Acknowledgements

The Djembe staff would like to thank all of the writers and artists who submitted work to the journal. This publication would not be possible without you.

The Djembe staff would also like to thank its sponsors:

Intercultural Affairs Office
Global Studies Program

We would like to acknowledge the following individuals for their contributions to and support of Djembe this year:

Amy Aasen
Per Anderson
Karen Carlson
Ken Foster
Mona Ibrahim
Polly Kloster
Sonja Paulson
Vincent Reusch
Nathalie Rinehardt
Lori Steedsman
Karis Thompson

Poster, cover, and layout design by
Valeria López-Cortés and Camillia Freeland-Taylor
# Table of Contents

Introduction .................................................. 1  
*Djembe Team*

The Jebeliya: Reflections on Development ............... 2  
*Dr. Stewart Herman*

A Little Taste of My Extraordinary Experiences in the U.S. ...... 4  
*David Velich*

A Simple Gift of Touch ................................... 5  
*Emily Gilsrud*

Third World, Not Second Class! ............................ 7  
*Sureshi Jayawardene*

Where I am From ........................................ 9  
*Xuting Jiang*

The Last Crane Game ..................................... 10  
*Dr. Vincent Reusch*

The Art of Good Travel .................................. 14  
*Marisa Jackels*

Art Submission ........................................... 16  
*Nikki Rae*

Céad Míle Fáilte ........................................... 18  
*Caroline Grealish*

Standing in the Presence of a Hindu Goddess ............. 20  
*Dr. Tammy Lanaghan*

Human Trafficking ...................................... 22  
*Melanie Thompson*

What Work Might Be ................................... 24  
*Dr. Bill Snyder*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ukrainian Heart in America</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Oksana Bihun</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relating to “the Other”</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr. Mona Ibrahim</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning to See Through Their Eyes.</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kelly Pflaum</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A World I Never Had To Know</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wendy Vang</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Art Submission</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sierra Sweet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Booklist</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100% Me</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ayah Kamel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human Rights for All: Tunisia, Egypt, next?</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ayah Kamel</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biographies: Editing Staff.</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“Gbudum Gbudum kpa”-- the unmistakable sounds of the *Djembe* pierce the moonlit night in Baro, a village in Guinea, gathering the people together. Halfway across the world, in China, the red drums march in front of soldiers signifying the power of rulers and the destinies of their armies. And right here at Concordia, student bands with their modern percussion instruments dazzle their audiences time and again in our auditoriums and hallways. Indeed, there may very well be no other artifact as ubiquitous as the drum in the diverse cultures of the world. It transcends both cultural and geographical barriers. Its enchanting beats can be heard from the remote African villages to the great orchestra halls of the world.

In deciding upon a name for this journal for its 2010 debut, we chose to readopt a name used in some previous cultural publications at Concordia: *Djembe*—the name of an African drum. The *Djembe* is of unique cultural significance. It is a symbol of the commonalities between the cultures of the world. Indeed, the word “*Djembe*” is often traced to the Bamanakan language of the Bamana people in Mali, where it means “everyone gather together.” “Dje” means “to gather” and “be” means “everyone.” The *Djembe* also highlights the uniqueness of each individual culture, just as drums come in a wide variety of shapes, sizes and sounds. Each *Djembe*, like our contributors, has its own unique rhythm and so do the articles in this journal. All of them tell a story and open windows into cultures and world affairs. As you immerse yourself in the writings of this journal we hope they come to life like musical notes on a page, each rhythm drawing you into a better understanding of our world.

**The Tree**

Along with the *Djembe* drum, this year we have also placed a tree on the cover of our journal. This is a modern day representation on the tree of life. Historically this concept has been prevalent in many cultures. The meaning of the tree as perceived in different faiths, cultures, and belief systems still resonates the same simple and strong message of UNITY. We as humans develop our ‘roots’ from our history and past experiences, as we branch out and have to opportunity to experience more of this diverse world, we grow. Although our paths may lead in different directions, we may be shaped in different ways, and have experiences that can never be duplicated, we are all interconnected by the ‘trunk’ of life. We are all in this wonderful, thrilling, scary, and amazing experience together! This is a journal of OUR tales, enjoy!

-Camillia Freeland-Taylor

- *Djembe* Team
This past May, six students and I experienced some Middle Eastern "development" in the raw. Under a vividly blue, sheltering, desert sky, we worked with local residents to build a small dam not far from Mt. Sinai. All was done by camel and by hand — carrying boulders, scooping sand, mixing mortar, and carrying all of the above in a high and narrow gorge where skilled Jebeliya (Jeh-beh-lee-yah) and Egyptian masons pieced together a gracefully curved dam some ten feet high.

I was drawn into the project by the plight of the Jebeliya. These "people of the mountain" trace their history back to the Emperor Justinian, who reportedly brought them from the Black Sea region in the sixth century to supply the material needs of the newly established St. Katherine's Monastery. They settled in the red-granite mountains surrounding Mt. Sinai and intermarried with local Bedouin, producing what is recognized as a distinct nomadic tribe. Perhaps the area became most economically developed in the mid-nineteenth century, when Abas Pasha, the morose and reclusive ruler of Egypt at the time, ordered a summer palace built on a barren peak not far from the monastery. Possibly as an omen of what was to come, he was assassinated, the project was abandoned, and the economic activity of the area declined. One hundred years later, the Jebeliya moved out of their rugged mountain wadis, or valleys, down to the flatter land around the monastery. Their mountain gardens of fruit trees, enclosed by high stonewalls, were largely abandoned.

Some fifteen years ago, the tide slowly began turning the other way, thanks in good measure to the Makhad Trust, a small British effort organized by a charmingly quirky and tenacious architect named Danny Schmulevitch. He began cultivating relationships with Jebeliya and responded to their ideas for reclaiming their gardens and rebuilding their mountain economy. The Makhad Trust encourages and supports local garden-owners in deepening their ancient wells to reach the dropping water table; this involves digging through solid granite bedrock to a depth of twenty-five feet or more. Thirty dams have been deepened so far. Makhad also flies in small teams of volunteers to build low stone dams, which serve to capture and retain the runoff from infrequent rainstorms. The precious water seeps into the rocky soil to recharge the long-depleted aquifers. Despite a drought lasting almost a decade, improvements are already visible. Stonewalls have been rebuilt, trees planted, and even magnificent outhouses constructed to accommodate itinerant trekkers who arrange to pitch their tents in the gardens. Mini-oases of startling greenery have blossomed in the bottoms of the ruddy granite wadis.

Today most Jebeliya still live in St. Katherine, adjacent to the monastery, or the village of Abu Sila. There they have electricity, water, jobs, schooling, and some degree of medical care — but not their beloved gardens, with olives, pomegranates, almonds and other fruits of the mountain valleys. They have neither the fresher air of higher altitude, nor can they smell the pungent aroma of wild herbs.

So they long to reestablish their high gardens. With the help of Makhad and the government, they are making slow, steady steps, one dam at a time. The dam we built is expected to raise the water table in Wadi Zuweitin and nourish the gardens of several families. Nine dams have been built so far, and more than two dozen are at various stages of planning. Eighty-five more families are on Makhad’s list for deepened wells and dams. Interest is keen simply because the families stand to gain so much. Yet only two people actually reside full-time in the mountains, and most beneficiaries of Makhad’s help are not likely to return to their family gardens to live.
Full-blown economic development is not expected, and therein lies the genius of the project. Genuine development, it seems to me, involves five complementary measures of well-being, and the Makhad effort appears to me to meet all five. The first measure is material improvement. In this respect, the wells and dams make it possible for families once again to cultivate the fruit of their orchards and enjoy the land that they treasure.

A second measure is historical and cultural preservation. The Jebeliya are not busting into an untrammeled wilderness, but seeking to restore a neglected inheritance from their ancestors. By reviving their gardens, they strengthen the region’s culture and enhance its appeal to trekkers.

A third measure of genuine development is what might be termed the empowerment of individuals. Some ten years ago, Thomas Friedman heralded the spread of globalization by juxtaposing two symbols: the Lexus and the olive tree. Beneficiaries of globalization want to give up neither the shiny technology, which improves their lives materially, nor the deeply rooted traditions that ground their lives. The Makhad effort reinforces this kind of empowerment. With a very modest bit of development provided by the dams, the Jebeliya are able to move increasingly comfortably between two worlds.

There remain two further measures of genuine development: social justice and environmental sustainability. The Makhad effort seems to achieve both, thanks to its small scale. Social justice is served by extensive consultation among the Jebeliya for the scheduling and planning of projects. No distant bureaucracy or large institutions intervene. Rather, it takes a full year of local effort to move each dam project from conception to completion. This process seems sufficiently fair that future beneficiaries wait patiently in line. Environmental sustainability is served by the modest scale of construction, the dams are built entirely by hand. Their construction involves simply rearranging the rocks and sand with which the Sinai is so abundantly endowed. Each dam requires 2–3 tons of cement, ferried in on camel back — a mode of transportation that contributes modestly to the carbon in the atmosphere. Once built, the dams fade into near-invisibility against the stark granite of the wadi.

Overall, the Makhad effort operates at a scale tolerated by an environment that cannot support more than a light human footprint. The dams raise the water table by a few feet, providing enough water for the garden families to generate income in the form of fruit and in the form of cash from the trekkers who pitch their tents to enjoy Bedouin hospitality. In any case, the Sinai does not encourage further growth. Year-round residence in the high mountain wadis is all but physically impossible. Moreover, the climate seems to be changing, with less rainfall and earlier seasonal spikes of high temperatures. The high wadis of the Sinai may be receiving less precipitation on into the future. The capacity of the mountains to sustain a human population may continue to decline. There is all the more reason, then, for Makhad and the Egyptian government to encourage the capture and conservation of whatever water is received.

While the future is up to the Jebeliya to decide, I cannot help but wonder if leaving the mountain valleys beyond the reach of such modern infrastructure might be a good thing. With the very modest bit of “development” encouraged by the Makhad Trust, the Jebeliya have the opportunity to remain in touch with their natural heritage of tending their orchard gardens while enjoying the benefits and conveniences of interconnected and technologically enabled town living.
Moving from one country to another country frequently brings a variety of fruitful experiences and memories. On the other hand, moving can occasionally result in a bizarre adventure that will be remembered for rest of one’s life. Even though my experiences moving from the Czech Republic to the United States of America were not shocking, they still were interesting in three characteristic ways.

First, finding out that sports are generally organized through high school and college, unlike in the Czech Republic, was surprising. Honestly, I felt like someone was making fun of me, mainly due to language barriers. At age fifteen, I received a great opportunity to continue my studies and to play ice hockey in America, even though I thought representing high school or college in a given sport was only attainable in my dreams. Such an education system in Europe is extremely limited. Athletes cannot manage performing their sport in college since the Czech educational system does not offer similar opportunities. As a matter of fact, it is almost impossible to combine both at once. It is well known in society that any type of “pro” sport is enormously time consuming. The athletes are consequently forced to decide whether to continue studying or practicing their sport professionally. Therefore, being able to combine hockey and education at the same time made my dreams come true.

Second, noticing the friendly and welcoming nature of people in America has, plainly said, made me shed tears. I was indeed aware from my brother Jan’s narratives about people’s friendliness and willingness to talk in the States. However, having a stranger chat with me about the baseball team on my t-shirt was more than surprising; it was horrifying. So horrifying, that I was considering flying back home in a short period of time. The fact that I was scared does not mean that people in the Czech Republic, or generally in Europe, are closed to friendly conversation. Yet, talking about teams on clothing would rarely occur. Personalities of people, especially in the Czech Republic, are rather private if one is not familiar with another person. Thus, imagine a young boy, who does not even know how to speak English, reacting when a stranger comes up and immediately starts conversing about the team on his shirt. On the other hand, after quickly adjusting to this, I have been more than pleased by people’s curiosity in the States about my home country and their sociability.

Finally, the third characteristic of my surprising experiences was caused by a rushing lifestyle and change of food. This may not seem unusual or not serious, but coming from an outlying part of the world where traditional food and consumption of beer is connected to culture, this has been the most difficult challenge. For instance, Czechs eat fish along with potato salad on Christmas Eve, duck or rabbit meat with dumplings and sauerkraut on Sundays, and so on. It is our own extraordinary food that is not exactly seen anywhere else around the globe. Nevertheless, the food in America is pretty tasty. It contains a tremendous amount of sugar, salt and fat, thus
making the food truly “rich,” sometimes too rich. The foods in the Czech Republic do not contain nearly as much of these ingredients, and as a result, getting used to the food in the States was honestly tough.

The rushing lifestyle has overwhelmed me, as well. What I have figured out is that almost everyone is in a rush. In Europe, and especially in the Czech Republic, time goes at a slower pace; people take their time while eating, walking, and simply doing almost anything that takes time. This change was, therefore, disturbing because the first few weeks I was late for class and hockey practice on a daily basis.

Depending on the country I am in, I will always have to adjust to that country’s customs. Though some experiences may not be pleasant, they will surely be remembered for the rest of my life. Although my experiences moving from the Czech Republic to the United States were exciting in three characterist ways, they were still intense and especially surprising.

As a young child I remember sitting for long hours at the beach digging endlessly in the sand hoping that if I dug far enough I’d reach the other side of the world, specifically China. My dreams became an unexpected reality when I jumped at the opportunity to join Dr. Polly Kloster on a Summer Study Abroad trip offered to senior nursing students. During this abroad program entitled, “Integrating Spirituality and Health in China,” seven students and I completed our Community Health Nursing course while we traveled. I am confident that the personal experience I took away from our journey is much more life changing than any education that I have received out of a textbook or in a classroom. Our journey lasted a mere month, but the lessons that I took away from our experiences are going to last me the rest of my life.

