broken there?

What thoughts had flashed through their minds as they stood on the edge and gazed into the lily-padded pools? What friendships had grown as feet trod the paths between the hedges and the over-arching trees, the same paths I was reading now? There were so many avenues to go down, all with possibility scattered along the way. I was so glad I had left the fairy-tale castle to come out here.

Inside, it was a paint-by-number that created a complete picture in your mind as you pressed the buttons, everything in its right place.

But if you messed up, got the numbers out of sequence, it created an indistinguishable mess of candelabras and luxurious carpets. Even if you got it right, there wasn't a lot of thinking to do. It kept your mind occupied. They even had the dining rooms set up as if the mistress of the manor was holding court that day, the tables were all elegantly arranged and all the wax food was laid out too. They were having turkey. But at Tintern Abbey they could have been eating anything. Perhaps it was pheasant, or a wild boar. Or even a Spartan meal of bread and cheese.

Maybe that is the power of ruins. Like a garden, there is room for the imagination to spread out and grow. Ruins are like a canvas with a faint outline penciled in. Not a dictation of what to paint, but a helpful prompt: "the Cistercian brothers ate here." Not "the Penrhyns and honored guests feasted on turkey and roast potatoes with the fork and knife to the left of the plate, a selection of spoons on the other and their napkins neatly folded at the top." It is as if the lack of complete walls and a ceiling allows you to go elsewhere, anywhere in your mind. One moment, you can be triumphant atop a tower, the next sunk down at the bottom, you can be firmly rooted in history and then swept away into the mists of legend. You can be, like Wordsworth, observing a crumbling monastery and then in a blink of an eye back, with your sister, to the home of your childhood.



Light slipped through the trees in shimmering threads and landed on the orange-zested ground. The air buzzed with the smell of sweet nectar-intoxicating, fresh, and juicy. "This is a new China," I thought. I often had this revelation during my short stay in Hangzhou. Each time I looked there was another part of the country, quietly waiting to unfold before me—in a crowded fruit store, in a steaming basket of dumplings, in the wrinkles of an old Chinese woman. As I walked around the Hangzhou Botanical Gardens, I saw another China. The trees and ground were speckled orange and golden-yellow with tiny flowers. Cooler weather in Hangzhou had started the shift from summer to fall, and these flowers were one of the many signs of autumn—

About Amy McAlpine, '10

Amy McAlpine lives in Adel, IA where she works as Quality Assurance Manager at Community Support Advocates. She and her husband David go for walks and take care of their 124 year-old house. In 2012 they traveled around Ireland, staying at cozy B&Bs and eating delicious bread, butter and soups.

The Fall of Orange Snow

Amy McAlpine

cheerful and downward-floating. The osmanthus were in bloom.

I set out in search of the osmanthus on a quiet October afternoon. I packed books, water, and cookies in my very American-looking red back pack. I was going to the botanical gardens, beyond the west side of Zhejiang University, just a fifteen-minute walk. The night before, our program director had told us about the flower. "You can start seeing osmanthus all around Hangzhou this time of year," he told us. "It's the city flower of Hangzhou, so most people here have a special attachment to it." He told us that the smell is very strong and sweet—we might smell it before we even saw it. The flowers bloomed in early October, and we only had a couple weeks as a time frame to witness them. I decided to find them for myself.

It was the kind of small, self-contained adventure for which I had come to China. To encounter the un-encountered. I had been in Hangzhou for a little over a month, and I could already feel

myself being pulled into the monotony, the sameness of classes. Each day I went to the same white-walled room and learned the mysterious strokes and sounds of Chinese. The material challenged me, but the rhythm was familiar and somewhat lulling. I knew how to be a student before I came to China.

But there were thousands of roles outside the classroom that were beyond my experience. I knew I would never be able to fill them all. I would never play the role of a Chinese daughter, teacher, or worker. Since my arrival, I had mostly played the role of survivor. I learned how to be a restaurant patron who knew how to order. I was still struggling to figure out how to be a part of public transportation. I was learning to be a shopper who knew how to subtly barter with shopkeepers. I stretched myself to fill each role. In my new adventure, I sensed the opportunity for another role, one that I wouldn't need to survive.

