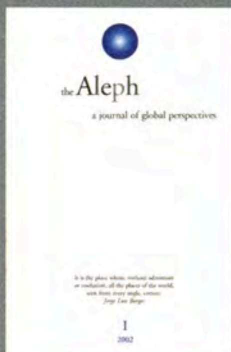
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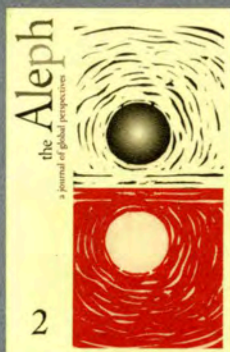
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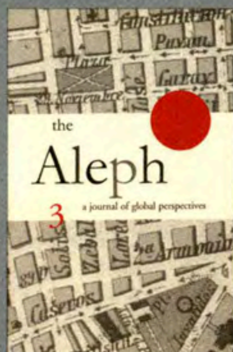
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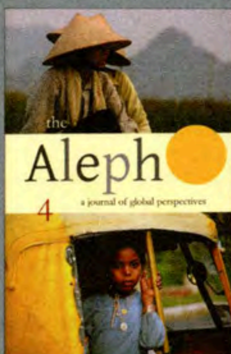
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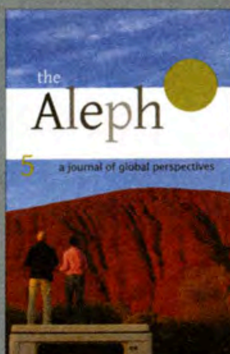
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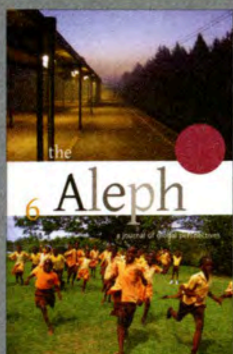
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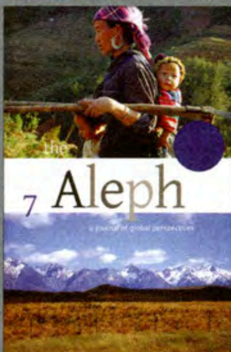
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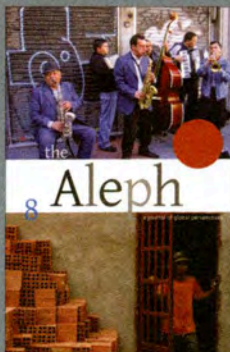
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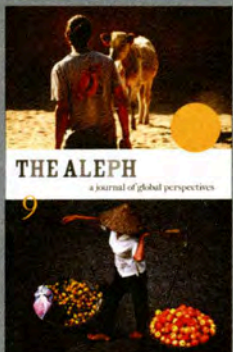
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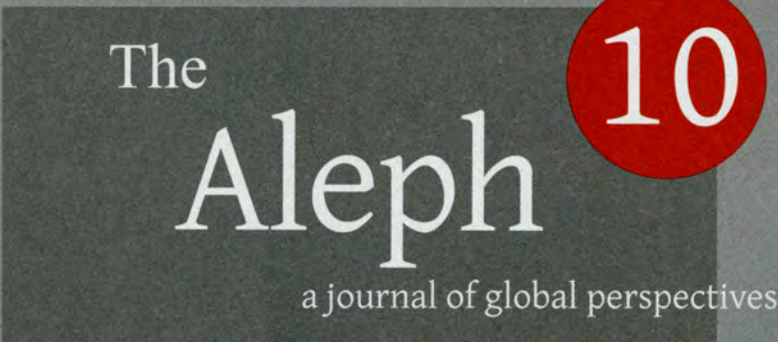
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Clock Tower in Paris, France [Chris Veneman] From Aleph 6

The Aleph: a journal of global perspectives
Volume X, 2012

Thomas D'Agostino, Editor-in-Chief
Doug Reilly, Artistic Director
Lauren Schwarzenberg, Layout and Design
Sharon Walsh & Stephanie Annear, Assistant Editors

ISBN No. 1937-0474

Printed by Canfield & Tack in Rochester, NY We would like to thank John Lathrop at Canfield & Tack for his work on our behalf over the years; we appreciate his cheerfulness, professionalism and deep sense of sarcasm.

Stories in *The Aleph* are set in Gentium, a font designed by Victor Gaultney (2002) and adopted by SIL International, an NGO working to document thousands of dying ethnic languages, many of which are written in modified Latin scripts. Most digital fonts do not include these extended alphabets and therefore millions of people are shut out of the publishing community. Gentium is an attempt to meet this challenge. The name is Latin for *belonging to the nations.*

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FROM THE EDITORS

In early 2000, Hobart and William Smith Colleges and Union College established the Partnership for Global Education, a collaborative initiative funded by the Andrew W. Mellon Foundation designed to bolster study abroad programming at both institutions. As part of this effort, we set out to create a variety of opportunities for students returning from programs abroad to reflect upon and continue to process their encounters with other peoples and cultures. One idea that particularly intrigued us was creating a journal in which students could share their international experiences through photography, artwork, and writing. This idea evolved into *The Aleph: a journal of global perspectives*, which we first published in April 2002.

The journal takes its name from the 1945 short story "The Aleph" by the Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges. In the story, the narrator (a writer named Borges) comes upon "a small iridescent sphere of almost unbearable brilliance" in which, "without admixture or confusion, all the places of the world, seen from every angle, coexist." Through this encounter with the mystical Aleph, he is able to see all things from all perspectives – yet he despairs the daunting task of trying to convey the enormity of this experience to his readers.

Our affinity for Borges derives from his desire to understand the connections among seemingly disparate things and his search for clarity in a complex and chaotic world. His story resonates with us because our students face much the same challenge when they return from abroad: after crossing borders and cultures, navigating societies different from their own in which they are exposed to new values and perspectives, how can they make sense of it all? How can they adequately convey the significance of the experience to those who did not share it?

The Aleph: a journal of global perspectives was created to address this dilemma. All too often, the "reentry" phase of study abroad is overlooked and students lack opportunities to build upon and to continue to process their international experiences once they return to campus. To this end, the journal provides a space for reflection, analysis and dialogue that benefits contributors and readers alike. The pieces offer insight into what captivates, challenges and inspires our students while illustrating what they glean from their interactions abroad.

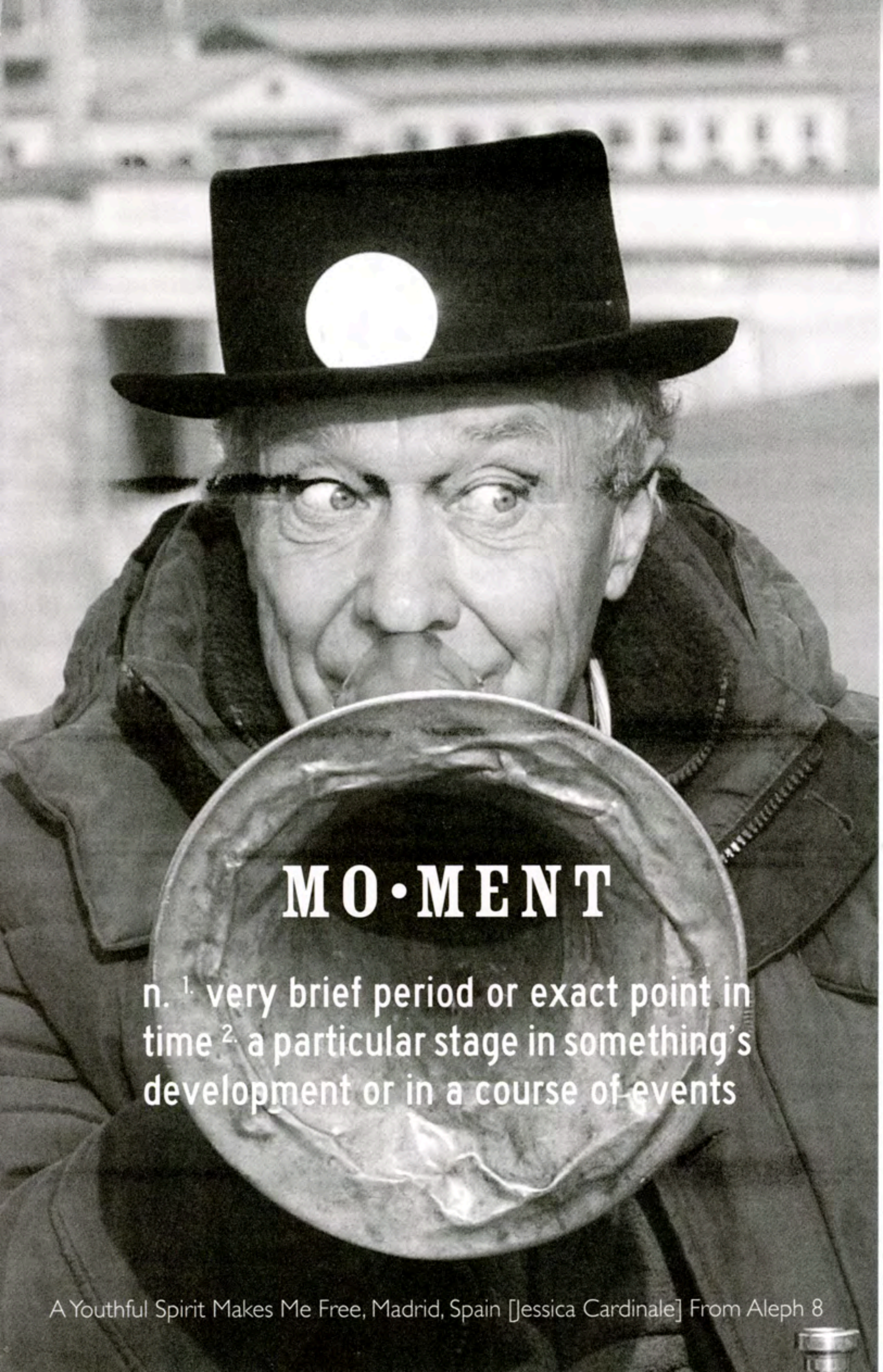
As we celebrate the publication of the 10th edition of *The Aleph*, we have decided to feature a selection of new submissions alongside some of our favorite pieces from the past decade. Ironically, as we reviewed the previous editions we felt much the same trepidation that Borges wrote about and our students regularly express to us. How can we provide a reasonable snapshot of a decade of reflection and creativity from across the globe? How can we construct our own Aleph, reflecting the array of destinations our students have explored and the wonderfully disparate experiences they have had?