Over the course of our travels, we stayed in five cities in China, visiting a nursing school and a hospital in each. We had the opportunity to talk with Chinese nursing students regarding their opinions about health care, ideas concerning community health, and how they felt about their soon-to-be role as nurses in their country in comparison to our views on the same topics. We discovered early on in our conversations that we had different opinions about the health issues that we perceived to be significantly affecting our separate countries. However, what troubled me the most was the reason that most nursing students in China gave for choosing the nursing profession. One of the most profound differences that we discovered was the fact that in China, the nurses didn’t choose to be nurses; rather, they were nurses because they didn’t score high enough on a standardized exam to become what they truly aspired to be. Hearing firsthand the lack of passion that would accompany this country’s future nurses with their lifetime dedication to the care and compassion of others was devastating to me. We learned a lot about the Chinese culture through brief conversations with these students as we each tried to teach one another everything we knew about health promotion and the role of the nurse in our respective countries. These discussions opened our eyes to how differently our countries viewed health in general, how different emphases are placed on how health is managed and treated, and how health issues rank in importance over others. Although these discussions were imperative to our understanding of the culture’s views regarding health, the
the experience that will stick with me forever was one that occurred without words.

In Zhuhai, the second city we visited, we had the privilege of staying on campus at the United International College (UIC), which is the first full-scale cooperation in higher education between Mainland China and Hong Kong. Their education is a lot like ours at Concordia and is also a liberal arts school that places great emphasis on community involvement and service. The students at UIC commonly go on their own time to perform acts of service all around their communities, whether it is volunteering on campus, helping in elementary schools, or going to elderly communities to spend time with residents. Our Concordia group had the chance to go along with one of these outreach programs to spend a day at an elderly home near Zhuhai. Initially going into this experience, I had absolutely no idea what to expect. In the back of my mind I had envisioned a nursing home like we’re used to in the United States. Never in a million years was I prepared for what we were going to see.

Our bus arrived outside the gate of the elderly home and I initially thought that we were at the wrong place. This “elderly home” was nothing like I had expected. Instead of what I thought was going to be a facility where elderly people had caretakers who looked after their every need, we arrived at what I can best describe as an abandonment compound. Each resident had their own room, which was comprised of a bed with a wooden board and sheet, a hole in the ground that was used as a toilet, and all of their personal belongings packed alongside the walls. There was no running water in the rooms, nor did they have doors. These elderly people who had no family to take care of them were essentially put into what I would describe as cement boxes to live the remainder of their lives almost in seclusion. Some residents came from deep within the countryside of China, and it was rare that they found someone else that spoke their dialect, making verbal communication with anybody nearly impossible. As we were walking around, I was expecting to see somebody who worked at this home taking care of the residents. We later found out there was a man who worked at the compound, but he was not in charge of taking care of the elderly residents. The residents were responsible for their own meals, their own laundry, and their own hygiene. Some were crippled, others were blind, and many had other ailments that denied them the ability to care for themselves. It brought tears to my eyes thinking about these poor people who had been brought to this “elderly home” and essentially abandoned. I kept thinking about my own grandparents and how absolutely terrible it would be to put them in the same position. However, I had learned that, because of the immense number of people in China, there just aren’t enough young people and/or facilities to care for all of their elders. China’s one-child policy, which was put into effect in 1979 to reduce China’s population, doesn’t help with this growing problem. With some exceptions for rural families and ethnic minorities, each family in China is only allowed to have one child. Consequences of this policy essentially leave the burden of care for four parents on their only child and often the responsibility of caring for grandparents as well. All too common, these responsibilities get to be too burdensome for the children. So Chinese elders are placed in elderly homes because they have nowhere else to go. After trying to put the despair and sadness that I was feeling for the people living in the home behind me, I found myself sitting next to a woman whose face I will never forget.

I was very worried that because I couldn’t speak the same language as the woman sitting next to me, we would sit and awkwardly stare at each other, accomplishing nothing. However, I quickly learned that a compassionate touch is just as comforting as any words I could have mustered up. We had three students with us from UIC that helped translate between the Chinese elders who spoke Cantonese, and our group, who was crippled with only the ability to speak English, without anyone nearby to help me translate. I felt bad that I couldn’t offer the woman next to me any conversation. To try and show her that I cared, I simply reached over, held her hand, and smiled at her. I quickly learned that was all she needed. She immediately broke down into tears, so I just sat with her in my embrace.
When I finally got the attention of one of the UIC students who could help translate, he came over and asked the woman what was wrong. She tearfully told him that I was the first person to hold her hand and hug her in 28 years! That statement coupled with tears rolling down her frail face absolutely broke my heart. We ended up sitting together for a few more moments just crying together and I made sure not to let go of her hand. I wanted to give her as much love as I could in the small time that we had together, trying effortlessly to make up for the lack of any caring touch she had missed over the last 28 years of her life. I could have never imagined that simply holding somebody’s hand could be so important.

Through that experience, I realized that the simple things in life are what mean the most. Something that I thought was so small, like a simple hug or the touch of a hand, was so incredibly meaningful to that elderly woman whose life I touched that day. I will never forget the face of that woman, whose name I never knew. I pray for this woman and all of the other residents of that elderly home every day, in the hopes that someone else will go and hold their frail hands, give them loving hugs, and just spend time smiling with them. One of the most important lessons that I learned from this global service experience is that a loving touch and a smile can break through all language barriers. I am choosing to live the rest of my life with that thought in the forefront of my mind. I have come to know that simply smiling at others and granting them your undivided loving embrace can brighten their entire day, or possibly the last 28 years of their life.

---

**Third World, Not Second Class!**

**Sureshi Jayawardene**  
Concordia College Alum '08  
Major: Global Studies, Minor: Women’s Studies  
Currently in NDSU Sociology graduate program

Over the years, I have found myself increasingly and wholeheartedly embracing a feminist identity. I watch my family and peers cringe at the mere utterance of this 'F' word that has historically elicited varying degrees of discomfort. Such reactions are generally followed by my attempt to explain the meaning behind my self-proclaimed feminism.

I am a native of Sri Lanka and have been in the U.S. for the last six years, pursuing higher education. My feminist identity, while rooted in experiences in my motherland, has evolved with the life experienced in the United States. I am often met with assertions that my foreign education is what has led to the formation of this strong feminist consciousness through the colonization of my psyche. Many family members have raised the argument that my American education of the last six years has thus orchestrated a 'Westernization' of thought.

This identity is not the direct result of higher education in the U.S. or an acculturation within American society. Rather, it is a self-constructed identity inclusive of a variety of lived experiences, upbringing, heritage, culture and education.

Key to the formation of this identity are three of the most inspirational women in my life: my mother, my grandmother and...
my great-grandmother. All three of them, through the ubiquity of their personalities and experiences, have exemplified feminism in some form or another. Sometimes through easy conversation. Sometimes through intentional education. Mostly, however, through their own modeling of what it meant to be women, defined by different times and spaces.

A single parent and career woman, I watched my mother struggle to balance a family life and establish herself in her chosen career. My grandmother was a housewife and homemaker throughout her adult life, nurturing her two children and then her four grandchildren. My great-grandmother was a public school teacher and survivor of domestic abuse. She was also mother to five children and several grandchildren. Through their actions, words and values these three women exemplify elements of womanhood and thereby a source of feminist empowerment to me. Despite this, I observed areas of their lives where I feel they could have embraced feminist notions that would have been more empowering to them. All three of them overstepped the bounds of cultural prescriptions for womanhood in the way they conducted themselves and went about their lives.

Watching, listening to, and hearing about these women laid the initial foundation for the consideration of my own woman-centered values and ideas. I can easily identify the real experiences of injustice, unfairness, subjugation, and socioeconomic struggle that directly speak to my feminist identity. My initiation to feminist notions, thought, and discourse combines disgruntlement with the inequities of my environment and an inherent interest in social justice, both of which necessitate a personal politics of resistance.

As a teenager, I found myself launching a silent fight with patriarchal norms, regressive policies, the inequitable distribution of resources and opportunities, and hierarchical social constructs. This process led to the development of self that incorporated far more knowledge and experience than that which was prescribed for me, enabling me to see the disparities of society through a much wider lens. For me, responsible civic engagement required taking a firm stand on controversial issues, challenging the status quo, and engaging in an alternative discourse.

More recently, I have explored the particular significance to me of being a Sri Lankan woman, single mother, daughter, sister, friend, scholar, artist, and activist. Today, this identity is that of a Third World feminist. What gives rise to this determination is largely my Third World experiences in Sri Lanka, where I was first exposed to feminist issues and discovered, for the first time, my own quasi-feminist beliefs. Beyond this is my diverse knowledge of the broader scope of my Third World experiences and their impact on my life, my son’s life, and all the other lives intertwined with mine.

Third World feminism is set apart from what is typically considered feminism in the West. This distinction is drawn to acknowledge how third world women were already engaged in feminist and women’s rights movements prior to interventions by Western women/feminists. Moreover, Third World feminism demands that the pedagogical essence, discourse, and praxis of third world women be regarded as valid and thus, canonical within feminism as a whole. Third World feminist theorists Chandra Mohanty and Uma Narayan actively encourage more Third World women to embrace their feminism through this framework. Such a paradigm affords proactive movement in feminist (and/or women-centered) efforts inside individual Third World states. Thus, successful resolution of women’s issues with positive change driven from within is validated and made possible.

My involvement in local feminist activity in Sri Lanka is hereby given value and located within the broader global feminist movement. When the term ‘Third World’ itself carries negative connotations (particularly if one is from the Third World but situated in the West) and often speaks to one’s identity, it becomes challenging to be completely removed from the negativity and the label. By (re)claiming ‘Third World’ status, I attempt to justify and dispel any notion that my identity as such is (negatively) impacted by the Western world and thereby removed from traditional, cultural contexts. Further still, that my experiences are secondary to that of women in the West (or, anywhere else in the world). The bottom line is that they are unique, valid, and largely Third World. Therefore, the distinction, for me, is that my feminism is located on terms that are familiar to me. These experiences and the feminist identity thereby formed are not classified by a Western framework of what they are deemed to be!
I am from a big country over a billion,
Different ethnic groups, different children.
"One-child policy" was strictly spoken;
Nothing was chosen.
I am from a small family of three,
Hand in hand we walked along the sea.
The word "kindness" was taught to me,
Forever Lasting.
I am from the city of happiness,
Mountains, hot springs are countless.
I am from the flavor of sweet and sour,
Where love, caring were consistently given.
I am from the fresh Spring,
Where streets were always green with Banyan trees.
I am from the rainy Summer,
Where the smell of Jasmine entertains neighbor's laughter.
I am from the breezy Autumn,
People gather, appreciate the reunion, tasty mooncake.
I am from the sparkly Winter,
The season of New Year, family warmth, the natural heater.
I have traveled too far, too long from the place I once belonged,
But I have kept it all deeply inside my heart.
This is where I am from.
I was walking home late one Sunday night when I saw the forgotten crane game in an alley near my apartment building in Jeonju, South Korea. I had been sitting at an all-night cafe, drinking a cappuccino and reading my Korean-language textbook. A professor at the university where I taught English was giving me free lessons. The cafe was a van, actually, its side lifting to form an awning, space enough inside for an espresso machine and a thin man in an apron. An electric space heater kept me warm against the late September evening. These vans were all over the city, having replaced the kabob vans that had roamed the streets when I’d arrived in Korea six months earlier. I suspected that the cappuccino vans were actually refurbished kabob vans, “OK Kabob,” painted over with “Smiling Cappuccino” and “Happy Cup!” In a month or two, I thought, they might be doughnut vans or hamburger stands.

The crane game was one of those into which you put a quarter—or in this case, a hundred-won coin—and then manipulate the dangling claw with a joystick, dropping it into a plush pile of cheap stuffed animals, nearly impossible to grab. These crane games had been hugely popular when I’d arrived. They had lined the streets throughout the shopping district and around the university. Crowds of young men worked the steel jaws in hopes of earning prizes for their girlfriends. But the fad had faded, as fads do so quickly in Korea, and after a desperate attempt to reinvigorate interest by filling the machines with more expensive catches—cell phones, mini-disc players, remote control cars, all impossible to grab—the vendors gave up, and the yellow machines began to disappear.

Following the demise of the crane games, Dance Dance Revolution hit the scene, and video-game rooms everywhere filled with boys and girls in school uniforms, stepping mechanically on the colored spots that flashed in time with the music. But just as quickly as it came, DDR was gone. Then the rage was machines with punching bags and strength meters. I had recently heard of a place with a mechanical bull, and I wondered if that would be the next fad, robotic bulls gyrating throughout the city.

I had moved to Korea after finishing an English M.A. program. I was thirty years old, wanting some adventure, wanting to see a bit of the world before entering a Ph.D. program and funneling myself into more permanent obligations. Before my arrival, I didn’t know much about Korea. I remembered a Summer Olympics being held there, disputes in the boxing scores. I had heard of Kim Jung Il in North Korea, his love of Hollywood movies and the famine of his people. But when I imagined Korea, I found my mind split. I imagined curling tiled roofs, red and gold silk robes, poets writing on parchment scrolls beside babbling brooks. But I also imagined bullet trains, neon signs, break-neck construction. Somehow these two visions intermingled unexamined in my mind, “Asia” morphing from one to the other as fit my desires or fears of the moment. When I stepped off the plane at Kimpo Airport (since replaced by Incheon International), however, I found only the modern Korea, and for some months I was content with, even fascinated by, this new home.

I would stand on the balcony of my twentieth-floor apartment and look out at the city, at its flashing neon signs and rows of small shops. The streets were narrow, filled with people day or night. Restaurants and bars were carved into the smallest nooks between stores, often just a neon sign over a dark staircase. Pop music blared from the storefronts, the songs overlapping between stores. On
rainy days, the city would fill with umbrellas, their circles merging, diverging, flowing like cells through the narrow streets. New businesses seemed to open every day with great fanfare—gyrating balloon people, dancing girls and M.C.s—only to close a few months later, a new business opening almost before the brooms had finished sweeping the old one away. And in every direction, towering over the skyline were construction cranes, erecting new buildings, each taller, grander, more modern than the last.

I had found this modern Korea, but I found only tattered remnants of the older Korea. In the center of the city was the traditional public gathering place, gaeksa, a wooden building topped with a curled tile roof. On the edges of the city were several large markets, where farmers and fishermen sold their food. In these places, I would see older people dressed in the traditional Korean hanbok, a kind of loose robe and flowing pants. But when I turned a corner and these places disappeared from my sight, I found it difficult to imagine that they had been there at all, or that they would be there when I next passed by that way.