As I journeyed to the botanical gardens, I thought of the flower. The sweet

osmanthus tree is a precious Chinese treasure, hardly found outside the country's borders. Because of the tree's isolation, the English name "osmanthus" wasn't very familiar to me. It sounded vaguely like a flower name or possibly an herb. I liked the Chinese name much more. The word "osmanthus" had hard vowels and halted syllables. It sounded scientific and technical. In Chinese, the syllables were soothing. I rounded my lips and quietly practiced the gliding Chinese pronunciation: *gway-hwa*. Each syllable needed to fall with accented emphasis for the tone to be correct. I thought of my Chinese lessons and realized that the "gui" of *guihua* sounded just like the Chinese word for honorable and valuable. I liked the connection, and it seemed promising for my afternoon walk.

I soon reached the edge of the botanical gardens where tall curving stalks of bamboo blocked the strong mid-afternoon sun. As I walked through the garden's main gate, I could already smell something new—I had found osmanthus! I slipped under the shade of the grove, anxious to see the gardens. An old Chinese proverb says, "When osmanthus flowers bloom, happy events will come." I understood the enjoyment of the flowers very soon after I started walking around the grove. Though the *guihua* had just begun to bloom, the ground was already a carpet of creamsicle-orange blooms. The evergreens that released them had high branches whose leaves formed a nearly-solid ceiling above. It was cool and

dark under the interlocking trees. The scene was a quirky delight to my senses, like a warm-weathered citrus snowfall. Some trees had golden osmanthus blossoms, which blended a sunny yellow with tangerine. Slight breezes delicately brought down more flowers as I walked. I watched them fall slowly to the ground.

As delighted as I felt, I knew I was out of place. This time, it was more than my white skin and American backpack. Dozens of Chinese families and friends gathered in clusters in the shade, no more than four or five, sitting at tables and drinking tea. Other picnicked on the ground. No group made more noise than their neighbors. They simply sat and talked, eating and drinking tea. They poured steaming water from the tall water thermoses like the one I had in my room.

I scanned back and forth to see the whole scene, looking at more things that caught my eye. I felt conspicuous. I walked down the brick path with a camera and wide eyes. I really wanted to people watch but that felt too intrusive on the relaxing bubbles of conversation that each group created. They sat amidst the blossoms with no purpose at all. I felt the pull to blend in and act more Chinese. I sat on the edge of a small pond and tried to take pictures discreetly.

It took a while for me to enjoy the scene around me in the directionless way that I observed. I sat on a low, flat rock and breathed in my surroundings. The tiny *guihua* did have a powerful fragrance. It felt like a sugar rush from a citrus-sweet candy. It smelled

fresh like spring, even though it was an autumn afternoon. I almost expected to see rays of the smell floating around, lingering like gentle fog. The rock that I sat on was more open to the sun, and the smell intensified with gentle heat. I would later see perfumes and cleaning supplies that boasted to smell like *guihua*. I never tried them. How could dish soap compare to the feeling of this soothing and intoxicating afternoon?

As I sat, I watched some of the groups around me, including a small family. They sat on the ground and teased each other playfully, occasionally touching each other on the arm. They laughed easily. I liked watching the calm scene, thinking of my own family at home. I was amused to see how stationery they had been. Piles of orange blossoms stood out like sprinkles resting on their black hair.

In front of the family, sat a group of four older women. They were playing cards next to a small pond, and they laughed quietly every few minutes. Some had silvery gray hair and others had jet black hair; each had wrinkles around their dark, Chinese eyes. I imagined they were old friends who gathered two or three afternoons a week. They seemed completely comfortable in this garden setting. How many times had they experienced this orange snowfall? I was often drawn to the older women that I saw in Hangzhou. They moved around in the modern, bustling city, but seemed to remain connected to an older China, a traditional country that didn't have cell phones

or KFC. Sometimes, they seemed almost bewildered by the fast pace of life circling around them. But this scene wasn't bustling. The garden was a timeless place of slowing down and talking to friends. Conversation could float lightly in the air like the blossoms falling all around.

The smell that tickled my nose had started to become overpowering and too sweet. I grew anxious on my stone seat so I got up and explored more of the gardens. I let my camera take over and frame each scene for me. A pond with huge goldfish. A low branch reaching towards the surface of another pond. Small neatly cut trees. I liked having the camera in my hand again, stepping behind the lens to see my surroundings. On my way out, I passed the osmanthus

grove once more.

I later read of an old folktale about osmanthus. In the story, sweet osmanthus trees grew on the moon and showered blossoms on temples and mountains. Those in the temples welcomed the blossoms as gifts from heaven. From this tale, the Chinese said that anyone who passed the highest imperial examinations had "plucked the osmanthus branch from the moon." Throughout Chinese history, the osmanthus continually represented goodwill.