We hope that this collection will serve as a window into the lives of our students as they navigate new cultures and societies. Through their words and images, we learn about the people and places they encounter, we see how they change along the way, and we are challenged to join them in trying to comprehend "all the places of the world, seen from every angle."

We hope that you enjoy your journey through ten years of our students' experiences as much as we have.

—Thomas D'Agostino & Doug Reilly

January 5, 2012



A Youthful Spirit Makes Me Free, Madrid, Spain [Jessica Cardinale] From Aleph 8

MOMENTS I

*Anoo, nande ikimasu ka?**

I awake to bright sunshine filtering through the curtains beside my bed. Stretching and allowing myself to sink into the mattress, I grin. I could not have wished for a lovelier homestay: my own spacious room, windows opening up onto rice paddies and the neighborhood below, children laughing in the streets and my own soft bed. My reverie is interrupted by Tamiko-san, my host mother, calling from the kitchen downstairs, "*Sutefuanii!*" (Stephanie in Japanese).

I leap out of bed and grab my towel and shampoo. The night before (my first in her home), Tamiko-san had briefed me in her rapid Japanese and broken English that we would be going to meet the rest of the family at her grandson's Sports Festival, a day of competitions and performances put on by the elementary school. I could only imagine how nervous she must have been, trying to speak English and hoping that I understood. My own Japanese still quite minimal, I had nodded and smiled and attempted to make conversation about the meal and about what was expected of me.

Dousing myself under the showerhead, and then dashing up to change, I emerge several minutes later greeting Tamiko-san in the kitchen, "*Itadakimasu!*", and the two of us sit down to miso soup, fried egg and salad. One thing had been troubling me since I learned we would be going to the school...how was I going to get there? I feel very nervous, fumbling with my Japanese and my head still foggy from the early rising. Tamiko-san scurries around the house like a bee, with me at her heels trying to help and catch what she's telling me. Finally, my arms full of clothes and lunchboxes, I ask her, "*Anoo, nande ikimasu ka*?" (How will I get there?)

She leads me over to the screen and I behold the oldest, most rickety-looking bike I had ever seen. This apparently

*(How will I get there?)

was the neighborhood bike, and for today I was kindly given permission to borrow it.

Since arriving in Japan several weeks ago, bicycles have been a common sight—everyone seems to ride one, whether commuting to work or school or going to the supermarket. And the Japanese ride with inhuman skill. Dodging in and out of heavy traffic, maneuvering tight corners and crowds of people, I had already begun to enjoy this lifestyle, and it was much easier than waiting for the bus. However, today would be a little different. Tamiko-san disappears to change, putting on a lovely skirt and hat. Then the two of us, weighed down with bags, slip on our shoes and head outside.

Tamiko-san does not own a car. Instead, like many older Japanese, she rides a motorbike. Despite her small frame, she confidently and gracefully maneuvers the bike out of the tight space and through the tiny gate. Having just met her, and unsure what is expected of me, I stand by awkwardly as she loads the bags onto the bike, puts on her helmet, and starts the engine. Glancing at Tamiko-san and looking at "my" bicycle, I almost laugh; here is this tiny woman, dressed to attend a formal dinner, mounting this motorbike as if it were the most natural thing in the world, revving the engine and looking back at me expectantly. I hop on my bicycle and shake my head in resignation, prepared to follow.

And we are off. I think I am going to die. Never in my life have I felt this insecure. My brakes do not quite work, and as we ride through the town, Tamiko-san is speeding ahead around corners and up hills. I keep to the sidewalk believing I will survive this ordeal and will soon be enjoying lunch. However, once we make it out onto the highway with traffic speeding by, my bravery wanes slightly and it takes all of my will to not laugh hysterically. I distract myself with the surroundings slowly materializing before me. I am on the open road, the wind in my hair, bicycling beside breathtaking scenery and having a near-death experience. Taking my eyes off the tiny figure ahead of me on a motorbike, I behold the wilderness. Japan is a beautiful country. Amidst fields

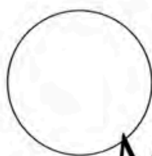
of swaying green grass and rice, mountains in the distance, there is a quiet spirituality about the landscape. An awesome majesty, with the expanse of skies overhead feeling so close.

Twenty minutes later, I slide off my bike bedraggled, wind-blown, and sweaty, my hands shaking slightly as I lock the bike beside Tamiko-san's. Giving her a quick hug, and gathering the bundles, we hobble together, Tamiko-san with her arthritis and me with my wobbly knees, towards the field behind the school. There I am greeted warmly and enthusiastically by the rest of the family. Smiling, feeling quite safe and contented, I know from this moment on that my stay with Tamiko-san will be special.

—Stephanie Merritt

From Aleph 3

Tamiko-San in Japan [Stephanie Merritt]



MOMENTS II

Pronounced "EE-AH-GUH-RAH"

The entire plane ride I dreamt anxiously of what my new host family would be like, look like, and what my first spoken Spanish words would be. I'm going to blame the following events on the cold chicken pasta, the strange economics professor that committed the crime of armrest stealing, and the complete and utter failure of being able to get comfortable with my blue, germ-contaminated pillow.

It's a good feeling to pass through customs. Both my bags were in my arms and I couldn't help but wear a rather large grin on my face. This is it. This is Mendoza. I was about to take my first real whiff of this new foreign place when I was interrupted. A large woman with dirty-blonde hair was suddenly giving me a smooch on my right cheek. This was Ana— my new mother. Ana was everything but what I thought an Argentine woman would look like. She was big-boned, blue-eyed and approximately 5 foot 9.

I mumbled the word "*hola*" and before I could say "*mucho gusto*" my bags were ripped from my sweaty grip by a man with gray hair and one of the largest bellies that I had ever seen. He leaned in for his own kiss. This was Horacio, Ana's "weekend boyfriend". So far everything was going just as I didn't plan. Between Horacio's mumbling and Ana's simultaneous yelling I was completely clueless as to everything they were asking me in the car ride. Within ten minutes we arrived at the Crespo household.

After getting somewhat settled into my new room, my host-mother attempted to explain our Sunday lunch plans. Along with some hand gestures and arm-flailing and some errant saliva flying my way, I comprehended the words "*almorzar*" and "*familia*." Like the mathematician that I am, I combined the two and guessed that the family would be coming over

for lunch. Little did I know I was about to experience my first official *asado*, the traditional Argentine barbecue.

The extended family had arrived and we gathered around two tables pushed together. Various salads lay around the table consisting of raw fruits and vegetables such as apples and celery, beets, carrots and lettuce. Everything was going well. I managed to introduce myself and kiss all ten relatives on the cheek. I sat down in the middle of the table smelling of airplane food and feeling like bad breath.

The Argentine *asado* is what I like to call the weekly Thanksgiving. There is a particular order in which the meats are cooked and served. First are the *chorizos* (sausages), *morcillas* (black pudding), then the *chinchulines* (chitterlings), and other organs. Next, ribs are served and occasionally *vacío* (flank steak). It was all beautifully prepared and I had no idea what I was eating but it was all delicious, nonetheless.

The family didn't make much of an attempt to converse with me but I assumed it was for my benefit since I was heavy-lidded and practically drooling from exhaustion. Between Horacio's son and Ana's three kids, there were plenty of laughs going around. Taking advantage of being invisible, I began observing the family and trying to identify each of their personalities. Without knowing what they were saying, this was going to be a tricky task. I imagined what they might be talking about. They were laughing quite loudly, and I found myself laughing along with them. They suddenly stopped and turned to me, shaking me out of my inner dialogue.

"Sophie, *entiendes*?"

Everyone's eyes were now beating down on me. Of course, I had no idea what they were laughing about and when they realized this, their smiles slowly turned to smirks. What was I going to say? "Oh, no! I was just thinking of an inside joke and happened to laugh at the same time that you guys were laughing!"

Plaza de Mayo, Buenos Aires, Argentina [Danielle Kreig]

My brain scanned for the words "inside joke." It was too late.

Eugenio's smirk had transformed into a big grin.

"*Ee-ah-guh rah*?"

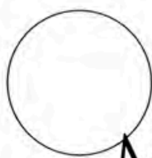
I looked at him waiting for more clues.

He motioned putting an imaginary substance into his mouth and then put up his hands. In slow motion he began to move them further and further apart.

Viagra. They had made a Viagra joke, and like an idiot, I guffawed along with them. I hadn't been there two hours and had established myself with the family as a lover of dirty jokes. Trying to recover, I looked at them and gave them a complete bullshit "*si si*" and shook my head, forcing a fake laugh like I knew what they were talking about all along.

—Sophie Ann Price

"*Dame tu mano.*" Barrio Flores, Mendoza, Argentina [Brianne Ellis]
Guard Dog at the Monastery Hostel in Certado, Italy [Phillip Lambert]



Moments III

Muddy Boots

"You know what would clear that skin right up?" Still recovering from the act of heaving her large, soft body into the van, the old woman pauses for breath. "Calendula." She smoothes out the shawl across her broad shoulders, her cheeks becoming less flushed by the second. "Calendula. Right down at any pharmacy. Good for the complexion." Coughing slightly from the closeness of the air permeated by the scents of twelve other bodies, she nods to the passenger across from her. The young woman beside me, for whom this sage advice is intended, clutches her purse tighter, but flashes a slight smile that passes for polite acknowledgement. It is rare to hear a stranger's mundane ramblings in this country. I feel an anxious anticipation for the next inappropriate words that might spill forth from her mouth.

Now fully recovered from her prior exertion, the grandmother turns her attention to the glum driver as he speeds breakneck through an intersection. Several weeks ago, this would have frightened me. This morning, I calmly plan out what I will say to the medics as they pull my body out of the wreck. It's important to have thought of such details beforehand when operating in a language that is not your mother tongue. Grandmother makes a clucking noise in the back of her throat. Her chin wobbles as she extols the orderly streets of this city during her youth. Angling her neck back she explains to the driver a better route he might take in the future. "Just as fast," more clucking, "Yes, but safer." The van driver grunts and exhales more smoke into the fetid air. Clearly suffering from craning her head at such an awkward angle for so long, she settles back comfortably into her seat like a very smug mother cat.