Rain had just started to fall when I found the crane game that Sunday night in the alley. I thought it must have been forgotten, perhaps abandoned, left there to rust. But it was plugged in, a blue-white fluorescent tube flickering in its plexiglass case, the light reflecting off the wet blacktop of the alley. I fished in my pocket for a hundred-won coin. The sides of the tank were fogged, and as I put the coin into the slot, a shadow of movement inside caught my eye. Just before the machines had disappeared, I had seen one that had been stocked with lobsters as prizes. The tank had been sealed, and the lobsters lolled dolefully in brackish water, their claws strapped with blue rubber bands. The movement I saw this time, however, didn’t look like something in water. I wiped my arm across the glass, and I found inside three guinea pigs, brown and white, huddled in a corner.

There was no bedding in the machine, just a flat, steel surface, scattered with the brown pellets of their droppings. I was alone in the alley, alone perhaps for the first time since I’d come to Korea. One of the guinea pigs was watching me, and I looked into the black bead of his eye. There he was, trapped inside what felt like the last remaining crane game in all Korea, and I thought that this must be what had happened to that other Korea, the five-thousand-year-old red and golden silk Korea. It had been wheeled out to the back alley and left to rust, to starve, to look mournfully around at the cement and steel, at the wash of flashing neon lights that had grown up seemingly overnight in its place.

During the following week, I saw that guinea pig’s eye everywhere. When the bus driver waved away an elderly man who couldn’t read the schedule (a man raised during Japanese occupation, barred as a child from learning to read the Korean hangul), I saw that guinea pig’s eye in his. When I passed an old woman sitting on cardboard in front of McDonald’s, selling cabbages that she had carried on her back from whatever outlying village, I saw that glistening eye. When I saw the frail crowd of elderly men huddled on the steps of the gaeksa, hemmed in by a forest of hastily built glass and steel buildings, I saw those guinea pigs huddled in the corner of their tank.

The next weekend, the last in September, was Chuseok, a Korean holiday that I had been told is something like our Thanksgiving. As with Thanksgiving, the holiday weekend spanned from Thursday through Sunday. Classes would let out on Wednesday afternoon, and I decided I would leave the city for the four-day weekend. I had heard of an island off the southern coast where I could stay at a minbak, a sort of rustic bed and breakfast. It was located on what at this time of year would be a secluded beach. I packed clothes, food, a few books and a collapsable fishing pole into my backpack. I rode my bicycle to the train station, checked the bike with the porter and took a seat on the 7:35, the city sliding away behind me as the train departed. What new fad would pop up in the four days I was gone, I wondered. Guinea pig kabobs? Puppies in the crane games?

At Mokpo, I transferred from the train to a car ferry, and by mid afternoon I was on the island, cycling through rice paddies and salt flats. I ascended a gradual hill for an hour or so, through the center of the island. A twenty-minute descent followed, ending when I coasted around a bend, and there was the ocean, a horseshoe bay, pinched nearly shut at its tips. A beach filled the arc of the bay, and rock outcrops rose on either side of the bay’s opening. A few seagulls drifted among a handful of brightly painted fishing boats. Half a dozen traditional tiled-roof houses huddled near the beach. Otherwise, the bay was empty, not a person in sight.
The minbak was the last house at one end of the bay. A hillside planted in pumpkins rose beside it, and on top of the hill were half a dozen large earthen mounds. The mounds were almost perfectly spherical, several feet in diameter, covered in tall grass. I knew that kimchi, a spicy pickled cabbage, was traditionally buried in stoneware jars, where they would age in a consistent climate, but I had never seen their burial sites, had never met a Korean who didn’t buy kimchi in the grocery store.

An old halmoni, a Korean grandmother, met me at the sliding door. She was wearing a hanbok, her feet bare. Had I been forced to guess her age, I would have said ninety. She stood about four feet tall, her face a pattern of deep lines that suggested laughter. She was talking as she opened the door, and she continued talking as she showed me into the house.

Inside were three rooms, separated by more sliding doors. Attached to the back of the house was a washroom with a “squat pot” toilet and a length of garden hose attached to a spigot, plastic buckets for bathing. The woman never stopped talking, her words shouted at me, punctuated with laughter and pats on the back of my hand. She left me in my room, a small square, with a single curtainless window and a sleeping mat rolled up on a wooden floor. I had found my traditional Korea.

I spent the last couple hours of daylight walking the beach, and when I returned to the minbak, the old woman was inside, her window glowing from a dim light in her room. I ate dinner alone—a can of tuna and a candy bar—on the covered porch in front of the house.

In the morning, I put on a windbreaker and carried my fishing rod and two books onto the rocky point, where I spent the morning fishing and reading. I didn’t catch anything, but I didn’t mind. I watched the fishing boats ride into the bay with their morning catch, alerted to their return by the slow puttering of their diesel engines. Several white-haired men stood on the deck in yellow rain suits.

At dusk, I walked back to the minbak. The old woman was outside, standing on the slope of hillside beside the house. She was severing the ripe pumpkins from their vines with a long, curved knife. Her feet were bare, and her toes curled for traction around the vines on the steep hillside. I waved, and she shouted and pointed at her pile of pumpkins. “Hana doh,” she said. “One more.” The pumpkins were small, but I managed to carry only three, one falling out of my arms each time I tried to grab a fourth. I took the three down the hill, she following with four in her arms. As darkness grew, we brought half a dozen loads of pumpkins down the hill and stacked them against the house.

I ate dinner once again on the porch. Over a camp stove, I cooked an egg and a packet of ramium, the Korean equivalent of Japanese ramen. I fell asleep early, and the next day I fished unsuccessfully again on the rocks and walked the length of the beach, picking up shells and bits of beach glass. I watched the sun set from the far point of the bay, and I walked back in the deepening dusk. The tide had gone out, and the fishing boats leaned on their bellies in the smooth tidal mud.

I was opening my last can of tuna on the porch when I heard the old woman behind me. “Ani, ani,” she said, waving away my packaged food. “Jakka man. No, no. Wait a minute.” She ducked into the house and returned with a plate piled with kimchi. She went back inside and came out with a pot of white rice, and a dish of some other pickled vegetable, a root perhaps, or fiddlehead ferns. She left me again and came back with more, then more, until we had a dozen different foods on the floor with us, almost none of which I recognized. This, I thought, must be our Chuseok feast. She sat on the porch beside me, and we ate together, she studying me as I tried each dish, delighted when I liked something, equally delighted when I couldn’t disguise a sour face after a bite of what I was sure was raw octopus.

She talked all the while we ate, and when our eating slowed, she brought out tea. She lit two fat candles, and her face shown like a warm moon in the aura of candlelight. I heard the words “family” and “Seoul,” as she talked, and catching a word here and there I understood that she had a grandson who had grown up on the island, that he was married and had a daughter. I understood that he lived in Seoul, and that they weren’t making the trip home for Chuseok. She pointed to the hillside as she talked about her grandson. The three earthen mounds that I had seen when I arrived were silhouetted against a nearly full moon. I asked if her grandson had helped her with the kimchi, but she seemed not to understand. I asked again, and she passed me the bowl of kimchi, pleased as I took another bite. I imagined her grandson now, in his highrise apartment, her great granddaughter watching satellite TV—music videos by H.O.T. (High-five Of Teenagers) or Fin.K.L (Fine Korean Ladies), or whomever had replaced those bands. The old woman eventually talked herself hoarse, and she laughed.
about that. She had trouble standing, and she smacked her legs and scolded them in the same tone of voice she’d used on me when I could manage only three pumpkins instead of four.

In the morning, the old woman loaded me up with a container of pumpkin porridge, some kimchi and rice. She shouted and laughed after me as I rode up the hill. I stopped before the road turned out of sight, and watched as she eased herself off her porch and walked up the base of the hill, a pair of garden shears in her hand. The bay was calm, the tide in, the sea lapping almost at the front doors of the small houses. I had found my traditional Korea, had spent two days immersed in its peaceful calm, but even from the short distance of the top of this hill, it seemed an age away, untouchable, as if in a case behind glass. I watched that ninety-year-old woman hobble on shaky legs up the slope to the pumpkin patch, and I felt as if I were once again looking into the window of that forgotten crane game. I had spent the past three days, I thought, not immersed in a living culture, but inside that tank. How long, I wondered as I rode away, before this one, too, would be scrapped to make way for the next big thing?

The ferry had just arrived when I reached the dock, but there would be half an hour of unloading and loading cars. I sat on a bench in the waiting area and watched the vehicles drive off the boat. Most of them were farm trucks, small pickups, their rusting beds covered with canvas.

The door to the waiting room opened, and a woman with a young girl of two or three entered the lobby. The woman was wearing a lavender pantsuit, very urban, very Western. Her daughter was in a hanbok, red and gold, covered in embroidery; on her head was a red silk hat. The two sat on a bench opposite mine. The little girl smiled shyly and waved at me, and for a moment I thought maybe the traditional Korea wasn’t on its last legs, wasn’t starving in a back alley, locked inside a rusting crane game. The girl fanned the hem of her dress, and her mother smiled at me. “Chuseok,” she said, nodding toward her daughter’s hanbok. Of course, I thought, a costume. I remembered Thanksgivings when I was a child, making construction-paper pilgrim hats in elementary school, drawing turkeys with crayons, the outline of my hand forming the tail.

The little girl clung to her mother’s leg and stared at me. Then she ran to a row of candy vending machines. The woman spoke to me in Korean, and I understood that they were visiting home on the last day of the Chuseok vacation, that her husband was still on the boat, waiting to drive their car off the ferry. She told me they were going to see her husband’s grandmother. I tried to ask if his grandmother lived on the horseshoe bay, if she raised pumpkins on the hillside, but I didn’t have the words, and she only smiled at me apologetically, told me, yes, Koreans like pumpkin. A silver sedan drove off the ferry, and the woman called to the girl, “Bali wa.” Hurry up. The girl ran to her mother, and I asked if I could take their picture.

So what if the girl’s dress is only a costume, I thought, as I raised the camera to my eye. It’s an adorable sight, a gesture of love for a grandmother. And what would I want for her? As much as I had enjoyed my time here, her life lay elsewhere, this island as foreign to her as the hanbok that she wore for the pleasure of her great-grandmother. She may become a doctor or a businesswoman or an engineer. She may live in another country; she may live in several. Her opportunities would be almost fathomless compared to those of the halmoni whom I imagined just then carrying more pumpkins down from the patch. Still, despite the doors that modernization opened, I lamented the loss of those that closed.

“Hana, dul, set,” I counted. The mother held her daughter’s arms apart to display her beautiful dress; the man tapped twice on the car horn, and before the girl could race toward the door I released the shutter.

I followed the mother and daughter out of the waiting room, watched their car speed down the single, narrow road that ran through this tiny village. When they had driven out of sight, I stored my bicycle in the boat’s cargo hull and climbed to the top deck. The weather was cool, but the sky was cloudless and vibrant blue. I decided not to read, but to watch the scenery as the ferry threaded through a chain of islands on our two-hour trip back to the mainland.
The boat’s horn blasted, a long pull of whistle, and with a clanking of chains the ramp began to rise. From the upper deck, I looked out at the wooded hillside that was the backdrop of the village, and I saw a group of people walking through the scattered pines—a man, woman and small boy, the man and boy in suits, the woman in a black dress. Leading them was an old man in a green hanbok.

A wash of water rolled forward as the boat reversed away from the dock. The horn blew again, and the boat pivoted and surged forward. As we sped away, angling for the northern point of the bay, the family stopped at a cluster of three grass-covered mounds, the same kind I had seen above the pumpkin patch. The woman spread a quilt on the grass, and just as the boat rounded the point, obscuring them from my sight, the group kneeled in front of the earthen mounds and touched their heads to the ground.

I want to say that I was surprised when I realized that those nearly perfect spheres did not house jars of kimchi. But once revealed, the fact was too obvious, and I realized that part of me had known all along. Chuseok, I would later learn when I showed the picture of the little girl to my Korean language teacher, is nothing like our Thanksgiving, but is instead a holiday of pilgrimage, a time when families return to their ancestral homes to pay homage to their dead.

The girl in the hanbok may have been too young that year to be of help, but she would one day learn to use the clippers to trim the grass of the graves, as I’m now sure the old woman I’d stayed with was going to do that morning. The little girl would eventually learn to say the proper prayers, would help place the bowls of rice and fruit before the earthen mounds, stick the chopsticks into the bowls so that the dead could eat. And before long she would learn what the teenagers on the Dance Dance Revolution machines had learned, what the barista in the cappuccino van had learned, what the misguided entrepreneur who placed the guinea pigs in the crane game had learned, what nearly every Korean knows. She would learn the list of her ancestors’ names, an unbroken chain trailing back a dozen generations or more.

When I returned from the island, I found that the crane game was still in the alley near my apartment, but that it was no longer plugged in, the guinea pigs no longer huddled in its tank (I like to think that they escaped, that they’re fugitives wandering the city). As far as I knew, the last crane game in all Korea was dead. I wondered what would replace it. I was sure that whatever it was would be bright and loud and almost irresistible. I just hoped that it would not be so bright or so loud that the little girl in my photograph would miss the whispers of her ancestors each year at Chuseok.

The boat’s horn blasted, a long pull of whistle, and with a clanking of chains the ramp began to rise. From the upper deck, I looked out at the wooded hillside that was the backdrop of the village, and I saw a group of people walking through the scattered pines—a man, woman and small boy, the man and boy in suits, the woman in a black dress. Leading them was an old man in a green hanbok.

A wash of water rolled forward as the boat reversed away from the dock. The horn blew again, and the boat pivoted and surged forward. As we sped away, angling for the northern point of the bay, the family stopped at a cluster of three grass-covered mounds, the same kind I had seen above the pumpkin patch. The woman spread a quilt on the grass, and just as the boat rounded the point, obscuring them from my sight, the group kneeled in front of the earthen mounds and touched their heads to the ground.