As I slipped into the grove, I found a seat. Through the osmanthus trees, soft strains of light fell on those around me. Two older women napped on a bench while a third woman knitted, silently holding up their weight. Chinese of all

ages played cards and turns piles of fruit and seeds into peels and shells. The delicate osmanthus blooms fell on each person. The colorful petals didn't miss one head. I was happy to find the bits in my own blond ponytail. I felt like I was let in on the secret of the osmanthus. I found myself in the role of a Hangzhou resident, one who could appreciate the *guihua*. I had breathed in the perfume of the blooms that fell around me. I had found the time to sit and relax, letting the small blessings fall on my head. When I did so, it was easy to imagine that life falls like the osmanthus—in tiny, fragrant bits of goodwill.



Tourists and Travelers

Rebecca Preston



The tube in London is the ugly cousin of the eight wonders of the world. It's as startling to think of someone building it as it is to picture people dragging the megaliths of Stonehenge. It's also as dangerous to navigate as the Colosseum when it was full of lions. It's the world's oldest underground and puts New York's subways to shame, if not in length, then in cleanliness. That's by comparison only, though. When you enter the tube, the light flickers, dims, or glares. The air is sooty and turns your nostrils black around the edges, and gum is stuck underneath the benches above crumpled McDonald's bags.

The tube is not just a means of transportation. It's the easiest way to tell the tourists from the Londoners. While I certainly wasn't a Londoner yet, two months

in, I had graduated to the rank of traveler. I reached this stage when, some where along the line, I stopped being excited when I left the open air of London's city and went down what seems like hundreds of steps into what I thought of as "the dungeon." I stopped seeing the ads for *Joseph*, *Hamlet*, and flamenco dancing. I stopped hearing the musicians trying to force their grating music on me. I just put on my iPod, like everyone else, and drowned it out.

Ascending stairs became second nature and I stopped having a feeling of dread when I had to climb them. The tube presented surprisingly good exercise, almost as good as walking to my destination would have been; a feat impossible this time since I was going nearly to the end of the Central line. I was on a small journey, a special errand given to me by my internship director. Long past were the days where I'd be sent right down the street and come back an hour later with my map crumpled in my fist. I took a special sort of satisfaction knowing that I could now

do things completely on my own and in a timelier manner.

It was strange to be going so far away from the heart of London, though. I lived near the Victoria tube stop and worked off Oxford Circus, two of the most well-known and busy areas in the city. I rarely traveled outside of a small radius around them. Despite the newness, I knew I could do it. I knew all of the tricks and rules for traveling.

I had learned to hustle to the ends of the platforms in the underground so that I could be in the less crowded area. I walked only on the left and stood on the right of the escalators. I called elevators "lifts." I didn't talk on the tube unless it was the faintest whisper. All of that made me a little better than a tourist. At least I liked to think so.

A voice broke through my shield of silence, startling me. "Excuse me?" It asked, forcing me to look up. I barely heard over my blaring music. I yanked out my earbuds, trying not to be annoyed that something had interrupted my early morning reverie, my half hour of isolated travel time. The woman before me was a

kind-looking blond with what I assumed was her husband, who was looking around the platform, pretending he wasn't involved in asking for directions. I sighed internally but smiled as brightly as I could in the morning. I knew they were about to ask me for directions and I'd have to take fifteen minutes to help them, which didn't seem fair, considering I was only a traveler myself.

"What are you looking for?" I asked, hoping my ride didn't come while I was helping them.

I could see the instant double take the couple did when they heard my Yankee accent, which I was sure sounded nasal by comparison to the clipped voices around me. It was the accent my British friends told me "no one preferred to English, or any other accent for that matter, except maybe Australian." Mine, they said, was a very mild American accent. It was non-offensive, even. In fact, many people mistook me for Canadian, which is not a bad thing for a traveler to be.

A Canadian tourist is an innocent, moose-loving, sweet soul. If you say you're Canadian it brings an instant smile to people's faces, though not much interest. No one minds helping a Canadian tourist. An American tourist is another creature entirely. They're loud, constantly defending President Bush, and to be resented with or without reason. I never actually made the claim of Canadian citizenship, but if someone made that mistake I was unlikely to correct him or her offhand. The couple asking for directions was Canadian, so it

seemed unlikely they'd make that mistake.

"We're trying to find the statue of Nelson," the woman explained, generously giving me a chance to help despite my accent.