A laugh catches in my throat. I force it to emerge as a quiet cough. Immediately Grandmother's sharp gaze snaps towards me, lingering on my filthy boots. A look of composed displeasure molds her features, but softens as her eyes roll upwards to my face. Foreigner. I sense her recognition and fiddle with my fraying mitten to avoid meeting her stare. Surely my stop must be coming up? I scratch at the iced window. A small, foggy hole reluctantly forms. Increasingly uncomfortable that she has called my poor bluff, I doggedly watch for the familiar line of buildings to emerge out of the snow. Eventually, their silhouette appears through the grey. Aware that her eyes are still upon me, I call out for the driver to stop; the routine words feel strangely clumsy under her gaze. After making my way through packed-in bodies and bags, I leap for the grimy curb. Turning to pay, Grandmother's watery eyes find mine. "A young lady," she says in a firm, quiet voice, "should always have clean boots." With surprising strength, she slides the door shut and the van speeds away. Faintly puzzled by the unlikely kindness of her remark, I remain teetering on the curb before turning towards the path. Trudging away through the slush, I take care to avoid the especially muddy stretches.

—Julia Gibson

From Aleph 8

Muddy Sneakers, Vietnam [Cristina Bain] From Aleph 6

MOMENTS IV

The Red Badge

I am most definitely in the wrong place. I don't actually know where I am, but I know I am not supposed to be here. My toes slip forward in my high-heeled shoes because my feet are sweating. I reposition to take the pressure off the balls of my feet. They are killing me from walking and I am developing a blister on my heel. I glance around for a room number or a staircase as a group of clean-shaven, middle-aged white men in navy blue suits passes me. One of the men glances at me but doesn't smile; the others don't bother to look up from their Blackberries. I wonder if I should know who they are. They look important. It is hard to tell if someone is important or not because everyone looks important in Washington. Even I look important.

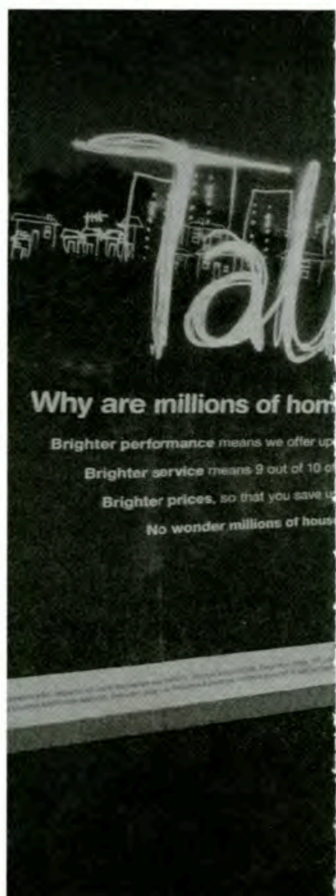
I spot a staircase in the corner and approach it confidently, as if I knew it was there and it would take me exactly where I want to go. I don't want the men who ignored me to think I am lost. I don't care where this staircase takes me, I just know I am in the wrong place.

I find myself in the basement, which is cooler and less threatening than the hallowed halls I just escaped. The ceilings are lower and the walls are not covered with frescoes of our Founding Fathers. I am relieved to be here. It is more understandable to get lost in the labyrinth of this basement. I turn right. It is an arbitrary choice, but right seems natural. I think I am walking west right now. Not really sure. Then I see something I recognize, a sign for the elevators. A great sense of relief floods over me. I close my eyes for a second and take a deep breath as the last of the tension dissipates. With my eyes closed I realize how exhausted I am. I wish I could just keep them closed. I have been awake for a very long time and I still have a lot of the day left.

When I get to my destination I tense up again as I open the large wooden door. The doors to some of the offices are huge, maybe ten feet tall. I am dwarfed even in my high heels. With doors this tall, there must be an important person working on the other side. Even the doorknobs are stately, but they are strangely shaped polygons that are not ergonomically designed for the human hand to grip. Now my palms are sweating, too, as I turn the odd bronze doorknob. I am never sure if I should enter or knock. I figure the door would be locked if I wasn't supposed to enter, but I am used to being wrong about everything. A woman about my age stares at me from behind a wooden desk with a hutch that hides most of her body. She isn't polite to me and I want to say something snarky, like "we both lick envelopes for free", but I don't. Instead I stumble over my words as I try to explain what I am dropping off and hustle out as fast as possible.

I walk slowly on my way back. My feet are really starting to hurt and I have no incentive to hurry. I am the bottom of the food chain here. I am always wrong, I am always lost, I am always confused. I reach an elevator but there is a sign that reads MEMBERS ONLY. Definitely not a member, but I consider taking it anyway. The taxpayers don't know that their elected representatives have private elevators with an old man who pushes the button for them. Seems frivolous and elitist to me. I wander to find an elevator that an average citizen can ride.

On the elevator I lean my lower back on the wall and stretch my hamstrings, taking the weight off my feet. I smile at an older woman wearing a purple tweed suit. She might be important, but I can't tell. She smiles back and says "You're the first person who has smiled at me today." I'm not surprised by her comment, but rather I am surprised that she even said anything

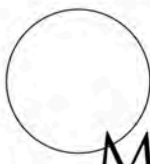


London Tube Station [Christina Amestoy]

to me. She asks "Are you an intern?" I sigh and give a slight nod. *Is it that obvious?* I wonder to myself, rolling my eyes a little bit. Then I notice my badge is exposed. Interns have a red badge—everyone else has a green one. It is obvious who is shark bait and who is actually employed. We jokingly call it "the red badge of courage" or "the scarlet letter", but really it is like a stamp on your forehead. Embarrassed, or maybe humbled, I gingerly flip my badge around to hide the red side as the elevator reaches my floor.

As I slip off the elevator, I glance back to smile at the older woman in the purple tweed suit. I catch sight of her badge; it is red, too. I think she chuckles as the elevator doors slide closed. I chuckle to myself, too. I might be at the bottom of the Capitol Hill food chain, but I am not the only one.

—Anna Hertlein



Moments V

Finding the Ocean

Life is full of those defining moments where something strikes your inner core to the point where you know it left a permanent change. People experience things, see things, even taste things that are so profound that that particular moment is forever filed away in memory. One such moment came for me when I was out on a walk in Dakar, Senegal. I had been alone all afternoon, so to fight off potential homesickness, I decided to wander around Yoff, a fishing village in Dakar.

My walk began as usual: the stares, the catcalls in two new languages that I now understood—all things that I had come to accept and that no longer bothered me. Milling around streets that I had never seen before in my time there, I was lured to the sound of the ocean in the distance. Thinking that I would perhaps discover a new beach, I followed the smell of a salty breeze. The houses had become more and more run-down; the makeshift stone or wood structures gave a new meaning to putting a roof over one's head. There were stone walls along the dirt road, which was not common in Dakar and made me feel as if I was walking in a maze. I made a right turn in my maze and discovered a little girl kicking an old rusty can in the sand. "*Bonjour*," she beamed at me from her dirt-streaked face.

"*Nanga'def*," I responded back to her in Wolof, which surprised and delighted her into another beautiful smile. It was about then that I suddenly felt a change in atmosphere. I wasn't sure exactly why, but the girl, the can, the stone walls, and the dirt all seemed strangely out of context. The girl had been playing near a curve in the road, and as I rounded the curve I stopped completely in my tracks. In fact, I think I froze mid-stride, and didn't move a muscle for at least a full minute. My nose was assaulted by a pungent, smokey smell that mixed with the ocean breeze to blow into my face. I had

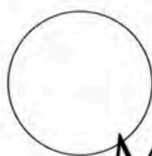
found the ocean; in fact, it was about 150 meters in front of me. And I had found a new beach, only now I didn't want to go swimming anymore. On the beach rose the largest mound of garbage that I have ever seen.

Seagulls and various other birds were circling above the mound, alternately plunging and diving their beaks into the rancid mush. There were children climbing on all sides of it, scavenging for food and whatever other useful items that could be salvaged. There were women, babies slung across their backs, boiling water and creating fires all around the heap. And then I saw the shacks...the same shacks that I had seen all over Dakar, the same shacks that many Senegalese people live in—only these shacks' oceanfront location included a huge pile of waste on their doorstep. This was their home. This was their food. This was their life. And all of a sudden I was overcome with a sense of not belonging. I was gripped with a fear that someone on that beach would see me and be angry that I had stumbled upon their world. I had seen a lot in my life, and yet I still had no context within which to understand the scene in front of me. For reasons that I still cannot fully understand, I stood paralyzed in the dirt, absorbed in a scene unlike anything I could have imagined. All I knew was that I was not supposed to be there, that I had ignorantly invaded a space I had no knowledge of...and all I could do was run away, hoping nobody had seen me.

When I returned home, and was breathlessly writing in my journal, I couldn't come to grips with the feeling that had overcome my body. Senegal had always been a sensory experience—both the most atrocious and the most beautiful. So all I could do then, as now, was to file it away as one of those life experiences that is forever etched into my memory...and the learning process continues.

—Melissa Scott

From Aleph 1



MOMENTS VI

Ceramics

Shifting my weight so as to not scald my feet on the hot ground, I waited for my invitation to enter the building. My shoes, along with those of my ceramics classmates, were heaped in a pile of dust. Before my arrival in South Africa, I had no idea it was possible for knees to sweat. Drips ran down my legs towards my ankles as I thought of the air-conditioned environs of home. Juliet, our professor, did not appear bothered at all by the 115-degree heat. She chatted with our hosts in their native Zulu, giving them the corn and meat we had picked up from the market for lunch.