I want to say that I was surprised when I realized that those nearly perfect spheres did not house jars of kimchi. But once revealed, the fact was too obvious, and I realized that part of me had known all along. Chuseok, I would later learn when I showed the picture of the little girl to my Korean language teacher, is nothing like our Thanksgiving, but is instead a holiday of pilgrimage, a time when families return to their ancestral homes to pay homage to their dead.

The girl in the hanbok may have been too young that year to be of help, but she would one day learn to use the clippers to trim the grass of the graves, as I’m now sure the old woman I’d stayed with was going to do that morning. The little girl would eventually learn to say the proper prayers, would help place the bowls of rice and fruit before the earthen mounds, stick the chopsticks into the bowls so that the dead could eat. And before long she would learn what the teenagers on the Dance Dance Revolution machines had learned, what the barista in the cappuccino van had learned, what the misguided entrepreneur who placed the guinea pigs in the crane game had learned, what nearly every Korean knows. She would learn the list of her ancestors’ names, an unbroken chain trailing back a dozen generations or more.

When I returned from the island, I found that the crane game was still in the alley near my apartment, but that it was no longer plugged in, the guinea pigs no longer huddled in its tank (I like to think that they escaped, that they’re fugitives wandering the city). As far as I knew, the last crane game in all Korea was dead. I wondered what would replace it. I was sure that whatever it was would be bright and loud and almost irresistible. I just hoped that it would not be so bright or so loud that the little girl in my photograph would miss the whispers of her ancestors each year at Chuseok.

A corner cafe. Freshly brewed espresso. The scent of baguettes. The atmosphere and culture of Paris, and indeed all of France, continuously caught me off guard. It was the simplicity of lifestyle that never failed to surprise me: how friends could carelessly spend four hours a day sitting in a restaurant, enjoying their food and engaging in real conversation. How the city seemed to
bustle about without seeming rushed. As I walked the ancient cobblestone streets and gazed at the distant outline of Notre Dame against the sky, I felt more at home than I ever had. Yet, I thought, one can always feel at home. I had felt at home in the rainforests of Costa Rica; on the beaches in Mexico; even within the taxi infested streets of New York City.

I feel at home now, writing in my dorm room in Moorhead, Minnesota.

You see with each new place I go, a tiny connection forms between myself and that place; a small establishment of home. Through creating these bonds I have also found that I feel much more a part of the world, and much more aware of its multifaceted beauty. In the words of the poet Maya Angelou, “I long, as does every human being, to be at home wherever I find myself”. This internal desire to feel at home is mutual among all human beings. The key to satisfying this aspiration is, as I have illustrated, creating those bonds of home no matter where you go. In other words, travel.

But wait! This is not just any type of travel. To truly begin building this ability to feel at home, one must first master the art of being a good traveler. The first, very basic step: keep cool. When traveling, anything can happen and it’s impossible to be completely prepared. For instance, in our month-long trip to France and Italy, my family and I came back to the train station feeling very tired after a long, hot day in Rome. Everyone was longing to get home and go to sleep. However, something very curious was afoot; there were no trains in the station. Our dreams of slumber were soon dashed when we were informed that the reason behind the missing trains was that the conductors had decided to go on strike. There was no telling when, or if, the trains would come. Thankfully, using their “good traveler” skills (and the very generous help of the mobile camps we were staying at) my parents were able to arrange for a large taxi to bring us, happily, home. Now in such a situation, a bad traveler might get stressed, scared, and whiny at the thought of sleeping in the train station- which of course was the main thought going through our heads. A good traveler however, never loses their head, but perhaps even embraces the surprises of traveling as an adventure. For traveling is an adventure, and the the unexpected moments become the future well-worn dinner table stories.

The next step to being a good traveler is to be a whole-hearted traveler. A whole-hearted traveler does not hold any stereotypes or prejudices against the culture they are about to enter. Instead, one must engage in that culture with new eyes, and experience the lifestyle without pre-judgement. Interact with the people of that culture; hear their perspectives, eat their food, speak their language, feel their pain, feel their joy. Perhaps the greatest, albeit more rare chance to being a whole-hearted traveler, is to develop personal relationships with the very souls of that culture. I can testify to this experience.

I was recently blessed with the opportunity to travel with my mother to France in February of 2010. We stayed in Lyon, at the house of her old friends from a jazz group, where she would be recording a CD. The experience was unforgettable. While my mom worked with jazz musicians from all over Europe, I toured Lyon with our host’s daughter, and now my “french sister”, Natacha. Together we walked the backstreets she took to school, chatted with her friends, and walked through the market (where I would ask ‘C’est que cest?’ at each fruit and vegetable, and she would patiently teach me the names). Our activities ranged everywhere from riding “La Grande Roue” (the ferris wheel), to watching “Invictus” and “I am Legend” with french subtitles. The most memorable time was in the evening, when we would sit down with the whole family and any guests that happened to be over (there was usually a guest) and enjoy a scrumptious three or four course meal, complete with wine and good conversation. It is the heart of french culture, right here in the ordinary home. That week, Lyon became my home just as much (if not more) as California. Likewise, Natacha came and stayed at our house for a month in the summer, making it her home as well. She has seen American culture at its heart, through my family and I. This is the key, the joy, of whole-hearted traveling.
While there are many other steps to being a good traveler, I shall conclude with what I feel is most relevant to you and I, as college students. Travel now. Take every opportunity. A good traveler can only exercise his or her fantastic skills if they are, in fact, traveling. Woe to the student who uses the words “It’s too expensive” or “Not right now”. Although the former argument can and is a valid issue, for many the real issue lies in the will. Blogger Anna Czaczkowski writes, “Many of them (Americans) feel that they need to have a large flat screen TV in the living room of the apartment they are renting...that’s a few thousand dollars which could have been put towards an eye-opening, horizon-expanding adventure abroad. My argument is not that everyone can afford such travel, but that Americans are making all the wrong choices- and prioritizing consumerism over their own personal growth”.

This argument is true to some extent. While some honestly cannot afford the financial costs of travel, other’s issue lies in prioritization. By recognizing the vital importance of developing those personal connections with different parts of the world and experiencing firsthand the differences in other cultures, re-prioritizing can allow for the means to travel. There is truth to the saying, 'Where there’s a will, there's a way'.

As to the latter argument; to say “not right now” is almost equivalent to condemning that potentially life-changing traveling experience to doom. Furthermore, it is depriving oneself from the opportunity to break out of one’s personal comfort zone. As students, we are at a crucial point of developing values and ideas. It is a time when we are forming and solidifying worldviews, and actively opening our minds to new ideas. By saying “Not right now”, one is losing that chance to travel whole-heartedly into a culture without any preset biases. As Mark Twain once wrote, “Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry, and narrow-mindedness”. Without opening our eyes, minds, and hearts to the beauty of different lifestyles than our own, we remain at an ignorant standstill in life.

It is for all these reasons that the time to travel is now: to travel adventurously, whole-heartedly, and earnestly. The world is in constant need of unity, and by traveling with the desire to learn about, and most importantly, to love the people of other cultures, we can help to strengthen that unity. And in the process, we may find our souls enriched with a global feeling of home.

Nikki Rae
Mass Media and Photography Majors
Art History minor
2011

The following is a collection of photos I had the opportunity of snapping for one of my classes while attending the University of the Sunshine Coast in Queensland, Australia. The series is a culmination of my experiences in the country and inspiration from Andy Warhol. I started out with a pretty clear image in my head of what I wanted to do—colourful and happy much like some of Warhol’s celebrity portraiture. However as time went on I became somewhat fascinated by the face paint of the Aboriginal tribes in Australia. The Australian natives have used body paint over time to create a sort of “paint” language to create a unique dialogue that is all their own;
which is a trait that I both admire and wanted to give homage to through my work. At USC I lived in an international student area; filled with fascinating people from around the world. I decided to use people from different backgrounds as my subjects for this reason. In a sense the paint represents my Australia—a uniting factor for all these different people and cultures. The project was something whimsical, colourful and completely fascinating. I like each piece because I feel that they have their own feeling and life. Every person has their own complexities that come from their background and individuality but still have the potential to make one beautiful picture overall when brought together with others. That is what I appreciate most.

"They always say time changes things, but you actually have to change them yourself."

-Andy Warhol
Céad Míle Fáilte is the Irish tourism trade slogan, and when translated directly to English it means a hundred thousand welcomes. I did not realize that this slogan should also be used in the community of Concordia College. It was far from my thoughts the night I arrived in America, except for its connection to my home and how much I longed to be there.

When I walked off the plane in the Fargo Airport in North Dakota, I did not feel welcome. I was a stranger in a new country, not knowing my surroundings. I peered through the windows as I entered the arrivals area. It was dark out; the sky was dotted with stars and illuminated by the moon. I wondered to myself if the moon was visible in Ireland at this time, quickly trying to calculate the time change on my fingers, as I was not used to it at this early stage of my trip. Everyone rushed and flew past me to meet their loved one with a loving embrace. My heart sank; it would be seventeen weeks until I had this opportunity. I was hopeful that I would meet people by the end of my trip I would care for as I do my loved ones at home, and would be sad to leave them, but thankful to them for embracing me in their lives. That night I could never imagine being that lucky. It is now only seven weeks since I first touched down at Concordia College and I can safely say I have already met many people that I feel like this about. When I finally arrived in Fargo late in the night, twenty-four hours after I left my home country, I was relieved to be greeted by two friendly students from Concordia. I sank into the back seat of the mini-van sent to collect me from the airport. I was stressed as I had no bag and was thousands of miles away from home about to embark on a great adventure. I counted myself lucky I was meeting two such lovely and pleasant students who really made me feel instantly safe and reassured. It was 10pm at night and these students had been shuttling international students from the Fargo airport to the college. One would expect them to be anything but chirpy. But they were not just friendly, they were excited and enthusiastic. It was an amazing way to be met at the airport and I immediately felt welcome. I did not pay much attention to it at this point; all I wanted after a nightmarish day of traveling, dashing between terminals due to flight cancellations, praying I would not miss my connecting flight, was my bed. I wanted to see the place I would call ‘home’ for the next four months and meet the people I would spent most of the time with, my roommates.

It quickly dawned on me that people were different over here. The perception I initially got of the two Concordia students who collected me from the airport grew as I met more students within my first week during orientation. The two students who collected me from the airport were beyond helpful and very interested in me and my stories of home. At this time I was tired and sad; they were reassuring and helped me feel more comfortable and positive about the experience that lay ahead of me. They helped me settle in that night and gave me their contact details in case I needed anything. They were, I felt, doing more than just bringing me from the airport to the college; they were giving me a feeling of security. This perception did not stop growing as I met staff and faculty around the college. Students, Orientation leaders, Clubbies, Staff, and Professors were excited about meeting me and wanted to know more about my country and culture. They genuinely seemed interested.

I was on campus about two weeks when I began to notice that people would randomly say ‘hello’ as I walked passed them. First I had to reassure myself I had not forgotten meeting this person but as it continued to happen and after I was walking with my American roommate and it happened several times I decided to ask her. She informed me that it was common for people to give one a friendly ‘hello’ as they walked past each other on the footpath.
This concept shocked me at first as I tried to think what it would be like if this happened on the National University of Ireland campus in Galway. I do not think people would give one an accepting glance; you would more than likely be looked at as being a little strange. The general feeling around Concordia College campus is positive and everyone is extremely friendly and helpful and entirely welcoming. I now look on Concordia College as a home away from home and I think this is due to how welcome I was made to feel here.

The students, faculty, and staff at Concordia College have done everything they could possibly do to make me feel welcome. This brings me to the main point. Being thousands of miles from the country I call home, Ireland, I feel I am not so far when I think of Céad Míle Fáilte, the term that means a hundred thousand welcomes. In my personal experience, I have been welcomed by everyone I have met or spent time with since I first arrived at Concordia College—so much more than the term Céad Míle Fáilte can ever describe. On one of my first days I was here a lovely young lady, a junior at the college, insisted she help me to settle in properly and get all the stuff I needed to make my apartment feel like my own. She may think that she only drove me to Wal-Mart, but she did much more than this; she made me feel welcome, treated me like a friend even though I had only met her that morning at international orientation. I think this is the way people in the community of Concordia operate though; they are willing to go out of their way to help anyone they think may need help. From a little thing like bringing a transfer student to Wal-Mart, or helping in the Extreme Home Makeover project that took place three blocks down from college, people at Concordia College are helpful and welcoming all the time. The people in the community of Concordia College do things that really help people’s lives, even if it is only a little thing like driving someone to the shop; you never know the impact you may have on them. The students are helpful in a touching way and I think it is a great way to be.

The term Céad Míle Fáilte describes the atmosphere at Concordia College. Every day I feel welcome at the college. Everyone I meet on a daily basis makes me feel welcome. I think the phrase “a hundred thousand welcomes” is more than likely completely unknown by the majority of the population at Concordia but it definitely reflects for me how welcoming and friendly the people at the college are. Every day as we enter the dining services, we are greeted by extremely friendly ladies who swipe our cards to allow us to eat and welcome us into the dining area. This is just a small thing but in my opinion it is the small things that matter and grow and build to create impact on a large scale. I have to compliment the students, staff, faculty at Concordia, from the aspect of an exchange student who is so far away from home. They have all made me feel welcome a hundred thousand times over and thankful that I chose Concordia as my study abroad experience. I have settled in and adapted so well to your way of life all because of how welcome and included I was made to feel on campus and many other places I have visited locally. I know this experience will impact my life in a positive way and I will hopefully become more like the many welcoming and helpful students I have met throughout my stay at Concordia College.
Is it possible for someone outside of a religious tradition to understand that tradition in a way that will be honest to that tradition? Can a Christian understand what it means to be a Hindu without becoming Hindu? Can a Hindu understand Christianity?

Some would argue that this is impossible. For them, religious experience – what people “feel” when they enter into a place of worship or read a particular passage or see an image – is wholly different for each tradition, making it impossible to find a common ground of experience that allows for people from different religious traditions to achieve some level of connection. Thus, efforts to understand one another, to talk with one another, are futile, and ought not be attempted. Yet, if we take this stance of exclusivity, then the very ability to enter into dialogue with one another becomes impossible.