I felt a little happier and stood up to help them. I knew exactly where that was; who didn't? but still I glanced at the clock to make sure I had time. After all, I had to get my errand done. I whipped out my A-Z (zed), the street guide which all the abroad students were supposed to have purchased immediately upon arrival, and showed them the exact streets to take. "You can actually go out here and just walk from the exit past the big stone lions. You'll see them as soon as you get out. It's hard to miss," I dismissed.

I felt a bit sad now because some old woman with a cane had taken my seat. It's amazing how malicious those old ladies can seem when you get on the tube and they've taken all the places. Cane indeed. I found myself wondering if they even needed them or if it was a ruse to get all the good spots.

"Um, how do we get out?" the woman asked in embarrassment.

I blinked, turning to look behind me and see if the "way out" signs painted all over the walls with arrows had disappeared. No. Still there. I couldn't suppress a grin and realized it had been a long time since I'd smiled like that in the underground. They laughed when I showed them and I remembered how that used to be me. I kind of wished for some reason it still was.

I wished I still cringed at

the smell of the underground and the scowling British faces. Now I was almost one of those faces. I missed running around the tunnels in confusion, like a blind rodent in a hamster ball. A tourist—that's what I wanted to be again.

A traveler was one thing. But tourists were like another species. Like a child walking into Willy Wonka's shop, they saw every street sign in blu-ray vision, every phone booth as a photo op. They were also creatures without common sense to bog them down, so desperate to avoid cultural faux pas they made twice as many.

I wondered, as my train pulled up, when it was that I started to lose that giddy sense of motion sickness watching the cars come through the tunnels. And what of the Canadians? Would that couple I'd just directed be quite so eager and alert in two weeks time or would they start reading on the tube, avoid eye contact and lower their voices?

A traveler might seem a little more intelligent at first glance, I decided. A tourist, though, had an understanding that others lacked. They saw magic in the ordinary and everyday where we saw tedium. They were frantically trying to make memories at every statue, trying to take photos with perfect exposure and angles alongside the pictures of them standing in front of landmarks, grinning. Where was my camera, again?

The doors to the car in front of me slid open. "Mind the gap," a surly sounding British voice warned from invisible speakers. I dove for a seat, thanking my lucky stars that

About Rebecca Preston, '10

Rebecca Preston received her Masters in Library Science from Indiana University and currently lives just outside of Indianapolis, IN where she works at the Greenwood Public Library as a teen and adult librarian.

there were only a few older ladies there to give seats up to. I pulled out my issue of *The Light* newspaper and paused. The colors of the poles in the car looked suddenly brighter, the seats more rainbow and the occupants more interesting. The reflections in the windows were once again a not-so-subtle way of spying on the Londoners seated around me.

I watched the stops go by, following them on the map that lined the car wall. I marveled once more at the peculiar names: Blackfriars,

Mansion House, and Mile End. They each had a history and an elaborate, often fantastical tale. When I'd first come here I'd demanded an explanation of each one from my co-workers. I used to write them down, the stranger the names the better. My favorite was Elephant and Castle, so named for a vision someone had seen in the clouds while standing on London Bridge, showing the gargantuan animal carrying a fortress on its back. Another version claims the name was a distortion of a title belonging

to Spanish royalty that was once in the area. The first one was my favorite. I always picked the more colorful explanation, regardless of which one was technically correct.

I looked away from the map and blinked as sunlight streamed into the car as we emerged above ground. I'd forgotten my route went this way—that natural light even entered into the London life. The outskirts of London was rushing by, completely new and unlike the inner city. I put down my newspaper.



Riding with a Bosnian Soldier

Shane Hallengren

For the past six years, my father has worked for the U.S. Foreign Services, providing aid to developing nations. It is a position that has moved him around the globe, from Nicaragua to Bosnia Herzegovina to Thailand. During 2009 he was living in Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia Herzegovina. It is a city of complexities: religiously, ideologically and culturally. It is a place where the old world meets the developed world, where Europe meets the Middle East. Walking the downtown streets takes you through a modern European shopping center with clothing shops, cafes, bars, and tech shops. But within a few hundred feet the smooth sidewalks break up into rough-lain cobblestones, and the modern

European city gives itself up to an old Turkish village. At meal times, the whole place smells of *ćevapi*, a Bosnian dish of mixed-meat sausages and pita bread. The doughy smell permeates the packed-together shops of old-town Sarajevo, which sell traditional Bosnian scarves and jewelry, hand-wrought copper ware, and Ottoman rugs.