Once inside the traditional Zulu dwelling I joined my classmates on straw mats lining the circular room. Our hosts, female potters from the heart of Zululand, have a working relationship with Juliet. She found the community during the 1980s while doing research on local artists. Because of apartheid, it was difficult for her to interact with this community of women. During her first visit she was accompanied by an armed guard. Carefully, she and other academics bypassed the system and secretly began to form connections with the local artists. Juliet had been working with our hosts for years, protecting the integrity of their techniques and ensuring that these artists receive just compensation for their efforts. She organized our visit so that we could be exposed to the traditional styles of ceramics she works so hard to support.

We sat with our legs directly out in front of us. All of the Americans in the room were soaked with sweat. Our hosts, in contrast, wore layers and layers of ceremonial clothing, meant to honor their ancestors. My wrap skirt and cotton t-shirt paled in comparison to their colorful long skirts, blouses and scarves. Juliet and our interpreter engaged in a lengthy conversation with the women in Zulu.

Potter at the Magwaza Homestead, Eshowe, South Africa [Benjamin D'Innocenzo]

Unable to understand, my eyes were drawn to the center of the room. Beautiful handmade pots lined the floor, intermingled with serving bowls overflowing with curries and beans. The women had gathered from surrounding settlements within walking distance. Each brought a dish to pass, as well as their personal pieces of pottery to sell. After a long period of conversation (and miming by my classmates and me), food was served.

Because we were guests, our food was served to us. A younger woman brought around bowls of bean meal. To eat, you scooped a handful from the bowl. The bean mixture was crumbly and it flaked through my fingers as I mimicked my hosts, squishing it up in my hand like a sausage. We quickly learned to eat fast, before the next bowl came around the circle. My legs and lap caught the crumbs and before long I was coated with a sticky paste of cornmeal, beans and sweat. My favorite was the small flat patties of ground roasted corn. The crumbly rounds were served with a green sauce; it tasted almost like spinach artichoke dip. A hollowed-out gourd was passed around the circle. I nervously tilted the gourd to my lips as I experienced my first sip of traditional beer. It was bitter, though apparently high in vitamins. The meat was brought out and cut by an older woman. She ripped it apart with a knife into small chunks; sweat dripping from her forehead mixed with the pieces. Not once did I regret my decision to end two years of vegetarianism for this semester. Experiences like this were exactly why I chose to come to South Africa.

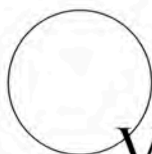
One of the main purposes for our field trip was to purchase pottery. The artists, all elderly women, make the pots entirely by hand using clay dug from a nearby riverbed. The tradition has been passed down from one generation to the next. Zulu culture dictates that only women past menstruation are able to learn the craft. This community, however, has rejected this tradition because of the steady income brought by the ceramics. Still, only the elderly women of the settlement interacted with us and sold their pots to our group. I bought two pots from the same woman.

Bumping through the dirt roads of Zululand, my head flirting with the roof of our vehicle, I clutched my pots, willing them not to break. Passing stray cattle, goats and small settlements, we drove out of the rural area back to our university in Pietermaritzburg. Within a drive of two hours, the landscape changed dramatically, serving as a reminder of the diversity of South Africa.

Later, sitting at my desk, eating a bowl of cereal, I reflected upon the day. As a group, we brought about $500 (3200 rand) into the community. While this is a seemingly small figure in our daily context at home, I realized that the value of our experience was priceless. In the process, we were able to help sustain a community struggling to maintain cultural integrity in an unsympathetic world.

The divide between between rich and poor in South Africa is among the most inequitable in the world. The country's history has been tumultuous; internal unrest and the influences of globalization have resulted in the revamping of South African identity. A careful balance between preservation of tradition and embracing progress has proven to be essential as the nation looks to strengthen its infrastructure and narrow class differences.

—Rebecca Felt



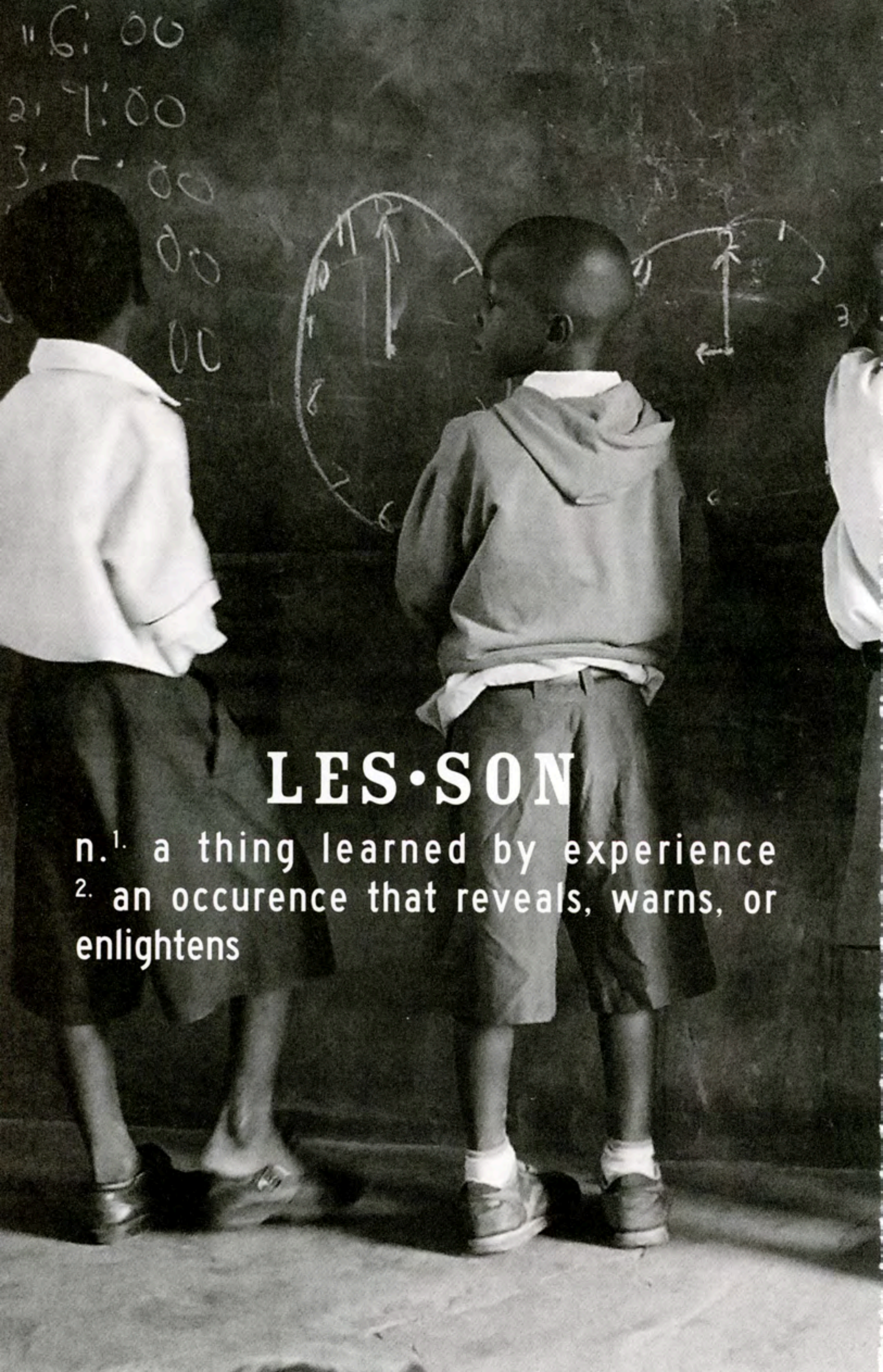
Verse and Vision I

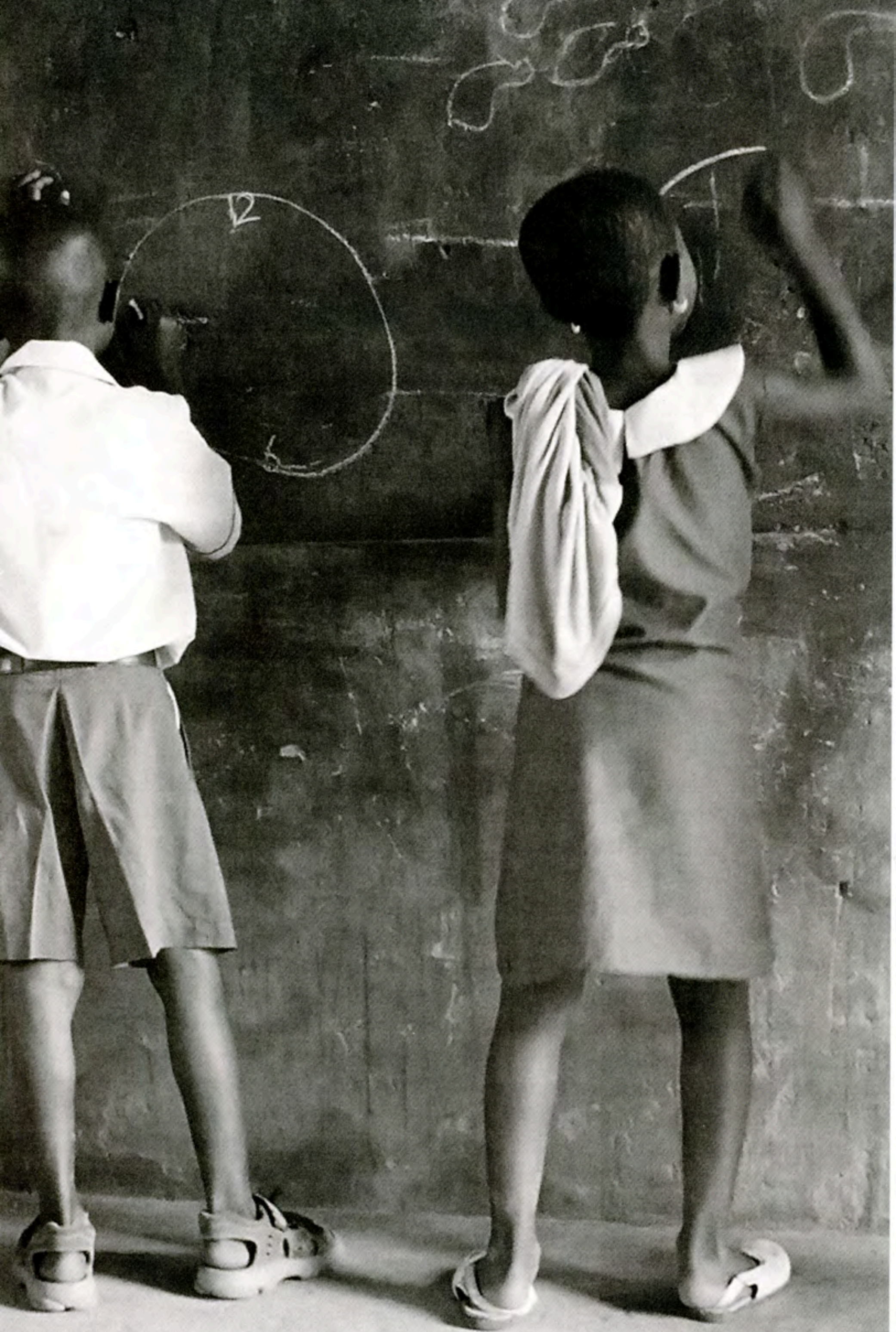
Untitled

He drinks alone.
Pausing only long
enough to shift
slightly in the
high-backed stool.
Or smile politely
at the young
hussy working the
bar.
Who cares, nicely I think,
To pretend that
His drink(ing) matters.