I strongly disagree with this position that religious traditions are so wholly different that we cannot possibly build bridges of understanding. At the same time, however, I am wary of the other extreme which would lead us to the conclusion that, in the end, all religious experiences are, at heart, identical because all religious traditions point to the same Ultimate Reality. There are plenty of books out there that espouse this position in a way that does violence to the religious traditions they claim are the same. No Hindu, or Christian, would recognize their religious tradition in books like this. So, how are we to enter into a dialogue that seeks mutual understanding, while remaining true both to our own background and preserving the integrity of the other religious traditions not our own? This is an enormous challenge that calls upon our honesty, intellect, and respect for others.

To explain what I mean, I will share with you an experience that I had when I first went to the temple home of the goddess about whom I wrote my dissertation, Sri Mahalakshmi, who resides in Kolhapur, India. When I look at the pictures of her that are sitting on my desk at home (reproduced here), I can readily say with the thousands of people who go to her temple every day, that I am overwhelmed with love for her and think that she is very beautiful. There is a considerable history behind this statement, however. How have I come to be able to see beauty in this image that, from a non-empathetic perspective, is merely a block of stone that is not even a particularly beautiful piece of sculpture worthy of being placed in a museum? What makes her beautiful to me and to the thousands who come to see, and be seen by, her? To explain this, I can only share with you my intellectual journey that has led me to this point of empathy – a journey that is rooted as much in acquiring what we might call “book knowledge” as in reflection on my own emotional experiences as I worship in my home congregation.

The first time I met Sri Mahalakshmi in person was about seven years ago during my first trip to India. I went with a friend of mine whose family had worshipped this goddess for close to six hundred years. It was their family tradition to go on pilgrimage to see Sri Mahalakshmi whenever there was a big event in the family: a marriage, a birth, an illness and recovery, success in business, etc. My friend, however, had not been when she was married because she was living in the States by then and couldn’t afford to make the trip. Besides, her husband’s family worshipped a different deity, and traditionally, women were expected to adopt their husbands’ family deity in place of their own. In cases like these, women’s family deities often
become “chosen” deities who receive individual worship, but do not require the more formalized worship that family deities receive. This is not exactly the situation of my friend, but suffice it to say that this trip was for her a major event in her life – the opportunity to meet a goddess who has always been present in her imagination, but whom she had never met in person, at least in a temple.

It was also an important event in my life, yet, I knew deep down that what lay at the heart of the event for me was very different from my friend’s experience. I was also meeting Sri Mahalakshmi for the first time, but it was as an “outsider” to the tradition, as a scholar who had a lot of “book learning” but had no experience of the “on-the-ground Hinduism.” This difference in our positions became increasingly apparent to me the longer I spent at the temple.

Entering into a Hindu temple is a very different experience from walking into a Christian church. It is dark and crowded. The floor, across which you walk barefoot, is covered with dirt tracked in by all the bare feet that pass through each day. The marble is contoured from the hundreds of years of that sand and dirt being scraped across the surface. My baby-steps were tentative and worried and I wondered if I might stub my toe against a raised threshold I couldn’t see because of the dark, or be tripped up by an indentation in the floor that had become deep from the centuries of wear and tear under the innumerable feet of previous visitors.

When my friend and I reached the central shrine of the temple, I was further confronted with confusion and even shame. People jostled one another for a place immediately in front of the doorway of the central shrine. Unwilling to use my elbows, I found myself systematically moved backward, almost against my will, until my back was against the chain that went around the pillars of the room before the shrine where traditionally dancing would have been performed for the entertainment of Sri Mahalakshmi. I knew that I should be up closer to take darshan – the important exchange of seeing between deity and worshipper – but I was at a loss as to how to push myself up to the place immediately before the door. Besides, being 5’ 7”, I towered over nearly everyone else, an excuse for me to hang back: I could take darshan without moving closer because Sri Mahalakshmi could see me and I could see her over the heads of everyone else. I might as well give those shorter than me the better positions to see from, I reasoned to myself.

But, there was far more underlying my reasoning as I stood there that first visit. A stream of emotions overwhelmed me. Panic bordering on revulsion over the crowds and the pushing as people fought over position. Disappointment and embarrassment over the fact that, despite my love for the tradition and my intellectual knowledge about what was supposed to happen in a Hindu temple, I didn’t have the emotional connection: nothing happened for me despite the fact that I’d come 10,000 miles to stand before this goddess. My heart didn’t leap up; I didn’t feel any spiritual connection to this goddess or the people surrounding me. And I suddenly began wondering whether or not, as a Christian, I should even be there. Was I polluting the temple? Would my Christian God forgive me for being in the presence of another deity? Had I wasted 12 years of my life studying a religious tradition with which I now found I could not engage without perhaps violating my own beliefs and traditions?

That was an important day for me, for I moved to a new understanding of what it means to enter into the study of a religious tradition. It is not enough to know all of the information about a tradition. I could spend hours explaining the technicalities in the theological arguments over the nature of ultimate reality or how the divine makes itself present in a stone or metal image at the heart of a Hindu temple. I could have done this that day seven years ago. I could have explained to you that a Hindu temple built in the northern style is a symbolic microcosm of the universe, the central spire representing the central mountain from which all else spreads out and under which is the “womb house” containing the seed of the universe, the image of the deity. I could have told you that statues in these “womb rooms” are consecrated in such a way as to invite the deity to imbue the stone with its life breath, thereby enlivening the stone so that people are coming into the presence of the divine, not worshiping a stone (as so many of the early Christian missionaries argued). I could have told you that the act of darshan involves a mutual seeing of one another: the deity’s eye-sight reaching out to meet the worshipper’s eye-sight half-way.
But, this is all just factual information that, I discovered that day, in the end, does not really convey what goes on internally for people as they stand in the presence of the divine. This is what those who would argue that we cannot really understand what another religious tradition is about mean when they say only people from within can articulate what it means to study another tradition. Certainly that was my initial reaction as I stood before Sri Mahalakshmi wondering whether or not I had “wasted” 12 years of my life. Deep down, however, I knew then, as I have come to understand more fully now, that my work was not wasted; it just needed a new perspective. Subsequent visits to Sri Mahalakshmi’s temple and numerous conversations with her devotees have provided me with opportunities to develop an empathetic understanding of the experience of darshan. And through this experience I have come to appreciate the richness of my own Lutheran tradition and how it shapes my encounter with God.

In my experiences both as a student and as a teacher of the religious traditions of South Asia, I have often had people ask me whether or not I have become a Hindu. While I am usually surprised by the question, it nevertheless is an important one to ask. Underlying this question are many assumptions about what it means to be a religious person and what it means to study a religious tradition that is not your own. From a Christian – or, perhaps more broadly, a western – perspective, this is really a question about conversion: a rejection of one religious system in favor of another. The monotheistic perspective cannot – or will not – allow for the acknowledgement and worship of more than one deity. From a Hindu perspective, on the other hand, such a question probably would never arise, for one does not give up, or reject one deity for the sake of another, but adds to the group of deities worthy of worship. In a world populated by 33 million gods, the Christian insistence on a single deity at the center of an individual’s life sounds awfully “thin”. Indeed, Hindus will often ask Christians whether or not the Christian God isn’t lonely, being all alone. What I have learned from my experiences at Sri Mahalakshmi’s temple is that conversion is not the only option for engaging and understanding other religious traditions. While I will never become a devotee of Sri Mahalakshmi, I can nevertheless appreciate her beauty and see the great love that her devotees express toward her. Through that discovery my own self-understanding as a religious person has been enriched.

As life goes on we become more and more acutely aware of those moments we encounter that will stay with us for the rest of our lives. There are images we see that become permanent fixtures in our memory. One word can trigger these images and immediately bring us back to that one moment that has been branded into our mind. With this often comes a flood of emotions and we become frozen in place, re-living that one moment again and again.

I believe that these moments shape our lives in profound ways. These moments are what create a timeline of our past. When we take the time to think about the life we have lived thus far, these moments are what stand out and become the marks along the timeline.
As life goes on we become more and more acutely aware of those moments we encounter that will stay with us for the rest of our lives. These images we see become permanent fixtures in our memory. One word can trigger these images and immediately bring us back to that one moment that has been branded into our mind. With this often comes a flood of emotions and we become frozen in place, re-living that one moment again and again.

I believe that these moments shape our lives in profound ways. These moments are what create a timeline of our past. When we take the time to think about the life we have lived thus far, these moments are what stand out and become the marks along the timeline.

Last February I had one of these moments. I was driving through Sanagachi, the largest red-light district in Asia located in Kolkata, India. I can see the scene now in glaring detail. I was sitting in the back of a car with three other Americans and two Canadians. It was 5:00 in the afternoon on a Monday. As we neared Sanagachi, we took a left-hand turn which dropped us right in the middle of an alley lined with massive, dark, filthy brothels. Since it was only 5:00 on a Monday, the street seemed unbelievably busy. Thousands of people packed the street. Along the sides of the street and standing in the doorways, I saw woman after woman, young and old. Some, mostly the older women, wore traditional Indian clothing, while the younger women wore short skirts, tight dresses, and low tops. Their hair and make-up gave evidence of the fact that they had spent tremendous time “getting ready” for work that night. On their faces was one of two expressions: false joy or utter misery. Those who gave the image of false joy seemed to simply be trying to appear to be attractive or enjoyable. Those whose faces reflected misery revealed an attitude of complete submission and hopelessness.

The other actors in the scene were the men. They reflected a much different attitude. As they romped and ran around the alley, they seemed completely unconscious of the misery around them. Their selfish drive for pleasure was evident, laughing with one another as they walked past the poor prostitutes sitting on the steps and into a crowded brothel. Some men were relieving themselves on the side of buildings as they made crude comments to the women within earshot.

Dirt, grime, hate, pain, filth, dark, evil. I had never been in a place where I could literally feel evil. The air felt thick. The sun was still in the sky but this place felt dark as a moonless night. Evil is tangible.

As we were driving past one of the brothels, I made eye contact with a girl sitting on the steps of her brothel. This image, I will never forget. She appeared to be around the age of 15. She was wearing heavy make-up, a small skirt, and a little tank top. Her skin was lighter than most of the girls on the street. Her admired skin tone and young age must have made her quite the expensive commodity. Her elbow was resting on her knee and the palm of her hand held her small face. As we drove by, I locked eyes with her. It is hard to describe what I saw in her eyes. Never have I felt so close to utter, wretched desperation. It was as though everything within her, including her soul, had been ripped out of her and replaced by filth. It was as though I could see her life story. I could see her as a little girl, playing with her siblings and holding her favorite doll, dreaming of the day she, too, could be a mommy. I could see the man who came to her door, telling her parents that they owed him money and had to pay up. I could see as her parents resorted to selling their daughter to pay off their debt. Did they know that they had sold her into a reality that would rob her of every aspect of being a human? Did they know they were selling her spirit? Her comprehension of love? Did they know they were turning her into a dispensable object of pleasure sold at a cheap price? If they did know this, I no longer believe in a human tendency for good.

What I cannot stand is thinking about the fact that this poor, beautiful, robbed girl is still sitting on those steps. Her life is still one that revolves around the seven times a night that she is raped. Every night, every night, she is prey to a new man seeking pleasure. She is touched. She is groped. She is invaded. Every night.

What makes me even more sad is knowing that she is just one of millions. Right now there are thousands, if not millions, of girls in the middle of torture as they once again have no choice but to submit themselves to the humiliation of repeated rape. Some are as young as five years old. They did not choose this life. This life was chosen for them. They have been told they are worth nothing more that a few moments of pleasure for someone else. They are toys. Easily replaceable toys. They are worth maybe a couple dollars. This is all they know, and all they will know, until the day they die.

This is a horrible reality. It’s one of many horrible realities that exist in the world today. It is easy to look at a reality like sex slavery
What Work Might Be

and take 10 seconds to think, “Wow that’s sad,” and then go on throughout your day. But that one thought, those 10 seconds, does nothing for those girls stuck in the brothels. They are just waiting for someone who has heard about them and cared enough to come and save them. They are waiting for someone who believes that they are worth more than a couple dollars, who believes that they have more to contribute to the world than just momentary pleasure.

There are some people out there who do care. I went to India with an organization called International Justice Mission which puts up a huge fight against human trafficking. What is so hard for those of us who do care is knowing what to do about something that is this massive and this ingrained into society. What are we, blessed American nobodies, supposed to do about the poor girl sitting on the brothel steps? If you are asking yourself this question, I beg of you not to stop there!

Asking a question means nothing if you do not take the time to seek for an answer. The reality is that you can do something about it. Learn about it, think about it, talk about it. Resist the temptation to just feel bad and move on. Act! We talk about wanting to change the world, but how often are we actually willing to put in the work that creating change requires? I, for one, am great at talking about something I see that needs to change and then sitting around waiting for someone to change it. What a shame.

It is impossible to go through life without witnessing some form of injustice. We as a people have become so numb to injustice that we find ourselves walking past a homeless person and at most thinking, “Oh that’s too bad,” and then moving on. This has got to change. Injustice has become so common that we fail to even see it most of the time. Open your eyes and keep them open! Do not let one sentimental moment satisfy you. Seek justice. Use the resources and the incredibly blessed life that you have been given to fight that which you know is wrong. True sentimentality will lead to action. Do not let yourself become lazy in your convictions. Look beyond your comfort, see that girl sitting on the steps of the brothel in Kolkata, India, and do not be satisfied until she knows that she is loved.

For more information on sex trafficking and the effort to rescue its victims, visit ijm.org and polarisproject.org.

Bill Snyder, Ph.D.
Professor of English

Off Zanzibar

I stand at the rail, diesels throbbing fingers, wrists, feet through the deck-plate steel. Waves follow waves—there must be a breeze—but the ferry is fast, so the real breeze is impossible to feel, just the wind from our speed. A gull skims foam tips, scalloped troughs. Then ahead, on a thick, blue swell, a little canoe—hollowed log, outrigger float. Another wave, and we’re beside it. Deep, black skin, salt-threaded shorts, two men sit on narrow benches bow and stern—if a craft so small could have a bow and stern. We pass close. The canoe topples through our wake, plunges away behind, the two men bobbing.