And, of course, the city is a religious grab bag. Downtown, within a few hundred feet of each other stand cathedrals of the Orthodox and Catholic churches as well as one of the oldest mosques outside of the Middle East. It is this religious trifecta, which traditionally coexisted peacefully, that was torn apart and used to bring the city to war from 1992 to 1996. After Yugoslavia began to fall apart following the death of Tito, the nationalist movements that had been suppressed for so long erupted, and Bosnia Herzegovina declared independence from Yugoslavia in 1992. This threw the country into civil war; ethnic Serbs fought the Muslim Bosniaks for control of

the region. Forces from the Republic of Srpska, one of Bosnia Herzegovina's political entities, attacked Sarajevo for the longest siege on a European capital in modern history.

I was vaguely aware of these facts in the summer of 2009 as I arrived in Sarajevo for the second time. Having been there before, I had seen the hills from which the Serbs had lobbed shells and unleashed sniper fire onto the city. I had even seen the bullet holes covering the city's buildings, and felt I had grasped a sense of resiliency the city used to deal with this part of its history. This summer I was just looking for an internship, a way to make some money and to bolster my resume while seeing parts of Southeast Europe. My dad had been able to arrange a position working as a summer intern with the embassy. I was assigned to the Management Department, working to provide services to the embassy community. My first day, I presented my badge to the guard outside one of the embassy's subsidiary buildings in the city. He cleared me through

About Shane Hallengren, '11

Shane Hallengren lives with his wife in West Des Moines and works in health care management. Since leaving Central, Shane has continued to travel abroad as much as possible. He visited Thailand in 2012 and Ireland in 2013. In 2014 he returned to the Balkans, spending several days in Croatia during a trip that also included stops in Italy and Greece.

into the compound. I looked up the towering eight-story glass face of the building. It seemed out of place in the city, most of the buildings of this height in Sarajevo had the impersonal look of communist bloc housing. This building was impersonal in a different way: it was a clinical feeling of polished glass and metal framing in a city of concrete, stone, and fog. I walked through the door and flashed my badge again to get into the elevator, hitting the button to take me to the fourth floor.

The doors opened onto a small open lobby. The fluorescent lights inside were a harsh change from the gray, overcast light outside. I blinked at the difference and found myself in a room arranged with a couple of couches and an assortment of office equipment around the walls. There were doors regularly spaced along the walls of the lobby, leading into offices. I walked into the first office on my right, as my dad had told me to.

“Hi, I’m Shane. I’m starting my internship today,” I said to the man sitting behind the desk. He jumped up. “Yes, you are Mr. Hallengren’s son,” he replied in a thick Bosnian accent. His voice wasn’t deep, but the accent gave it a heavy quality, and he spoke slowly, as if he were considering his words carefully. The accent had always sounded Russian to me, with subtly rolled R’s and carefully rounded syllables and a quality that made it seem all the sounds were formed farther back in the mouth than was necessary. “My name is Ilija,” the man finished as he grasped my hand.

He was a tall man, I was staring at his chin as he stood across from me, but he had long, smooth limbs and an ease to his movements that made him very approachable. His smile showed that one of his front teeth was slowly darkening with decay and his hairline had receded into male-pattern baldness.

Ilija was one of many Foreign Service Nationals who the embassy hired for various non-classified jobs in the mission. He was in charge of embassy housing and property management. The U.S. government leases houses across the city for the use of embassy employees, and Ilija was the contact for landlords or tenants, who couldn’t overcome the language barrier. He also prepared houses for turnover as one family left and the next came in on a new assignment.

“Would you like to do some paperwork this morning?” he asked me. I told him I would be happy to whatever he had for me. After finding me a desk, Ilija explained that the department needed second copies of all the leasing contracts. I needed to remove the originals from their folders and make sure they were in order before scanning them to a hard drive and printing a new copy. When he had finished giving me my task, he looked at me, “After lunch you will come with me to see houses.” There was an upward inflection over the last two words, so I knew it was a question. “Yeah, sounds great,” I responded, knowing how badly I would want out of the building after a morning with the lease contracts.

That afternoon Ilija and I

got into a white Renault, left the building compound and headed into the city. Ilija kept a constant commentary as we passed landmarks in the city, places that he knew through work, or things he thought I might be interested in. He pointed out some apartments the embassy leased and drove me past his own home. We passed a building across from the river, an old concrete place with bullet holes pocking the exterior walls. “The owner wanted to rent us a unit there, but it is too small. They do not know that Americans like big things,” he said, giving me a knowing look.