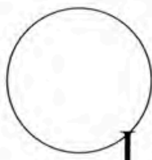
—Michael V. Daly
(with apologies to Seamus Heaney's "Casualty")
From Aleph 1

Franklin D. Roosevelt Metro Station, Paris, France [Cole Judge] From Aleph 3


LES•SON
n. 1. a thing learned by experience
2. an occurence that reveals, warns, or enlightens



Triumphant International School in Ghana [Nancy Borowick] From Aleph 9



Lessons I

My Vietnam Experience

I spent a long time looking back at my abroad experience with a bad attitude—about three months, in fact (as long a time as I had spent in Vietnam)—and I still have a long way to go. I was happy that I went and certain that I had gotten a lot out of it. But...I just didn't think I had gotten enough out of it, or rather what I believed I "should." I guess I had expected it to amount to more—or at least something different. I thought I should and would come back with amazing stories and pictures and new knowledge about the world that I could share and do something with, something bigger than myself, something to really make a positive impact.

Instead, when I got back, I couldn't even organize my photos. My normal life snuck back up on me—in fact, it seemed to reappear as soon as I was unpacked. This made my experience abroad feel even more devalued.

I believed that if I hadn't experienced culture shock, then I hadn't really "experienced" Vietnam to the fullest. I had made a lot of new friends, learned to live in a foreign city where most people didn't speak my language, and became comfortable with not being able to call home whenever I wanted. I even managed to get by without washing my sheets for three months! I learned to wander alone in the city. I even started to like riding on the back of the motorbikes driven by complete strangers with whom I could hardly exchange a word, even though after my first ride I swore I would never do it again. I learned to take risks and reevaluated many parts of my life. Yet, I still felt like my experience was not as full as it should have been and somehow less than that of most of my classmates. For some reason I was convinced that other people were able to have a deeper experience of Vietnam and its people—maybe because my attention was focused less on what was going on around me and more on my own personal struggles.

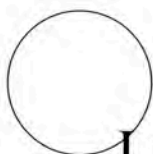
What is experience? How do we take full advantage of what is offered to us? What did I or anyone else who has been abroad get out of the experience? These are difficult questions. A new environment doesn't make you a different person. Sure, it inspires you to explore and to challenge yourself, and oftentimes it even forces you to take risks and think new thoughts. High expectations are good and they challenge you to embrace opportunities and push yourself in the direction you want to go, but my advice is "be reasonable."

Don't be afraid to take risks and to celebrate your accomplishments. However, you have to be ready to adjust your frame of reference as to what counts as progress and as "real" experience. Look for new opportunities to grow and change, reevaluate and appreciate. Go in a direction you never would have dreamed of going. It's good to try to let go of the expectations you had before your arrival. When you judge your experience abroad based on your expectations, you are filtering and devaluing all the learning that goes on outside of what you were prepared for. What would I tell a student about to go abroad? Talk, grow, let down your guard.

—Sarah Hauck

From Aleph 5

Girl in Sapa, Vietnam [Nga (Teddy) Tran]



Lessons III

*Jaay ma Suukër ak Warga**

I anxiously walk to Pathé's room, prepared with *warga* (tea leaves) and *suukër* (sugar) in hand. He greets me with the common salutation "*Yaa ngi si jàmm?*" Do you have peace? I reply, "*Jàmm rek, alhomdulilah!*" Peace only, thank God! Two months ago these words had no meaning for me, but now they envelop me in peace and happiness. I feel at home.

It is my first time making *attaya* all by myself. Making tea is about being social. My friends and I talk as I try to concentrate on the art of *attaya*.

Pour water into the kettle and plug in the hot plate. Wait for water to boil. Add half a packet of warga and wait for the water to boil again.

"A woman sat on me today!" My friends in the room look at me strangely and I explain my funny story. I was in a *car rapide*, a common mode of transportation that can sometimes transport thirty people at a time. I was sitting on a bench that usually fits six people, but has a maximum capacity of five when the people are a bit larger. We squished as much as possible and only got about a 6-inch space in between me and a woman sitting next to me. A woman about twice my size got onto the *car rapide* and thought that she could fit herself in this little spot. I looked up at her, she looked down at me and proceeded to sit right on my lap!! I burst out laughing and then said "*Bonjour!*" and the whole *car rapide* burst out in laughter. We had a little conversation in Wolof, eventually a spot opened up so the woman could have her own seat, and then I got off and we went our merry ways.

Add in sugar. About 18 cubes. Pour tea into glasses and pour back into kettle—mixing all the ingredients. Let boil.

*(Sell me sugar and tea, please.)

As the laughter dies down from my story, the subject changes to cultural differences between the United States and Senegal. Here in Senegal, the emphasis is placed on the social. Pathé explains that if a friend comes to visit you, you talk with him or her even if you have a lot of homework. You would never turn someone away because you are in the middle of an assignment. This person chose to spend time with you; how could you turn him or her away? My thoughts turn to HWS and how I am always busy, how I could never take three hours out of my afternoon to make tea. I sigh and wish our two cultures were not so different.

After tea has boiled for fifteen to twenty minutes, pour one glass almost to the top. Attaya can continue to boil as the glass of tea cools. When cool enough, start making mousse by forcibly pouring tea from one glass to another. It takes a lot of practice to make good mousse.

As I sit making the mousse, my friend Demba asks me why I am not married. I wonder why the conversation always turns to marriage. It just seems to be one of those "hot topics" here at Université Gaston Berger. I ask my own questions. What is your opinion on polygamy? After all, polygamy is perfectly legal in Senegal. "I am not opposed to it, but I could never do it," Demba replies. If you did have more than one wife, would you have them stay in one house or would they have separate houses? "Same house," he answers quickly. "So the children could all play with each other." Clearly he has thought about his options. Do you think it is unfair that women can only have one husband but men can have four wives? "No. If a woman had more than one husband, how would you know the father of the child?" Huh. That's the first time someone has given me a sensible answer to that question.

When the mousse is finished, serve the attaya. Share with friends and neighbors.

They ask me about my teaching in town. I tell them about how I am teaching at an all-girls high school, Ameth Fall. I do not really enjoy teaching English; I have found that I do not have much passion for the language. However, my girls are hilarious. One conversation I had with a class was particularly funny—it was on the topic of marriage. We were talking about

traditional marriage ceremonies in Senegal—I learned a lot and they practiced speaking in English. Then we talked about the roles of husbands and wives. The girls thought that roles for a wife included cooking, cleaning, and taking care of children. Roles for a husband included working, sleeping, eating too much, watching tv, and doing nothing! I like teaching in an all-girls school!

Start the second glass—add the rest of the warga and twelve cubes of suukër. Bring to a boil.

As I start my second cup, I develop this aching feeling that I may never see these friends again. It scares me and I start to tear up. It's different than with my college friends, who are only a few hours drive away... The Atlantic Ocean divides me and Senegal. Pathé notices my change in mood and starts explaining how Senegalese people do not usually leave their homeland. Families live in the same villages, in the same houses, for years and years. I think about my first days in Senegal with Professor Joseph. We were walking through the busy streets of Dakar, near where he used to live, when he saw the same man who used to clean his car. The man was in the same neighborhood decades later and recognized my professor! I did not appreciate what this meant at the time, but this exchange gives me hope. People never leave Senegal. All I have to do is physically come back and keep the phone numbers of my friends and I will see them again. *Insh'Allah*, God willing.

Make mousse again. Serve attaya and share with friends and neighbors.

I talk about the things I will miss about Senegal. The warmth of the people. *Taranga*—the hospitality the Senegalese show. The cows,

Deirdre Wholly (far left) and Christa Levesque (far right) pose with their Senegalese roommates, Bineta Ndione and Mariama Bodian, during a spring break visit to Dakar, Senegal.

donkeys, goats and horses roaming around campus. The call to prayer five times each day. The music. The endless expanse of stars in the night sky. Philosophical discussions with my best friends as we share tea.

I start cleaning up, dumping the used *warga* in the trash and rinsing the glasses.

I miss the warm smiles that wished me goodbye. I will think of them every time I make *attaya* in the future. *Ba baneen yoon, Insh'Allah.*

—Christa Levesque

From Aleph 9

Lessons IV

Sarajevo from a Mountaintop

Standing in a cemetery on a mountaintop overlooking Sarajevo, Bosnia, I was wrapped in confusion. It swirled around me like November's chill. Warren took in the scenery with his camera. I would be thankful later for his photographs; my own fingers were too numb to bother with the tiny buttons on my camera.

Our trip to Sarajevo went nothing like I had imagined. We traveled 12 hours overnight from Budapest without a sleeping car, and without much escape from the endless harassment of border officials. Hungary/Croatia. Croatia/Bosnia. They yelled at us in unfamiliar languages, and we wearily handed over our passports. For all we knew, they may have been yelling "Fire, fire, get off the train!"