If I had been working that canoe, with the white ship full ahead, cutting close, I would have cursed, spit,
What Work Might Be

Off Zanzibar

I stand at the rail, diesels throbbing /fingers, wrists, feet through the deck-plate steel. Waves follow waves—there must be a breeze—but the ferry is fast, so the real breeze is impossible to feel, just the wind from our speed. A gull skims foam tips, scalloped troughs. /Then ahead, on a thick, blue swell, a little canoe—hollowed log, outrigger /float. Another wave, and we’re beside it. Deep, black skin, salt-threaded shorts, two men sit on narrow benches bow and stern—if a craft so small could have a bow and stern. We pass close. /The canoe topples through our wake, plunges away behind, the two men bobbing.

If I had been working that canoe, with the white ship full ahead, cutting close, I would have cursed, spit, clawed at the cracks of the sea. But these men did not, too busy hefting oars, hauling nets, coiling sisal rope. And as they disappear to tiny dot, I imagine, for them, just the opposite—their quiet savor of steady breath and muscled limb, their water-knowledge of current and depth, their delight in the canoe’s stability, its history, its form—outrigger lashed to log with vine, sail tucked to slender mast, hull carved with axe and adze to woman-shape, shelter and cleft.

COFFEE YARD

We learn coffee here, students and I—bananas chandeliered above the brown-earth yard, two cows stamping mud and dung, the cooking shed, the thatch and smoke. We’ve done the work of it, schooled by the farmer: pinched berries from squat green bushes, shredded red-green husks in a crank-it machine, pounded hard white kernels. Then roasting our beans in a fire-black pot, crushing them, hot and shiny into grounds with tall, wooden pestles brought high over our heads in pistony twos. And now we drink the coffee, our coffee, take photographs, make student-jokes—our laughter like snapping glass, brittle and sharp before the neighbor women at the coffee yard’s edge, and the children who’ve come to watch us.

A young woman sits on a bench, leans against the farmer’s house. She wears kanga—orange, green, white—and cracked, flattened, yellow thongs. A gray cat lies in her lap. She kneads its front paws, her fingers smoothing, squeezing up to inner toes like a little dance, the threading of a loom. Small girls sit beside her, but it’s as if she’s alone—this time to caress a cat, this moment of idle, this moment brought by us, our being here. What does she think of our blondes and blues, our daintiness, our language she doesn’t know, or is too shy to speak—we don’t speak to her?

The students mill, ready to go. But I smell cow, wood smoke and fire, the coffee berry sap on my fingers. Something inside me has filled. I feel it in the well of my throat, the rounds of my eyes, the meat of my lips, lips held open of their own accord, like the girl’s, as she watches us, her eyes pensive, alert, as if she understands how we fit here, how we do not, how she, how we might explain this day, might explain such distance,
BOY WITH MAIZE

We turn, slowly, the road buckled and torn, 
the dalla dalla full, listing left 
on exhausted springs. By the corner, on a seam 
of dry grass, a boy—shirt torn at a shoulder, 
collar stretched and drooping, pant legs rolled— 
squats behind a rusty grill, grilling maize, 
five yellow cobs, blackened kernels 
facing up and ready, bottoms roasting still. 
At the boy’s bare feet, a heap 
of shucked green husks 
he will wrap the ears in as he makes his sales. 
I’ve bought these corns in Iringa, Mbeya, Dodoma. 
I know the big, tough, sweet kernels, the taste 
of smoke, the traces of grit 
along the rows. I see his eyes. He sees 
mine, mine easy to see—this mzungu— 
sitting here, staring out, white, transparent, 
like the window itself. Or that’s how I feel, 
how I think the driver, the riders stuffed around, 
the conductor shouting Ubungo, Ubungo 
must see me. But I’m glad to be here, glad 
the boy has noticed, glad to carry away 
this flicker of spirit between us, the dalla dalla 
swaying now with its own slow knowledge 
of speed. I don’t know. Maybe nothing’s 
been gained at all. The boy won’t remember me. 
Nor I him, really—I’ll never know 
just what to remember: his clever fingers, his 
sharp eyes, the hungry bones 
of his heart and jaw. And surely, surely, 
I’ll never know the way of maize.

In 2003, my advisor asked me: “Do you want to go there?” I shrugged 
my shoulders and said: “If they take me, I will go.” “They will not take you if you 
don’t want it,” he replied. 
That night, falling asleep below the emptiness of the ceiling, I asked 
myself: “Do you want to go there?”
Advice came to mind: if one dreams of something, the dream must be sent deep into the Universe; do not cling to it, let it go. The Universe will respond. “Yes, I want. I want.”

A few days later I received an offer of a graduate assistantship at the University of Missouri, Columbia, USA. Several months went by during the preparation of my departure: going to Kyiv for a visa, arranging for an apartment, borrowing money and buying a ticket. This would be my first time on an airplane. Too excited to fall asleep at night, I often thought of this new land as a beautiful city with white buildings of unusual shapes: spherical, conic, pyramidal... Mathematics was opening its world to me! Little did I know that this pursuit of a dream would transform into a search for identity in years to come.

I told the news to very few friends. Many would ask: Why do you want to go there? Who will take care of your ill relatives? What about Ukraine; aren’t you a patriot? Because I struggled with the same questions, my anxiety would be overwhelming if I discussed my decision with others.

Right after passing the border control in the Chicago airport, I was very amused: the plastic cover on a toilet seat moved automatically, and it flushed several times before I left the stall. “Wow,” I thought, “not bad...” My first classes at the University of Missouri were challenging; I found myself reaching for high standards as I was learning the topics I had dreamed of learning. Working on a unique research project brought deep intellectual pleasure and satisfaction. My dream was coming true.

The complexity of emigration legalities affected my life on the most elementary level. Because my legal status in the US was temporary, investments into a car, furniture, or other possessions that would improve my well-being significantly, seemed unreasonable. I did not risk visiting my family for the last two and a half years of my study for fear of not having my visa renewed. Although my behavior was very logical under the particular “immigrant” set of circumstances, my actions, questions, and requests often seemed strange to the people around me.

Adjustment to a different measure system — degrees Fahrenheit versus Celsius, pounds and feet versus kilograms and meters — seemed a fun game as I confused distances and bought too much or too little deli meat; but a misunderstanding of the US health care system had serious consequences for me.

It became my habit to pray the Office of Prayer – a standard morning and evening selection of psalms, scripture readings, and petitions, arranged according to Catholic calendar – in English, thus allowing the new language to enter the most intimate verbal activity I perform. I made sure my roommates were American. Eventually, I was able to read The New York Times and non-mathematical books. I even wrote some poems in English and dreamed a few dreams in which I spoke English. But at this point I approached a border that was dangerous to cross: any further intrusion into my Ukrainian core threatened to shatter my personality and destroy my integrity.

I left Ukraine for two reasons: to mature as an individual away from my family and to pursue my vocation to become a mathematician. Delay in resolving either issue would cause spiritual death, which can be described as a state of human being in which human spirit loses its orientation toward God and falls into deeds of mere survival – not life – dictated by hopelessness and despair. If I denied my aspirations to come out of the womb of my family, the way I once came out of my mother’s womb, and follow the call to enter the realm of God’s intelligent mind – mathematical mind – I would still be functioning: walking, eating, working, talking; but my humanity would be compromised. I was genuinely afraid of spiritual death, certainly more than the challenges of adjusting to life in a different country.

As I made a furious effort to assimilate into American society, a deep nostalgia took root in me. Even though I was glad to get away from my native country and live in an environment that helped to reshape my life and heal from much suffering, I found myself unable to listen to a Ukrainian song without tears. This I could understand. But it came as a surprise that Bulgarian folk songs had the same effect on me. Surrounded by an alien culture, I discovered my Slavic identity. This vivid experience reminded me of Carl Jung’s theory of collective unconscious archetypes, according to which a part of human psyche contains symbols and ideas – archetypes – that have not been generated by psyche’s individual experience, but are hereditary and
belong to collective unconsciousness.
I came to understand that being Ukrainian means much more than eating certain food, speaking certain language, or practicing a certain religion. Ukraine is the cradle of my humanity and I cannot remain whole and fully human without maintaining a deep spiritual connection to my Motherland. God made Himself present in my life in Ukraine, in that nation which He formed to shelter me and other human beings, to which He chose to speak in Ukrainian, and to which He revealed Himself in a very particular and special way.

As I touched upon the profound mystery of God’s work in particular nations, I understood my vocation better. It was not bestowed to reshape my self entirely to most closely resemble an average American born citizen, it was to maintain and foster my Ukrainian identity and to speak to all people of good will from the depth of my being, my Ukrainian core.

This is the drama of an immigrant: to live and function in the new land, be open and friendly to it, accept at least some of its customs, and accept its people with love. And, on the other hand, risk spiritual death by dissolution of self in the new environment. I therefore declare myself as an immigrant: a foreigner who is willing to contribute her best to her new community while remaining deeply rooted in the heritage of her ancestors.

This resolution will not bear fruit if the new community does not accept foreigners, as they are – immigrants – and instead expects them to be to be exactly like native members. Compassion and openness from the community are necessary for the elementary well-being of an immigrant. International centers, celebrations of diversity, rides to a grocery store, and care for ill immigrants are helpful. But the fundamental issue is the disposition of heart: the hearts of community members must be wide enough to embrace the presence of unknown elements and not signal about them as threats. Historically, the “other” was often a threat to a community. A practice of mercy and compassion is required if we are to repel this natural reaction so that to truly welcome immigrants.

A community is like a castle. The immigrant sees many beautiful lights inside and imagines the castle’s inhabitants dancing at a ball and engaging in delightful conversation. Perhaps they are even speaking of those outside, vulnerable to cold weather and wind. I am tapping on the window. Can you hear me?

--

SALAM.

That’s hello in Arabic. To respond you just say Salam back.

I chose to greet you with Salam, which means not only hello but also peace and goodbye and is the standard greeting that Muslims use, regardless of the native language they speak. I chose to greet you with Salam because it captures many of the thoughts that I want to share with you today. For today I want to talk to you about diversity and about relating to “the other:” the other languages, the other religions, the other races, the other nationalities, the other human beings.
Why talk about diversity and relating to the other as you begin your education at Concordia?

Because relating to the other is essential for the Salam, the peace, that we all strive for in the world today, and because relating to the other is, in fact, at the heart of the core curriculum that you are starting today. The theme of the core curriculum, as I am sure you have already heard, is to BREW, that is to become responsibly engaged in the world.

Diversity is an integral part of the world’s design. In order to become responsible engaged in the world, it is essential to have the ability to relate to others who are different from us. Diversity is a fact. Differences are all around us. What should a responsibly engaged person do with these differences? Conveniently avoid them? No. Tolerate them out of the goodness of one’s heart? No. Merely accept them? Still no. A responsibly engaged person values differences and understands what a precious resource they are.

Differences are valuable for the richness and perspective they offer. With different points of view we are able to see the full human experience. It is like looking at a complex statue from all different angles, slowly walking a full circle around it, crouching in front of it to view it from below, and climbing to the top of a tall building to view it from above. The result is a sophisticated, accurate, complete view of that statue. Without diverse points of view, we see the human experience from one single angle as if looking at that complex statue while glued to the ground in one rigid position. The result is a simplistic, inaccurate, deficient view of that statue.

It is our diversity that helps us fully see the world in all its complexity. It is our diversity that helps us understand ourselves and recognize what is distinctive about our viewpoint. And, paradoxically, it is also our diversity that helps us discover the core of humanity that we have in common with the other. After all, we all have the same goal: to enjoy the statue, regardless of the position we are in or the viewpoint we happen to have. Yet, we often feel threatened by difference because of the ambiguity and novelty it forces us to deal with.

How do we keep anxiety from overcoming us when we are faced with difference? How can basic trust replace fear? The answer lies in empathizing with the other. Empathy is the bridge through which we can connect with the other. The good news is: Empathy is not hard at all. It is a natural ability that we all have. Neuropsychologists have described what they call mirror neurons in the brain. These brain cells activate in response to the other’s situation in the same way they activate in response to our own situation. For example, when we watch another person being poked by a needle, mirror neurons in our brain fire as if we are personally experiencing the pain. Basically, we are hard-wired to empathize and to emotionally respond to the other.

It is failing to empathize that is hard. It requires actively going against our nature. In one study neuroscientists showed democrats & republicans pictures of election candidates. When observers saw an image of a politician from their own party, their mirror neurons fired strongly indicating a lot of empathy toward the politician. When the same observers saw a picture of a politician from the opposite party, an astonishing sequence of events occurred. At first the observer’s mirror neurons fired, indicating a natural tendency toward empathy, but after a little while, as the individual thought about the fact that the politician belongs to the other party, the firing of the mirror neurons stopped. The person’s prejudice effectively quelled the brain’s natural empathic reaction.

We must avoid prejudice because it is bad for us as well as bad for the other. Prejudice takes away from our humanity. It suppresses our natural tendency to form connections with others. How can we avoid prejudice? Simple: by knowing the other. When you get to know the other well, you begin to see that other, not as a stereotyped member of a threatening out-group, but as a fellow human being. The other may be an Arab, or a Muslim, or a Jew, or a Mexican immigrant, or maybe even an MSUM dragon. But first of all and above all, that other is a human being; a human being who has the same basic needs for love and dignity that you have; a human being who values justice and fairness just as you do; a human being who is just as vulnerable to fear and suffering as you are.

Knowing the other eliminates our prejudice and allows our empathy to dissolve the barriers between self and other. Really knowing the other is the best anti-dote to prejudice and the best prescription for peace. What then does it take to really know the other? Three things: meaningful, sustained face to face encounters with the other, dialogue with the other, which means listening and responding as well as talking, and learning about the other’s history and the socio-political context that makes them who they are. Encounters, dialogue, and knowledge, these three things help nurture our empathic capacities and make it possible for us to responsibly engage in the world.