We continued along the river. “That is where First World War started,” he said with a nod towards a bridge, raising both eyebrows, as if he expected disbelief on my part. But I knew enough to know that the Latin Bridge was where the Austro-Hungarian Archduke Ferdinand had been assassinated, throwing Europe into war.

Ilija was always friendly with his comments. He didn’t condescend to me, but pointed out things he thought I might be interested in: the reconstruction progress at the public library, the university, a few bars frequented by people my age. We pulled off the busy road by the river and hit the hills surrounding downtown. We climbed up into the sprawling neighborhoods of red-roofed houses and trees became more regular along the road. He slowed in front of a house busy with activity. It was big by Bosnian standard; this far away from the city center things had spread out enough to allow for larger homes.

Instead of spreading vertically with more stories, there was room for the building to sprawl across the property, making it look almost like an American ranch house. Boxes were stacked outside and heavy Bosnian men packed them into a waiting truck. “This house with kind of green facade is ours. They will be moving next week.”

We stopped and spent about an hour recording the damages to the house. A crack in a window, water damage around the shower. We wrote the information down, and prepared a work order for repairs. We left the house in the opposite direction we had come from, looping around the busy city center to avoid the traffic. These homes were even less tightly packed together, and at points we passed by large swatches of heavy deciduous trees. We were nearing the top of the hills that surround Sarajevo.

We passed an open patch of land, bare of both buildings and trees. The unkempt grass climbed the hill and met a rocky cliff falling out of the forest above. “That is where my sister was shot,” he said as if he were still commenting on houses. I tensed, not knowing how to react. “It was during Bosnian war. She was just young girl at the time. Both my sisters snuck out of the house to go sledding one night in winter.” I knew this must have been dangerous; snipers and other gunman had surrounded the city during the siege. People had run from building to building to eliminate the time they were exposed to gunfire. The hillside was conspicuously open, and the trees would

have been great cover for soldiers. Even at night and even as children it would have been dangerous to be out here.

“They walked here from our home, about one kilometer away. They got here and started sledding for one half hour, when the youngest one got shot in the leg.” I could see the scene. Slow snow falling in big flakes, adding to the blanket of soft powder already on the ground. The night would be lit by a big moon and bright stars. The buildings of the city would be dark. The girls would have tried to be quiet, but would still laugh in the cold night air. They gave themselves away. And the gunshot would have broken the scene like a rock shattering glass, cracking the stillness for an instant and leaving it in quiet ruin, with the peacefulness trying to reestablish itself around the fringes of the scene. The bullet snapped through her layers of clothing and dug into her thigh, spilling blood into the thick snow, the red thirstily drinking up the white stuff, staining it. “They just fired once. And then my sisters hobbled back to our home. My sister lived, but they had to take her leg.” He finished in the same casual tone as we drove back towards the more populated neighborhoods.

I wasn’t sure what to say. At home you aren’t supposed to talk to people about their experiences with war. They have bad memories and PTSD that haunts them for their entire lives. All of my past experiences and my supposed knowledge of respect had told me not to bring up somebody’s experience in war. America is a place where we

respect people who have seen wars, but we do so quietly, unobtrusively. We honor the people who have suffered for our country with parades and beer commercials and presidential recognitions. We display them in front of the nation without prying into the knowledge they had gained in the war. War teaches people how to watch a friend die, what it looks like when the mechanisms of war destroy bodies and building. They have experience seeing the world around them thrust into the turmoil of insanity, while they are expected to resist its grip. We honor them by not forcing them to recall that knowledge. We respect them by giving them the opportunity to forget. I didn’t know how the Bosnians handled their experience with the siege.

“That’s awful, “ I said noncommittally.

“It was the war,” he responded, the tone of his Bosnian accent remaining level, stating a simple fact. “This building is where we go next.” We stopped at the next house and Ilija talked to some contracted laborers about the needed repairs. I thought about my own father, a veteran of the first Gulf War. In my entire life I had heard only a handful of stories about his time in the Middle East, and even those I suspected were censored for me. It’s a topic I wouldn’t push with him.