When we arrived at 6 am in Sarajevo, we realized how unprepared we really were. First of all, it was cold. How could that be, when we had just traveled 12 hours south? Alas, Sarajevo lies in a deep valley flanked by snowcapped mountains. I put on every piece of clothing that I had packed to stay warm. Freezing and tired, we had no Bosnian money, no knowledge of the language, and no map of the city. Everyday tourist luxuries, like an information booth in the train station, or a helpful English-speaking resident, were absent. We exited the train station in the cold, dark rain.

Is there something wrong with looking down upon a city surrounded by death, while feeling nothing but life? My feet crunched against the hard earth beneath me, in that mountain cemetery where victims of Europe's most recent genocide lay. To my left and right were buildings that used to be Bosnian homes. Today, they are rubble. Homes ruined, lives cut short; I wondered where the residents were now.

But life has a funny way of getting your attention in this city. Brand new buildings, reconstruction efforts, hundreds

of thousands of citizens healing from their "dark age." The city is re-emerging. In the shadow of death, Sarajevo is giving birth to hope. In the four days that I called Sarajevo home, I was sickened by my own ignorance of what had happened there. I was paralyzed by the sight of the bullet-riddled Parliament building. I was chilled by the effects of human coldness. True horror like that never disappears; I could feel it in the Bosnian air. A legacy of cruelty permeated the UN-patrolled streets, the war-damaged mosques, and the beautiful, snowy mountains deadly with unexploded mines.

But, when I stood in that cemetery, Sarajevo the place and Sarajevo the spirit separated. And I understood. Now, Sarajevo is standing up to reclaim itself. It is burying its past; life becomes it.

—Mary Berkery

From Aleph 5

Small Statue in the Old Street Cafe, Hanoi, Vietnam [To Thu Tra]

Verse and Vision II

Night in the Thar*

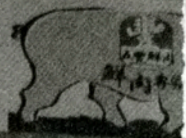
The tribal song fills the night
Echoing the rich voice that belts it
She turns and
twists
As the darkness bursts with a twirl of red.
The motion carving the sand in her feet
The dunes rise and fall
Animated, personified
By the sparkling spiraling of her colors
The tinkling of her
silver adorned self
The cold Thar air,
Leaving behind the scorching day,
Becomes the dancer.
As the vibrant lyrics reverberate
Through the sky, sand and me.

—Suprita Kudesia

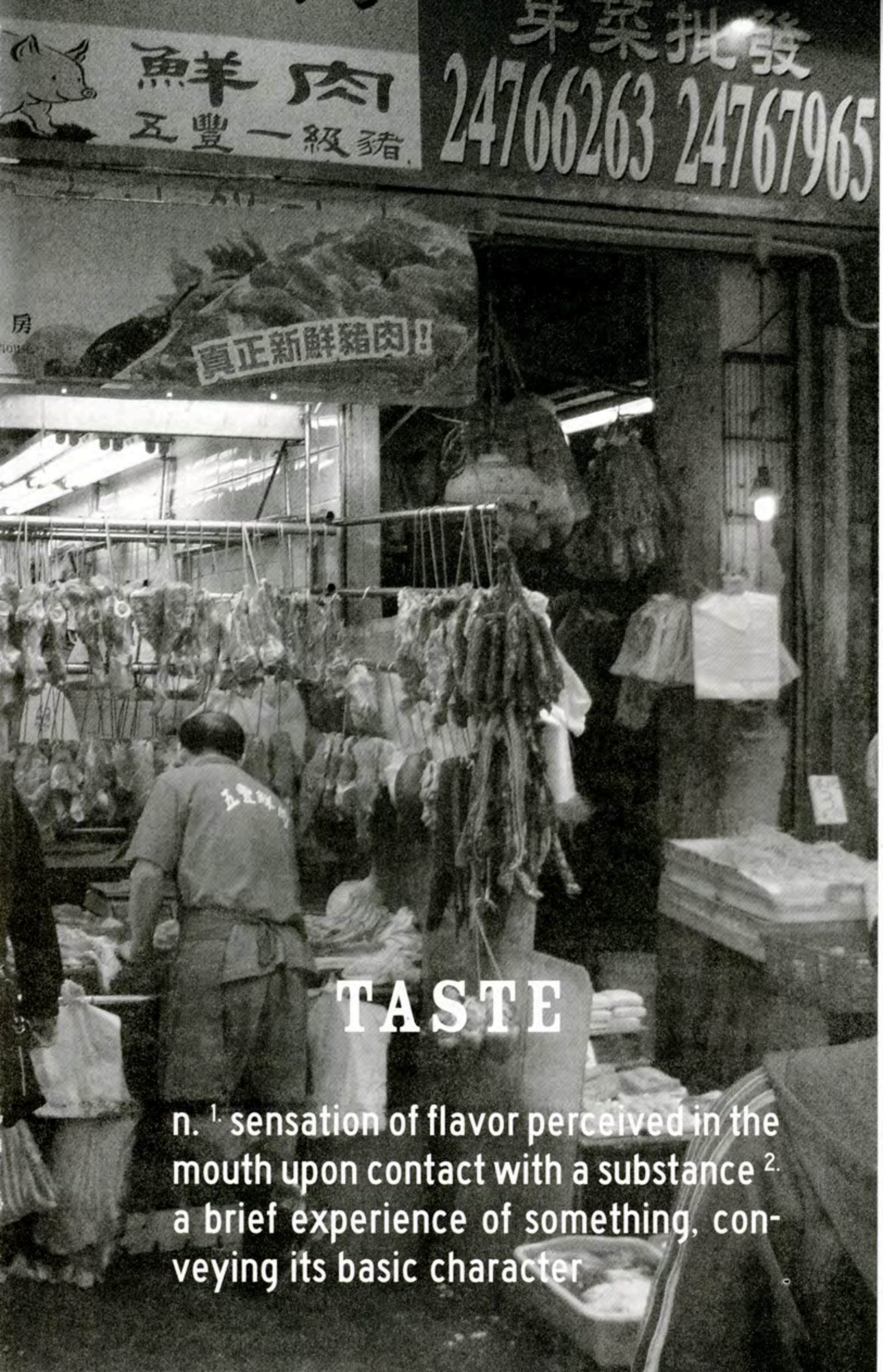
From Aleph 2

*The Thar, or Great Indian Desert, lies in Rajasthan, the state of kings (raja=king, sthan=kingdom) in western India. I relate to this anonymous woman because I come from neighboring Gujarat, where we have folk dances similar to the one described. The dancer represents a personal journey as I switch from watching to dancing to dancing with her. It is for the reader to decide if this is literal or metaphorical. -S.K.

Dancing Hmong Girl in Sapa, Vietnam [Bryan Harris]



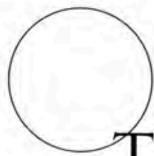
Butcher Shop in Hong Kong [Sara Hollingshead]



TASTE

n. [1.] sensation of flavor perceived in the mouth upon contact with a substance [2.] a brief experience of something, conveying its basic character

Diptych: Woman Selling Eels in Busan (above) and
Fruit Vender in Seoul (below) South Korea [Rosemary Scheibel]



Tastings I

Tasting Britain

According to Joanna Blythman, an award-winning investigative food journalist and author of *Bad Food Britain: How a Nation Ruined Its Appetite,* England lives in a fantasy food world. Although cookbooks line kitchen shelves and Jamie Oliver products permeate the grocery stores, this façade obscures reality. Blythman offers some staggering statistics:

- In 2003, the British ate more ready-meals than the rest of Europe combined.
- 69 percent of British people are confused about which foods are healthy.
- Only one in five Brits will go out of their way to buy British-produced food if it means paying more for it.

There's a definite link between the nation's health and its dependence on ready-made food. The shift from cooking homemade meals to defrosting microwaveable dishes compounds the problem—if the British themselves no longer prepare their own traditional dishes, how can they combat their cuisine's bad reputation?

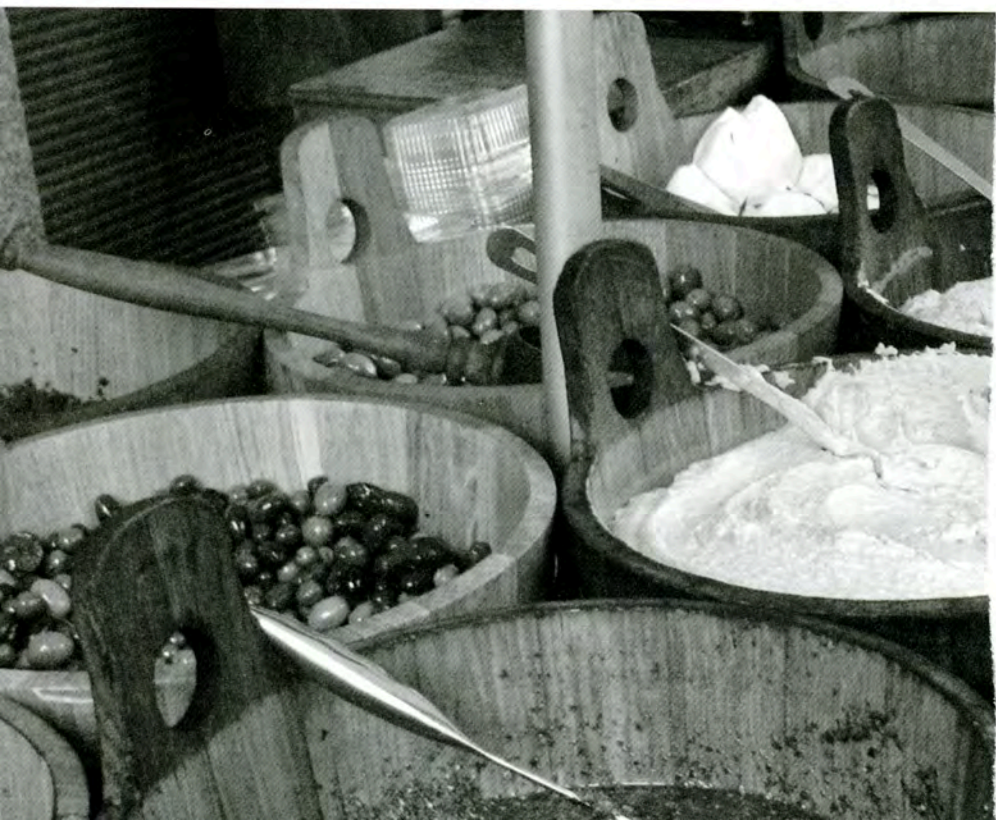
In the course "Food, Society, and Culture" that I took in London, I discovered traditional British cuisine. During an in-class tasting, I sampled savory items like pork pies and Cornish pasties, pickled onions and finally sweet treats including digestives, Bakewell tarts, and mince pies.