I urge you to take advantage of the abundant opportunities to encounter, to dialogue, and to learn that exist in the Fargo/Moorhead...
In May 2010, I participated in a Concordia College May Seminar with the English department that went around the world. Although I have travelled to various countries in the past, this trip was my first experience visiting a non-western country, traveling to Hong Kong, India and Egypt as part of our itinerary.

While our small group of seven students and two professors, all of whom were white, clearly stood out as a minority in all of these countries, there was nowhere that I felt more like an outsider than in India. Our four-day stay in India was filled mostly with visiting the major tourist attractions of Delhi, Agra, and Jaipur, including the Taj Mahal and the Amber Fort. Together, the three cities are known as the Golden Triangle. Since we stayed in the highly toured areas, I expected the Indian people to be used to seeing white people and to not be too interested in us. Boy, was I wrong!

Entering into the Jama Mosque in Delhi, everyone is required to remove their shoes, and women must put on a full body gown provided at the entrance. Our group did as was required, then proceeded into the mosque. We gathered into a small group where we were listening to our Indian area and on this campus. Sign up for courses that help you learn about the other. Introduce yourself to a person different than you in the cafeteria, in the dorm, in the classroom and stop to dialogue with them. Encourage their questions and don’t be afraid to ask yours. Nothing is gained by avoiding differences out of fear of appearing ignorant or insensitive. Savor the wonderful process of discovering the other, of being challenged by the other, and of being affirmed by the other. Use your natural empathy to bridge the differences while cherishing them at the same time. Study abroad. Master a second language. Engage in service learning with the diverse communities that surround this campus. Read and contribute to Djembe, the intercultural journal run by your fellow Cobbers. Participate in intercultural events such as the screenings and discussions of the movies, and attend dinner and panel discussions that take place frequently on campus. I know all this takes time and effort.

As Eboo Patel wrote, in the book read this summer, “Pluralism is an intentional commitment that is imprinted through action. It requires deliberate engagement with difference.” Take action now. Don’t put it off till next year or next semester or even next month. Act now. In fact, you are already on your way. You took some action already today. You learned a different way of saying hello, remember?

SALAM.

Kelly Pflaum
Global Studies and English Writing Majors,
Political Science Minor
2012
Learning to See
Through Their Eyes

I took this photo when I was in India in May 2010, somewhere between Delhi and Agra. This is a fairly typical Indian street, but I think it really shows signs of globalization and western influence. The clothing that the two men in the foreground are wearing is very westernized, especially with button-down shirts and plaid patterns. Although some men wear more traditional clothing, it is common to see them wearing styles like this with nice khaki or black pants. Also, if you look closely, you can find English writing on signs, and even American brand chips and snacks displayed for sale in the shops. I remember buying Oreos and Ritz crackers at one point when I was there. The world is clearly becoming more globalized, and even if some people worry that American culture will take over the globe, I do not believe this will happen. Although India has adopted certain western influences, they take them and make them their own. A street in India will never look like a street in America.
I took these photos from a bus window in India, when we were driving somewhere between Delhi and Agra. It shows an impoverished slum community on the side of the road. They live in those straw huts and collect the animal dung cakes that are drying along the path to use for fuel. The woman appears to be working and providing for either her family or the community, and the children showed a particular interest in our bus that drove past. Living in poverty, as these people do, is such a contrast to our own lifestyle. The bus we were on was air-conditioned and they were stuck in the boiling 120 degree heat. Their clothes are dirty and worn, while ours were clean and fit properly.

I took this photo when I was in Cairo, Egypt in May 2010. It is from the Garbage Collectors' District. The people who live in this area have taken it upon themselves to be the informal garbage collectors for the city. Going door to door throughout Cairo, the pickup people's trash and bring it back to their homes where they dump the trash on the ground level below their living space on the second level. These people make their income from sorting and recycling the trash that they collect. This photo shows two men who have collected an incredible amount of garbage and piled it into the bed of their truck. In our society, we do everything we can to get rid of trash, and these people bring it back to their homes. It is their only way to make money so they do what they have to do. It really is shows a creative, entrepreneurial way to make a living, and also helps to clean up trash from the city.
A World I Never
Had to Know

Wendy Vang
Communications w/ emphasis in Public
Relations & Chinese
May 2012

Inspired by a good friend: Mai Yer Vang

Where I am from
They call us the sky people
But my father would say
You are a Hmong daughter

I am a Hmong daughter
Created by my mother and father
Preoccupied with life lately
While I am fighting a war of my Independence
You are in a war of your memories
While my hands ache from constantly researching
You see blood splatter in the hands of your enemy
Dead mothers, fathers, sisters, brothers
While words of disrespect repeatedly puncture my soul
You were already shot in the leg
So close to death, ceasing my existence I would not see today
While I am striving for a future of materialistic values
You are only thinking about what you have today
While I spend my riches like tomorrow does not exist
You work from dawn till dusk and still manage to put food on the table
While I am determined to learn the ways of this society
Fluently speaking a language that is not mine
You still struggle to learn the native tongue of a country that is not yours
While I write stories of how I struggle being a minority
Society ignores the stories you’ve stitched onto quilts
While I listen to stories of how America came about in history class
You talk of the rich green lands in Laos
While I learn of the war in Iraq
You whisper in my ear
A genocide of the Hmong people in the jungles of Laos
Waiting, to end since 1975

A Hmong daughter I am
From the land of my mother and father
A history painted before I was born
Sierra Sweet
Spanish and French double major
2011

The Eiffel Tower is a monument known by the world to represent the “City of Love”; the one and only, Paris. In our own culture when we think of love our thoughts go to red hearts and roses, and to think that even though Paris is an ocean away, the symbols of love even in a different language are the same. This rose abandoned in the cold in front of the Eiffel tower, to me, was a symbol a hopeful love. One of the most known monuments in all the world and someone went there hoping to meet their long lost love, with an emblem of their feelings. For me, this rose I found represents the love in this city and the romance that it holds that captures so many who go there.
**Zimbabwean Booklist**  
Submitted by Howard Mukanda

• Nervous Conditions by Tsitsi Dangarembga.  
• Some Kinds of Wounds by Charles Mungoshi.  
• Trial of Dedan Kimathi by Wa Thiong'o Ngugi and Mugo Githae Micere.

**Norwegian Booklist**  
Submitted by Espen Engelberg

In Cod We Trust: Living the Norwegian Dream by Eric Dregni Dregni

**Francophone Booklist**  
Submitted by Zacharie N. Petnkeu

Essays  
- The Wretched of the Land by Frantz Fanon.  
- Black Skin, White Masks by Frantz Fanon  

Fiction  
- The Shadow of Imana. Travels in the Heart of Rwanda by Véronique Tadjo.  
- Talking Drums: a Selection of Poems from Africa South of the Sahara by Véronique Tadjo  
- So Long a Letter by Mariama Bâ.  
- The Amputated Memory by Werewere Liking.

**Korean Booklist**  
Submitted by Vincent Reusch

The Dwarf by Cho Se-Hui  
Three Generations by Yong Sang-Seop  
The Guest by Hwang Sok-Yong

**Irish Booklist**  
Submitted by Dawn Duncan

Translations, by Brian Friel  
poetry of W. B. Yeats or Seamus Heaney  
The House of Splendid Isolation, by Edna O’Brien

**Scottish Booklist**  
Submitted by Dr. Graeme Wyllie

Contemporary Scottish Fiction  
The Crow Road – Iain Banks  
How Late it was, How Late – James Kelman  
The Sopranos – Alan Warner  
The Sunday Philosophy Club – Alexander McCall Smith  
44 Scotland Street – Alexander McCall Smith  
Lanark – A Life in 4 Books – Alasdair Gray
Growing up, I defined identity primarily in terms of ethnic and religious labels. I thought that if I established myself firmly as a member of one particular ethnic group and one particular religious group, some sense of self would grow out of these group identifications. As a result, my life up until now has been a series of phases during which I attempted to establish which groups I belong to, aided, of course, by those around me.

My first experience with the concept of ethnic identity came in first grade. Early in the school year, our teacher had us go around the room and share our cultural backgrounds. I listened to my classmates declare that they were “half-Irish” or “one-quarter German.” One girl who had recently moved from China declared that she was Chinese. I was confused. I knew where my parents came from, and I knew where I was born, but I wasn’t sure how to combine the two. I thought about it for a while and when my turn came, I confidently told the class that I was “half-Egyptian, half-American.”

That afternoon at home, I proudly explained to my parents how I had figured out this identity on my own. “No!” my parents exclaimed. “Half-Egyptian, half-American means that one of your parents is Egyptian and the other is American. You’re all Egyptian, sweetie.” “But I was born in America?” “It doesn’t matter,” they told me, “you are 100% Egyptian.” I nodded. 100% Egyptian, 100% unique. I liked it.

My introduction to my religious uniqueness also came in first grade, but was much easier to understand. Twice a year on the Islamic Eid – or festival, I didn’t go to school when everyone else did because I was Muslim.
and they weren’t. Simple.

For the next few years, I wore these identity labels proudly. I told anyone who would listen that I was Egyptian and that I was Muslim. I was thrilled to be different. I was firmly in my “I-am-different-and-different-is-good-phase.” It wasn’t until years later that this identity came into question again.

One cold winter day, I was walking to the next block to retrieve my brother from his friend’s house to break his Ramadan fast when my neighbors and 5th grade classmates Carissa and Emma ran in front of me. Carissa stopped, one hand on her hip and demanded I tell her why I was following her. I said I wasn’t. She insisted I was. Emma stood in the background nodding at everything Carissa said. Our little stand-off continued like this until Carissa delivered an argument I did not know how to respond to: “You’re following us. We Americans know.” I stared blankly at Carissa and Emma for a few moments before stepping off of the sidewalk and into the snow to walk around them. They snickered self-assuredly as I walked off.

I knew Carissa was wrong to think that her being American gave her any more knowledge about anything than me, but that is not why I was confused. By that time, I had learned in school about Christopher Columbus and the years of European immigration that had followed the arrival of the Mayflower. I struggled to understand the concept of “American.” What made that term apply to Carissa and Emma, but not to me? We all lived in the same neighborhood. We were in the same class at the same school. Carissa’s dad and my dad were both professors in the same department. Emma and I played on the same soccer team. 100% Egyptian wasn’t so cut and dry anymore if it meant that I was 0% American.

A few weeks later, the Eid festival came, marking the end of Ramadan. This year, I asked my parents if I could only miss the first half of the school day and join my classmates for the second half. I came to class that day eager to tell my friends about all of the fun I’d had that morning as part of the Eid festivities. We were getting ready for some sort of class party, and I was tasked with folding paper. I did my folding job rather distractedly, paying more attention to telling my stories of fun than to folding. When my teacher walked by, he chided me “get to work, Ayah. You’ve already skipped half the school day; you shouldn’t be slacking off now.” My stomach froze. Is that what my teachers and classmates thought of me? That I was just skipping class? Maybe they had a point – I mean, I was really just like the other kids in class. I did everything just like my classmates 363 days of the year. Why should I expect to get special treatment on the remaining two?

These fifth grade incidents made me realize that there was a downside to standing out: not fitting in. Only now in retrospect do I realize that I made a semi-conscious decision around that time to start trying to blend in. I started asking my parents to take me to school immediately after the morning prayers on Eid, in order to minimize class time missed. I stopped telling people that I was Egyptian or Muslim unless it came up directly. It was just as I entered in to this “fitting-in” phase that September 11th happened.

On the morning of September 11, 2001, I had no idea who Osama bin Laden was. I had never heard of Al Qaeda or the Taliban. I didn’t even know that the United States had fought a war in the Gulf region around the time of my birth. In fact, I probably couldn’t have told you what the “Gulf region” was. When I got home from school that Tuesday afternoon, I found my mom standing at the kitchen counter, watching television footage of the twin towers falling. Tears were forming in her eyes. When I looked up at her, she said, “God, I hope Muslims didn’t do this.” At the time, her comment struck me as silly and random. Of course Muslims didn’t do it, I thought to myself.

It didn’t take me long to figure out that I was wrong. The terrorist attacks put a major wrench in my plans to fit in. I knew that if I kept my mouth shut, people probably would never realize that I was Muslim, but I didn’t want to do that. I saw my parents giving lectures all around town about how most Muslims weren’t like the terrorists, and I felt a responsibility to stand up for my religion as well. I wanted people to know that Islam was a good religion. I was surprised to find that it wasn’t as easy as it had been in the past to claim the Muslim identity.

In 7th grade geography, a whole class period was devoted to talking about Islam. I came, excited to contribute my insider knowledge to the discussion. We had a substitute teacher in class that day. He started his lecture by saying “I can see that there is a Muslim in class today, and I’ll be sure to get her thoughts on the topics we cover.” I beamed for a moment, amazed that he could tell by looking at me that I was Muslim, but then I followed his gaze to Nafisa, the other Muslim girl in my class. Nafisa wore a headscarf; of course, she was the Muslim he’d recognized. Nafisa and I were in the same Islamic Sunday
school class, and she was quick to point out that there was actually another Muslim in class. As class progressed, the substitute teacher repeatedly asked Nafisa questions about Islam. Many times, she didn’t know the answers to his questions, and I would try to chip in, but every time, the teacher would cut me off. Finally, after my fifth or sixth attempted answer, the teacher explained himself, “I think it will be most interesting to hear what the practicing Muslim has to say.” I was stunned. I had questioned my own right to distinguish myself as Muslim before, but this was the first time someone else questioned that right. Tears burned in my eyes.

A few months later, my family went to visit Egypt over the summer vacation. It had been two years since our last visit, and I overheard my aunt telling my mom about how my cousin had been asking when her “Christian cousins from America” would visit again. My aunt laughed and assured my mom that she had told my young cousin that despite the fact that we were American, we were Muslim. I could hardly blame my cousin for getting confused. I wasn’t sure that American and Muslim could coincide in one person either.

Again, I wasn’t conscious of it at the time, but in the months after that visit, I shifted into my “act-as-Egyptian-and-Muslim-as-possible-to-prove-that-I-really-belong” phase. I did my best to demonstrate to the world that I belonged to the Egyptian and Muslim communities. I made a point of talking on the phone in Arabic in front of my friends. I was overly showy about the fact that I was fasting during Ramadan. I occasionally took my class notes in Arabic in the hopes that my peers would look over and see that I was capable of the task.