When we got back into the car and headed towards the embassy, Ilija turned on the radio. Bosnian music is an interesting mix of Western and Eastern pop. The male singer was moving nimbly

through the bars of his song and Ilija tapped the beat out on the steering wheel. “I love music,” he said, mostly to fill the silence I think. “During Bosnian War I worked at radio station, for free of course. After my military duties during the day, I would go work there. The music was relaxing.” I hadn’t realized Ilija had been a soldier. It must have been a hard road to walk. The Serb forces had taken shots at anybody they could get in their sights. They had obviously opened fire on

Ilija’s sister. The forces that the Bosnian government were able to pull together in the siege were underequipped and unable to take much action anyway, the Serbs had the high ground and the strategic advantage. But after a day of patrolling the city, helping wounded civilians and praying that he would not be shot himself, Ilija walked into a radio station. He would have been tired, eyes burning with the day’s effort. He would have picked songs he knew well, things from his

childhood that were soothing. The control room would have been dark; a brightened window in a dark city is an easy target for a sniper or an RPG launcher. So the blinking red and green status lights from the radio mixer would have lit the dark room, the light filling just enough space for Ilija’s face to be illuminated in the alternating colors. He would put his worn boots up on the panel and close his eyes, letting the music relax him.



Sunset at St. Cwyfan’s Rhiley (Huntington) Binns

White-washed and small, the chapel springs from its island like some great, rare block of salt. It is only an hour before sunset, so the late light is beginning to drip between the clouds around us. Great beams of it drop down into the sea, streaming from their banks and the gulls are, for once, quiet. Ahead, the rest of my group clambers over algae-covered rocks. They are aiming for the small staircase, steps covered in seaweed, cut into the island’s concrete retaining wall. The church, St. Cwyfan’s, can only be reached at low-tide, unless you have a boat. On the way here, my program director, Tecwyn, had to stop by the post office to fetch the key to the front door, left there for him by the pastor. From there, we’d driven half an hour through Anglesey, down small back roads, turning past dilapidated stone walls and, I

suspect at points, using sheep as landmarks. Right now, my eyes are darting from the beginning sunset, to the church, to my feet. I’m beachcombing and as I walk, my pockets ripen with shells. Here is a mussel, blue lean oval, and there, a razor clam, long and slick. Everywhere are an infinite number of small white cones of shells, worn from years of battering the coast. These are some of my favorites, for even they have forgotten their story. Were they great or small? Strong or weak? Colorful or white as sun-bleached bone? Neither of us knows. I also find tightly rolled snail shells, banded with pale pinks and blues. I’ve found these on other beaches, but here they seem brighter, smaller, more fragile. I start out counting them as they drop into my pockets—2, 3, 4—but gratefully forget the number by the time I reach the island.

When it was first founded, St. Cwyfan’s was joined to Anglesey by a thin land bridge. However, over time,

this bridge eroded and the parish became what is today known as the Church in the Sea. Each year, a few services, along with a smattering of weddings and christenings, are held in the 900 year old chapel. Local men and women help to maintain the whitewash on the outside walls, first applied in the 17th century when the church was restored to its current state. Atop its slate roof sits a small, empty belfry. The whole building is about as large as my living room at home. Its windows are small and simple, their frames gently sagging. Ahead of me, Tecwyn has left its door unlocked and opened. I duck inside. Inside, a hodgepodge of well-worn wooden chairs faces the altar. The stone floor is streaked with grooves of sand and the roof is supported by wooden beams, the color of driftwood and sagging ever-so-slightly. Small collections of rocks and shells adorn the windows and altar. They are piled into pyramids and concentric circles, arranged by careful hands. Whose careful hands? A priest’s, a pilgrim’s, a mother’s? Is it a

About Rhiley (Huntington) Binns, ‘13

Rhiley (Huntington) Binns lives in Norwalk, Iowa and works as a Small Mammals/Kid’s Kingdom Keeper with the Blank Park Zoo. Her most recent adventure was her honeymoon to the rainforests of Costa Rica, but she is eagerly planning for her and her new husband’s return journey to Wales, Scotland and England.

ritual, one rock set down for every prayer? An offering? A symbol? I can't imagine that it's just for decoration. I want it to mean something more.

* * *

When I was a child, my mother would give me a small bucket when we went to Saylorville Lake. I would pick up chunks of limestone and sandstone and shale, opaque pieces of quartz and sparkling granite. Then, of course, I didn't know their names. I knew only that they were pretty and that was more than enough for me. My mother, a teacher, would have me describe them as I picked them up — smooth, sparkle, heavy, small, glassy, rough— each rock forming an identity as I dropped them in.