The classic British crumpet kicked off the sampling. Piping hot and soaked with butter, this breakfast staple resembled a bland pancake. My instructor said the Brits either love or hate crumpets; there is no middle ground. Some of my classmates piled on orange marmalade to add flavor, but this sweet spread still couldn't compensate for the crumpet's rubbery texture.

Next up were the pork pies. Their flakey, golden brown pastry shells act as a sealant and preserve the moist meat inside. With this contrast in mind, it's simple to see why the Brits favor pork pies. To intensify the flavor, most add a dollop of sauce—sweet mango chutney, tomato chutney, or Coleman's mustard, for example.

Marmite was the curveball of the tasting. High in vitamin B, the sticky spread is made of the waste products (primarily yeast) from brewing beer. Although it looks like thick soy sauce, don't be fooled. This versatile paste that's spread on crackers and toast is a bitter, acquired taste. To state it bluntly, I felt like I was ingesting gasoline.

Fortunately, the desserts saved my taste buds. After sampling a sliver of mince pie—which conjured holiday tastes and smells like cranberries, currants, and spices—I realized the British have mastered the art of pairing flavors and textures



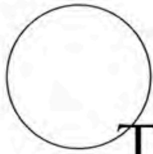
to complement each other. In the case of mince pies, the pie crust's understated and rough texture accentuated its sticky and sweet filling.

Two types of digestives—plain and chocolate-coated—came next, and finally, I tried a Bakewell tart. Although small and seemingly angelic, this cherry treat packed a punch. Buried between layers of plain pie crust, the thick confectionary icing and tiny cherry pieces satisfy both sweet and tart cravings.

Based on this sampling, I think some British dishes suffer from undeserved bad reputations—I loved the cockles (small saltwater clams) and pickled onions. Because cuisine is such a crucial component of a country's culture, I went on to try a variety of traditional Britsh foods, from the sandwiches and scones of a leisurely high tea to a Sunday roast. And I've formed my own—*favourable*—opinions of British cuisine.

—Carrie Stevens

Galway Food and Clothing Market, Galway, Ireland [Jess McCue]



Tastings II

The Chemistry of Culture

I.

Jerez is small. The stones that cobble its streets are small. They line the small *paseo* (walkway) which lies between small blue and white porcelain-tiled restaurants where small, old men sit hunched over small bars and eat small pieces of bread topped with small pieces of Mediterranean fish and cream cheese and talk small talk. They are busy with small things like small socks that come out of the laundry and are hung to dry on the lines strung between the one- and two-bedroom apartments that are scattered throughout town. Or the small breakfasts of *tostada* (toast) and *café* (coffee) they have every day. But what is most important to the people of Jerez de la Frontera is something so small it can fit in the palm of the hand—a Palomino grape, the essence of sherry.

The dry, crusted landscape of central Spain did not give me much hope. Looking out of the window of the train, all that I saw was tree after tree aching for water and an expansive sky with no sign of any precipitation. With the desire to find lush grape vines drooping with grapes, I was beginning to think that south might have not been the right direction to take. But there I was, on a chemical mission. Let me explain.

Grapes are grown all over the world for countless purposes. They are used to scent shampoo, squished for grape juice, aged for wine and seeded for oil. And each culture has its own use for grapes, which makes them even more interesting. Take, for example, my hometown of Silver Creek, New York.

In the fall, Concord grape vines snake across the town on plots of land as far as the eye can see. We celebrate the harvest with a festival and a very competitive grape pie contest. Our

grapes are grown for juice—the thick kind that sweetly sits on your tongue and stains your front teeth purple. But there I was, across the Atlantic. The grapes in Spain were grown not only for a different reason, but also in a completely different way, and because of the unique chemical makeup of these grapes, a distinct culture had emerged in the small town of Jerez de la Frontera. I was off to immerse myself in it and, as a chemistry nerd, figure out what made this culture so different from mine on a molecular level.

I chose that weekend to travel to Jerez because it was the *Fiesta de Vindimia*, or Celebration of the First Harvest. After checking into my hostel, a hard task because in small Spanish towns my limited Spanish vocabulary doesn't get me very far, I stood on the balcony of my room and saw the celebration coming to life. All throughout the maze of streets, flags were hung and huge oak barrels labeled with the local *bodegas* (wineries) stood in pyramids. It was that night that I discovered just how small this small town was.

After changing into some festive garb, I headed out onto the streets to experience this new culture first-hand but instead found myself being the one experienced. Everyone had heard, probably from the stationmaster, that I had arrived that day on the train. Everywhere I went they stopped me and, after giving me *dos besos* (two kisses) on both cheeks, asked what I was doing there, could I come to their home to meet their children or how long was I planning to stay so they could take me to lunch at the little café down the street. Though quite surprising at first, the small town talk gradually sunk in and I felt quite at home, even moreso because the entire town smelled of grapes. But unlike my home, where the odor of juice is in the air, the waves of smell that float around Jerez are of sherry, the wine I had set out to study.

Sherry is a fortified wine that is made in only one place in the world, Jerez de la Frontera. It is strong, containing double the amount of alcohol of normal wine, and has a peculiar taste that most Spanish people love and outsiders have an interesting time coping with, including me.

Upon learning that I had never tried sherry, the people of the town decided that the next day I should go on a tasting extravaganza as well as visit the fields where their prized Palomino grapes are grown. And so I did. From dawn till dawn, as is the Spanish way, I went from *bodega* to *bodega* sipping every *manzanilla*, *amontillado* and *crème Jerez* possible. Though the taste was not very pleasing to my palette, I could see that these people poured their lives into producing sherry as happily as they poured it into my glass. And, when I went out to the fields, I was able to pick the green Palomino grapes alongside workers who spent an incredible amount of time scrutinizing every grape that went into their sack, checking its sweetness, its acidity, its color, its texture and its taste.

At night, after a long day of grape-picking in the white-hot sun, I talked with Victoria, the owner of the hostel I stayed at, about what I learned. Although she wasn't that interested in the chemistry of sugar content and amino acid degradation, she told me that what I observed was true. She had spent her whole life in Jerez, working to make sure that grapes were grown so that they could be milled and pressed into liquid, to age in American oak barrels and be consumed with a pastry after *cena* (dinner). The grapes in Jerez are a way of life for the people, a culture unknowingly shaped by chemistry. And, after my short stay in Jerez, I began to think bigger than the small town and hypothesize where else chemistry might have also shaped the culture. So, Madrid became my next project.

II.

I am a meat and potatoes girl. It makes sense because my mother is Irish and my dad is Polish and German. So being in Madrid, a city smack dab in the middle of a Mediterranean country, where fish, almonds and olives are the most plentiful foods, it was easy for me to find many new foods to try—and to cook. But first I had to find a teacher.

Wandering around Madrid was something that I did a lot while I was abroad. But as soon as I gave myself the mission of learning how to cook Spanish cuisine from a Spanish chef, my wandering went to the next level.

The streets of Madrid are littered with cafés, tiny restaurants and street vendors. Or, in other words, lots of informal schools in which to enroll. The one I chose was close to where I lived, in the newer, more modern part of the city near the Plaza de Picasso. I chose this restaurant because every Monday, Wednesday and Friday, as I passed the mirrored windows, the smells that drifted towards me were not only mouthwatering, but inspirational.

The woman I found to be my teacher was named Maria. When she cooked she wore heels higher than I had ever worn in my life. Her apron was stained with the innards of prawns, a main ingredient in her best, and Spain's most famous, dish: *paella*.

Paella is a big production with lots of ingredients. Maria taught me that it didn't matter what went in the pot as long as you followed these rules: 1) Don't use store-bought broth for your rice 2) Never stir the rice after it is in the pan 3) Smash the heads of the prawns to get out all the good juices as that is where the flavor is and 4) Use a wooden spoon that is at least 10-years old and well-seasoned. These sound like simple rules, and to a woman who has been making *paella* for the last 40 years, they were. But to me, well, let's just say my first *paella* went to the dog.

Gradually, after many attempts, my rice started to get the proper texture and I could smash prawn heads like an expert. I found more teachers, owners of other restaurants around Madrid, who taught me to make *cocido* (a hearty beef stew with chick peas), *tortilla* (a potato omelet) and *gazpacho* (cold tomato soup). And not only did I eat some good meals with some good people, I got connected to the culture in a whole new way. Just like in Jerez, the people in the capital city were proud of their food because it represented their Spanish heritage.

It was after my *Madrileño* cooking experience that I came to what may seem like a common-sense revelation, but a revelation nonetheless: everyone has to eat, but it is how and what and why we eat that can create our culture. So, as I planned a weekend getaway to Ireland, I thought I would test my hypothesis as I explored a new culture through its cuisine.

III.

If someone wanted to know what the opposite of Spain is, I could give them a simple answer: Ireland. Spain is an achingly dry interior with a salty exterior. Ireland is green and wet and rocky, through and through. The Irish wear tweed, while the Spanish prefer light, colorful cotton. People in Ireland hope for sun and in Spain they wish for rain. But their passion for food, well that is something that runs in the veins of both cultures.

I flew into Dublin in the middle of the night. It was cold and rainy, as expected, and my Spanish apparel didn't quite hold up, though my upstate New York blood was equal to the task. Earlier that week I had contacted a man named Marco on the couchsurfing website to arrange a place to stay. He lived near the center of the city and when we met I was surprised to discover that Marco was not Irish. After a weekend full of scones, sweet Irish cream butter, corned beef, and heaping piles of spuds, I went, on Marco's invitation, to learn how to make pasta from his mother at their house in Florence, Italy.