My devotion to all things Egyptian and Muslim continued into my high school years. I took every mention of someone dating someone else as an opportunity to go on at length about how I would never date because it was not customary for Egyptians to do so. At one point, I considered wearing a headscarf, despite the fact that my family does not believe that wearing one is a requirement of the religion. When classmates asked me how I always got good grades, I told them that it was just expected of Egyptian children. When friends questioned my lack of interest in partying, drinking and dating, I told them that those weren’t things Muslim teenagers did.

The summer after I graduated from high school, I was accepted as one of 25 participants in a six-week intensive Arabic program in Cairo, Egypt. The program involved a host stay and many of our host siblings were also high school students. For the first time in my life, I was in contact with Egyptians my own age. I made fast friends with many of them and left Egypt that summer more convinced than ever that I had earned the labels Egyptian and Muslim. Four months later, I returned to Cairo to spend a semester at the American University in Cairo. I reconnected with many of the people I had met over the summer and became friends with a slew of new people I met on campus.

As I spent more and more time with my new Egyptian friends, I was taken aback by what being an Egyptian teenager meant to them. Many of my college friends had boyfriends or girlfriends. A lot of them were struggling to get through their classes; some of them regularly skipped class lectures. I knew a lot of people who drank on weekends. In short, my Egyptian friends weren’t all that different from my American friends back home. All of those ways that I distinguished myself in order to make myself more Egyptian or more Muslim really didn’t make me more of either one.

The rest of my college years were spent in a deep confusion regarding my ethnic and religious identities. I didn’t know what being Egyptian or being Muslim meant, and I wasn’t sure how to classify myself. I clung to the notion that identity comes from labels, but I didn’t know how to label myself. I struggled to figure out these things, to compartmentalize the different aspects of my identity until I was in Washington, D.C. for a semester. For the first time since that day in first grade, I found myself in a place where nobody knew anything about my identity unless I brought it up. Perhaps because I am used to people at Concordia just knowing, I never really brought up the fact that I am Egyptian or that I grew up Muslim to the other participants in my program. The resulting ways in which people struggled to place me were almost humorous.

One day I was walking out of class along with my American
February 12, 2011 is a day that will stand out in history books as a day of triumph for human rights. On that Friday, the people’s revolution in Egypt succeeded in eliciting the resignation of long-time dictatorial “president” Hosni Mubarak after 18 days of protests. This success is remarkable, not just as a testament to the power of peaceful protest, but because of the lasting implications it will have on Middle East politics.
Hosni Mubarak ascended to the Egyptian presidency on October 14, 1981 after the assassination of former president Anwar El Sadat. Since then, Mubarak has ruled Egypt with an iron fist in a state of “emergency law,” initiated immediately following Sadat’s assassination. Emergency law allowed the Egyptian government to arrest and detain its people without charge. Freedoms were quickly curtailed for the Egyptian people. Political opponents to the Mubarak regime were jailed. Media and literature that in any way criticized the regime was banned. Under Mubarak, government accountability to the people disappeared. Police corruption was rampant. Reports are now surfacing that Mubarak amassed over $40 billion during his time in office, siphoned from the Egyptian treasury. Although elections were routinely held during Mubarak’s 30 year presidency, the results were widely understood to be rigged, with Mubarak usually coming away with over 90 percent of the vote. The penalty for running for office against the National Democratic Party was frequently years in prison.

Few in Egypt were happy with Mubarak, but fewer knew how to turn their dissatisfaction into tangible change, without facing punishment from the regime. Protest and strikes were common in Egypt, but they produced no results. Egyptians unhappy with their government grew accustomed to screaming without being heard. Then the events in Tunisia changed everything. On January 14, 2011, after weeks of protest, the Tunisian people succeeded in ousting President Zine El Abidine Ben Ali. In this victory Egypt saw possibility.

Tens of thousands of facebook users indicated that they were attending a day of protests in Cairo’s downtown Tahrir Square on Monday, January 25 and indeed thousands turned out. Wary of angering its people after seeing what happened in Tunisia, and in an apparent attempt to appease the people, the Egyptian government was slower than usual to dispatch the notorious security forces typically used to quell protests. That slight delay was all protesters needed to gain momentum. By Wednesday the 27th, an alarmed Egyptian government had shut off all Internet access in the country in an attempt to hinder protesters’ ability to organize. The attempt backfired as thousands more protesters flooded the streets, bringing with them scores of international news reporters. The world watched as security forces tried and failed to disband peaceful protesters using tear gas and billy clubs.

A week into the protests, media reports of “pro-Mubarak” protesters clashing with “pro-democracy” protesters began surfacing. Journalists on the ground, including the New York Times’ Nicholas Kristof and CNN’s Ben Wedeman and Anderson Cooper, as well as many Egyptian activists, sent a different message. According to them and dozens of other journalists and protesters sending reports from Tahrir via Twitter, the “pro-Mubarak” protesters were really thugs paid by the regime to create the appearance of discord among the Egyptian people. For the first time there was violence on the streets as these thugs beat journalists and honest protesters.

The Egyptian protesters were not swayed by this attempt by their government to create confusion, and they continued to flood Tahrir in larger numbers. When it was announced that Mubarak would address his people on Thursday, February 10, for just the third time since protests broke out, speculation was widespread that he was planning to announce his resignation. When Mubarak finally appeared on state television over an hour after he was slated to speak, he delivered a speech widely perceived as derogatory. He promised to launch an investigation into the deaths suffered by over 300 protesters at the hands of his police forces and so-called supporters and promised not to yield to the “international pressures” calling for him to step down.

The crowd, of over a million in Tahrir Square, waited just minutes into Mubarak’s speech to start booing him and holding their shoes up to him in protest. Energized by their anger, the Egyptian people continued protesting through the night and into the morning. As Friday went on, more Egyptians flooded the streets. By mid-afternoon, several million people had left their homes in a show of dissatisfaction. In the early evening of Friday, February 11, 2011, Mubarak’s recently appointed Vice-President Omar Suleiman came on
Egyptian state television and delivered a 20-second statement that injected the Egyptian people with jubilation and forever changed the face of Middle East politics. Mubarak had stepped down from office, ceding control of the country over to a military council. The crowds in Tahrir Square erupted into celebration that lasted through the night and the following day.

Although the mood was almost exclusively celebratory in the days immediately following Mubarak’s removal from office, caution slowly started to creep into the public consciousness once more after just a few days of military rule. In its first week in power, the military remained reluctant to respect demands of protesters, including requests for a new constitution, free media and a majority civilian transitional government. Slowly as people continue to see the military conduct the country in much the same way as Mubarak did, fears are building that this new military regime plans to continue Mubarak’s policies without Mubarak.

Now more than ever, international influence will play a crucial role in the future of hope for democracy in Egypt. Egypt receives $1.5 billion in United States aid each year. In the days immediately following the start of major protests, President Barack Obama, Secretary of State Hilary Clinton and others in the Obama administration doggedly avoided issuing any statements that either condemned the Mubarak regime or supported the Egyptian people. Clinton stated that the Mubarak regime was “stable,” and Vice-President Joe Biden claimed that Mubarak was not a dictator. During the heat of protests, Obama delivered a statement claiming that the struggle was one that had to be resolved among the Egyptian people, essentially claiming an intent for the United States to remain neutral. But inaction from the United States government in this revolution does not amount to neutrality. The status quo has been allowed to stand for too long in Egypt because of United States support, so inaction now puts the United States on the side of the regime it has been financially supporting.

The Egyptian people are not likely to forget that the United States - a country that claims to stand for freedom and justice - chose to support a corrupt, repressive dictator over millions of peaceful, democracy-seeking Egyptians. The Obama administration’s actions in the next few weeks will determine just how severe and lasting the damage done to United States-Egypt relations will be.

The United States government largely props up the Egyptian military, so the administration has a duty to pressure the Egyptian military to accept the legitimate demands of protesters and to ensure that the military does not abuse its provisional power. The United States must now tie its aid to Egypt on the willingness of the regime to listen to its people and to grant them their basic dignity, rights and liberties.

Many in the United States have argued against supporting democracy in Egypt and the Middle East because doing so could jeopardize the “peace” with Israel. This may be the case. For decades the United States’ Middle East tactic has revolved around a strategy of paying off corrupt, repressive dictators to support a policy toward Israel and Palestine that is viewed negatively by many of the people of the Middle East. Since its creation, the United States has been unwavering in its support of Israel. For a long time, Israel was the largest receiver of United States aid (now it is third behind Iraq and Afghanistan). Many Arabs in the Middle East view United States’ support of Israel as unjust, but their leaders accept it because of the money they receive from the US government. The people’s views are not as influenced by the exchange of money between governments. In Egypt, for example, many people were agonized to see their Palestinian neighbors dying in Gaza without being allowed to cross the border into Egypt, due to a blockade strictly enforced by Mubarak. A free Egypt is a lot more likely to lift the Gaza blockade.

Now, as the spirit of revolution reverberates around the Middle East - from Yemen to Libya and from Bahrain to Iran - one thing is clear: the people of the Middle East are being stepped on by their United States-supported dictators. They are ready to take control of their own countries. So, now the United States will most likely be forced to adopt a more fair Middle East policy that reflects the wishes of all people of the region, not just of Israel. This can really only be a step in the right direction, as the Middle East heads for a more free, democratic future.

Human rights are rights, entitlements to all people, regardless of citizenship. The citizens of Tunisia, Egypt and other countries around the Middle East are taking that seriously, and it is time that the United States government does the same.
BIOGRAPHIES: EDITING STAFF

Amy Watkin, Faculty Advisor
Amy Watkin is an assistant professor of English and has been teaching at Concordia since 2005. She teaches courses in composition, American language and culture, introduction to literature, global literature, and British and American literature. In 2009 Amy traveled to Rwanda with a group from Concordia, and looks forward to bringing more students there in May 2012. Djembe has been such an enriching experience for Amy, and she is proud to have a role in making all of these voices heard.

Jenni Amis, Chief Editor
Jenni Amis is a senior English writing and History double major from Plymouth, MN. She has always had a heart for travel and cross-cultural experiences. She is currently serving her fifth semester as a technical assistant for Concordia Theatre's Audience Development Group. Jenni studied abroad in Ireland in spring of 2009 and really treasured her experience overseas. She considers it an honor to have had the opportunity to help produce the first two volumes of Djembe.

Chelsea Wilson, Assistant Chief Editor
Chelsea Wilson is a junior English Literature and Psychology double major hailing from the epitome of small-town USA: Hill City, Minnesota. Her plans post-college could include working as a criminal psychologist, an author, or an editor. She has greatly enjoyed the opportunity to work with the writings of her fellow Cobbers, and has learned a lot from the experience.

Nutifafa Yakor, Student Coordinator
Nutifafa Yakor comes from Ghana in West Africa and is currently a senior studying Accounting and Economics. He thinks coordinating Djembe has been a remarkable experience, particularly the bringing together of some of the finest scholarship and creativity from students and faculty at Concordia. He hopes you go right ahead and read an article or two from Djembe, and next year, write an article or two for us!
Kristen Frank, Copy Editor
Kristen Frank is a senior English Literature and Spanish double major, from Wahpeton, North Dakota. She enjoyed spending the spring semester of 2009 abroad in Pamplona, Spain, where she was able to do a lot of traveling and learn about Spanish culture. Through this experience, she gained a new appreciation for cultural affairs, and is glad to have the opportunity to be a part of this unique intercultural journal. Her post-graduation plans are pretty up in the air right now, but she’s interested in either attending a school to receive a certificate in Spanish-English translation or securing a job in the editing or publishing field.

Caitlyn Schuchhardt, Copy Editor
Caitlyn Schuchhardt is a junior from Aberdeen, SD, studying English Literature and Studio Art. After traveling on Concordia’s “Around the World” May Seminar, she developed an addiction for all things travel and a strong interest in intercultural affairs. She is looking forward to her next study abroad experience, where she will be spending fall semester of 2011 in India. Caitlyn has enjoyed working on this issue of Djembe and is grateful for the unique perspectives that her fellow Cobbers are so willing to share.

Dana Sloneker, Assistant Student Coordinator
Dana Sloneker is a junior English Writing and Communications double major and Classical Studies minor from Rochester, MN. She enjoys writing fiction, and if she could do anything at all after college, she would be an author. She is a board member of the Circle K Club on campus, and loves service projects. She loves all things Greek, and spent May 2010 in Greece and Italy with the Classical Studies department. Having that experience abroad changed her life, and she encourages all Djembe readers to do more than just read our journal to learn about world affairs and culture—go experience it!

Jenny Morrow, Copy Editor
Jenny Morrow is a sophomore majoring in English literature. She is involved with Djembe (of course!) and is also an America Reads tutor. She hopes to venture into the world of book publishing after college.
Matt Gantz, Copy Editor
Matt Gantz is a freshman and new member of the Djembe staff from Eagan, Minnesota. He is currently studying International Business and English Writing. Matt is appreciative of the diverse locals that many Concordia students have witnessed and hopes the readers of Djembe enjoy this journal as much as he enjoyed helping create it.

Valeria López-Cortés, Chief Designer
Valeria Lopez-Cortes is a senior from Grand Rapids, MN studying French and Graphic Design. She spent her spring semester 2010 in Tours, France, where she fell in love with the French culture. After graduation, she hopes to go back to France for a year and teach English to French children. Valeria also wishes to continue her career making layouts and covers for magazine and journals such as Djembe. Working for this journal has greatly helped her broaden her horizons as a designer.

Camillia Freeland-Taylor, Assistant Designer
Camillia Freeland-Taylor is a junior double majoring in Chinese and Business. Spring semester of 2011 she will be studying abroad at SISU, in Chongqing, China. This past year she has been active in the Tae Kwon Do club, served as president of brown hall council, and was a confirmation leader at Good Sheperd Church, in Moorhead. She has enjoyed being a part of the growth and diversity of the journal.