As soon as I got home, I would run to the balcony and pour the bucket out, some of the smaller rocks inevitability falling between boards. I'd rush into the kitchen to fill up a bowl with water and run back out with it again, shirt soaked by the time I made it to the balcony. Outside, I'd drop each rock, carefully, one at a time, into the bowl. I had learned that rocks took on a new form underwater. Their colors would deepen and textures heighten, like my own hair when I lay down on the floor of the swimming pool, wrapping around me, undulating and foreign. Here, in the water, I would name the rocks. A round, pink pebble became Zoe. A crooked piece of gravel was Gus. It was a baptism, like when I'd watched my mother dipped into a deep tub at the local church, coming up smiling. Swimming for Jesus. Being reborn.

When everyone had had their name and their bath, the rocks would be lined up to dry on the balcony's boards. I ordered them by how beautiful I thought they were. The shimmeriest and smoothest rocks sat closest to me and the line would run all the way to the deck's edge, where sat the broken and brown rocks. I would go down the line, telling each what I liked about them, why I had picked them up, repeating the words I had said on the beach: smooth, sparkle, heavy, small, rough, glassy....

* * *

Outside St. Cwyfan's, it has begun to rain lightly. While my group moves inside and under the eaves of the church, giggling and zipping up raincoats, I walk to the island's low bordering wall. The land runs straight up to the edge, like flour heaping from a measuring cup. I lie down in the grass, my eyes level with the wall, hands crossed beneath my chin. I watch the sun setting over the ocean and I imagine its water as a great tabletop and me as a child, nose pressed just against its edge until everything is a vast plane of wood grain under a drywall sky.

St. Cwyfan's wall was built in the 1880s, when a group of locals realized that the land was eroding. While the church is still here, obviously, before me spread a delta of cracks in the wall's stones and the concrete laid over them. From the cracks, lichens are growing in a multitude of colors, oranges and whites and greens blending into the ocean beyond them, then blending into the horizon and impending star rise. I wonder

if they realize that their house is built on sand, made to look like a rock. St. Cwyfan's is still slowly eroding and sinking and shrinking and no number of pyramids of rocks and shells will ever save it, no matter how perfectly piled, no matter how named or washed or lined up in perfect rows. We can place a stone in front of a tomb but, eventually, it will be rolled away. Waves will roar. The world will lose its miracles and begin waiting, waiting for salvation. Rock, paper, scissors. Chapel, rock, time. Rock covers chapel. Chapel covers time. Time covers rock. We cannot win.

Rocks are mentioned many, many times in the Bible. Miracles happen at rocks. Water and fire are brought forth from them; they are broken into pieces by the wind and rent at the death of Christ. They are used as places of worship, shelter, observation, and meeting. Rocks build homes, hammer nails, hold the Ten Commandments, and Christ himself is, countless times, likened to a rock: strong, trustworthy, and everlasting. During Sunday school, we would often talk about the parable of the man who builds his house on a rock and the other who builds his house on sand. Whose life isn't sturdy? Who's in trouble when bad weather comes? We had a song with hand motions and made sample buildings out of toothpicks on top of sand from the playground and rocks we brought from home. The sand would always wash out, tiny houses and schools and bakeries floating towards the drain until, at the last second, the teacher would reach in and pluck them out. They lay

outside the classroom on the pavement in tiny lines, drying in the sun so we could take them home.

As I walk back from St. Cwyfan's, the grit of sand and November cold forces its way into my skin and I collect my shells hurriedly, taking anything I like even slightly, pushing it into my pocket, and trudging forward. Shells are almost never mentioned in the Bible, except when listed in offerings or accounts of supplies. In Exodus, the Lord tells Moses to take shells with him to leave on the altar of the Tabernacle, the Israelites' temple and dwelling place for the Spirit. I pass again over

the algae-covered rocks and turn to look back at the church once more. A lone grey heron roams the beaches as the sound of the nearby racetrack shakes in the air. The sun is nearly set, the white church now an inky silhouette losing its edges. My classmates are far ahead, so I run back to the bus, the sheep along the country roads vanishing, afraid of my footfalls.

Back at my dormitory, I will pull the shells from my pockets one by one and rinse them in the sink, sand trailing down the drain. They will spread across my windowsill in small, neat lines, peaks rising and falling like

sand dunes or rocks in low tide. I will bring back rocks, too, slowly at first, then by the multitudes, numbering each with a fine tip marker. In a notebook, I will list the numbers, followed the places I collected them. Aran Islands, Ireland; Arthur's Seat, Edinburgh; Menai Strait, Anglesey; Mount Snowdon. They lie in my desk in plastic bags, carefully placed next to each other in the dark, but never touching, like old birds in a museum drawer.





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