I have never seen fingers move as fast as when I watched Marco's mother, Valentina, make tortellini. Stuffed with fresh cheese and homegrown herbs, the little tortellini were plump and ready to pop. Valentina and I made pasta for six hours. And, after I got past a bout of arthritis from all the pasta primping, that night we picked tomatoes from their garden to make a marinara sauce. When it was all ready, we sautéed the pasta with mushrooms and ate it (alongside crusty bread) beneath an arbor overgrown with grape vines in misty candlelight. I knew then that even though I didn't speak Italian, I could always communicate with Valentina through food.

Fin

We all eat. In small towns and big cities, in castles or cabins, on mountains or in the desert. But there is more to it than

Olive Oil Tasting, Mendoza, Argentina [Emma Schwartz]

that. We don't just eat what is available to us. We take what is there and use it to make it an extension of ourselves. We can define ourselves through food because it is part of our culture. Whether we make *paella*, sherry, pasta, a hanger of sausage or grape pie, we make it because it is part of who we are. My study abroad experience not only taught me new recipes to cook, but also that behind every culture is a type of culinary chemistry that brings people together. You are what you eat, no matter what it is.

—Megan Rechin

Verse and Vision III

1. Moving Forward

His Black knee
Touches
My White knee
And
I notice
But
Enjoy the fact that
Neither of us
Minds.

2. White Spot

Lone White face
In a sea of Black
Moving against
The tide

I'm unaware
That I'm going the wrong way
And
That I look funny

I can't see me.

3. Privilege

They will take you
Wherever
And pick you up
Whenever

But that's
Because
You're White.

4. Leftovers

Why should we forgive them?
He asks to expectant Black faces and
Heads nodding in
Agreement,
Voice booming over
Crackling speakers,
A look over his shoulder
At us where
We are caught
White
Frozen in the light

Nothing we could say
Would make it better

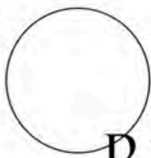
—Whitney Elrod

Skogskyrkogården, The Woodland Cemetery in Stockholm
Sweden [Evan Amato] From Aleph 9

Young Girl with Father's Shoes, Mumbai, India [Sloane Sheldon]

RES•IST•ANCE

n. 1. refusal to accept, comply or obey 2. attempt to prevent something by action or argument 3. the ability to not be effected by something



Reflections of Resistance I

Outsiders in Hong Kong

I realized early on that a Hispanic person walking the streets of Hong Kong is a rare sight. I can't tell you how many times I was followed in crowded stores, or was stared at, or became the topic of conversation in Cantonese. I felt welcomed at the host university where I studied, but was constantly reminded that I was different, an outsider. Little did I know that I would spend the rest of my abroad experience with a group of people who were even greater outcasts than me.

It all started with my philosophy professor. He suggested that I do community service with an organization during my time in Hong Kong. I accepted the challenge, but I didn't realize what I had gotten myself into, nor how it would change my life.

I volunteered at Bethune House, a refuge for female migrant workers who need a place to stay while they attempt to rebuild their lives. These women, mostly from Indonesia or the Philippines, are hired by Hong Kong employment agencies to serve as domestic help. They cook, clean and watch over the children of their assigned families. The agencies claim that the women can earn more money in Hong Kong than they could in their home countries, but it's the agencies that make money instead. In many cases, when migrant workers have completed their contracts, they are tossed into the streets or sent back to their agencies without being paid.

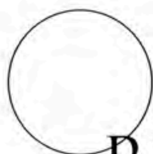
These women come to Bethune House for shelter and legal advice. Many of them are not fluent in English, so as a volunteer, I helped draft legal statements to be used by their attorneys. During free time, we had therapeutic cross-stitching sessions, where many of the migrant workers opened up and told some of the most heartbreaking stories I have ever heard. One of my

closest friends at the house told us about the time she was raped by her employer; another spoke of how her employer beat her with an iron and forced her to drink toilet water. Yet another told of the time she was thrown out into the street without any clothes and was forced to spend the night at a police station. It was one thing to read these kinds of stories in a news article but I was actually hearing from the victims themselves. I felt a great bond with these women and did what I could to help them.

One day one of the women asked me: *Melody, can you please come with me to get my passport back from my employment agency? I'm scared to go by myself.* When we got to the employment agency, the glares I received signaled that I wasn't welcome. In order to get her passport back, the migrant worker would have to sign a contract. She wanted me to look over the contract for her because she wasn't fluent in English, and as I started reading the document, an agency worker snatched the sheet from my hands and shouted for me to leave. I wasn't sure if they had the legal right to do that, but what I did know was that it was illegal for the agency to take away the migrant worker's passport in the first place—and that she didn't have to sign anything to get it back. I told the agency worker that we weren't going to leave without her passport and if we did leave, it would be to get the police involved. We did, and finally got the passport back.

When I arrived on campus as a first-generation college student, I never envisioned myself studying abroad in a place like Hong Kong. Volunteering at Bethune House was such an emotional and important experience for me. I've connected with, cried with and defended these workers in many different situations. They've made a lasting impression on me, and the experience has made me rethink my career path. I wanted to be a lawyer. But what I learned at Bethune House is that being a lawyer doesn't necessarily require you to really get to know a person at a much deeper level. This experience showed me how a support system can impact lives. Thanks to Bethune House and the women who shared their struggles with me, I am looking toward advocacy work as a social worker or a psychologist.

—Melody J. Acosta



Reflections of Resistance II

Becoming Aboriginal

The island of Tasmania lies off the southern coast of Australia, divided from it by the Bass Strait: 125 miles of ocean that has come and gone with the ice ages. A few hundred miles from the Antarctic, the island teeters on the edge of the known world, making it a natural choice for the British colonizers who established a penal colony there in the early 19th century. Of course, the island had a history, a name and a people before white men came to give it their own. The nearly forgotten echoes of this time before drew me in. I traveled to this island in December, rang in the new year a few days after arriving and returned home in March with a thesis beginning to form.

Tasmania, despite its bottom-of-the-world mystique, felt comfortably familiar. The roads in the suburb of Sandy Bay, where I resided, were narrow and gently sloped over the hills that bowed into the shores of the Derwent River. Nearing the crest of one of the rolling streets, the sea breeze would sweep up to meet me, carrying with it a wave of cold air. The city lies in the shadow of Mount Wellington, often capped with snow when the seaside is warm. The houses are low and softly-colored, aged well by the sea air and crisp sunlight. The city is over two hundred years old, much of it originally constructed by convicts. Stone churches, cobbled streets, and white-washed walls glowed in the winter sun.

I lived for over two months with the Edwards family and their rotating cast of offspring that buzzed in and out of the house, as well as their four cats and numerous chickens and ducks in the backyard. I read, wrote and rested in a small room at the back of the house, waking up every morning at seven to feed and change the water for the birds in the

yard. On special mornings, I would reach beneath one of the speckled hens, a motion that requires at least the illusion of competence to keep the chicken calm. There I'd find a warm egg—my breakfast.

Before settling into Hobart (the capital of Tasmania), we traveled around the island in two cars that were packed full with coolers, tents and empty soda cans. The land seemed to change with every mile. Stubbly cow pastures burned golden in the late afternoon sun and flowed into thick grasslands which sprouted up into green canopies and high valley walls. No larger than Ireland or West Virginia, Tasmania's size belies a profundity that draws you in until you forget that the world extends beyond its shores. Trees stand like titans, gripping the earth down to the hot core. Rivulets carve shaded cracks that wind on forever and evade the cartographer's eye.

Mt. William National Park lies at the far northeast corner of the island. The sand curves around, hugging the edge of the water like an infinitely long white highway. The wind had picked up since our arrival that morning and clouds were roaring across the sky, exploding against the fierce blue. Our teacher, Nels, was just ahead, leaning over the dark, sand-blown body of a penguin. His hand moved down to it, lifting one of the wings and letting it drop. Every few minutes we would see a bird that had died at sea and had been tossed up to the sand by a wave, and every time Nels would walk towards it and kneel as if saying goodbye.

"Just over this dune." Nels had looked up and was pointing ahead at a great mound of sand, crowned with the pale gold bunches of beach grass that grew where the sand met the dark clay of the island. "We're nearly there."

I had first breathed Tasmanian air less than two weeks ago. Some say it is the purest air on the entire planet. A night wind rushed down my collar and up my sleeves and reminded me that the ocean was closer and wilder here than in Sydney. I could almost hear the waves, crashing and churning the air with icy, Antarctic heaves that gave this island its cooler climate. Tasmania was the last verdant outpost before the deserts of Antarctica. Our cab that night wove through the dark hills, softly pushing the night aside

with its blue headlights as it went. "It feels like Vermont," my friend Michael said.

I had known, without really knowing, what I would study here. It chose me more than I imagined it would. On a whim, I had walked to a bookstore the day before I left home and bought a book about pre-Columbian America. I was tired of the same stories of conquest and spice trades and breast-plated Christians. I was sure that my country had a history before it was white, but no one ever talked about it. Every chapter I finished in those long, airborne hours crept into my brain and curled up, tucked so neatly I would hardly notice them until nearly two weeks later. I was about to be caught in the spell of history, and for once, it wasn't written by the victor, but by the vanquished.

I had my sandals off now and I began to press my toes into the sand faster, climbing the gentle slope towards the dune. Nels was just a few feet ahead and my classmates Cassandra and Jay walked just beyond. We were right up against the dune now, about to turn into the valley behind it, sheltered from the wind and the sea spray. In front of us, coating the narrow way ahead as if bubbling up from the sand, lay a pool of bleached white shells. I bent to pick one up. It was smooth and burning white like bone. Up ahead, I heard Jay gasp and Nels let out a low hum of appreciation. I took three more steps and there I was. The dune rose up like a wall in front of me, at least forty feet tall. Ribbons of white shell traced across the face of the dune. "This is it." Nels turned towards me, his hands on his hips and his grin beginning to spread, "We're at the midden."

The question of a thesis topic worked its way around the circle. What would I devote the next nine weeks to? Before I had an answer, I felt my hand rise up and all eyes turned towards me. I cleared my throat and began. Slowly, but with purpose, one idea after another opened up. The sentences fell out, uncurling like new ferns. My topic: *the Aboriginals.* I wanted to know everything: What songs did they sing to the half-moon? What roots would they squeeze for water? How did they hunt, how did they move, what did they love and where are they now? I sank back in the seat and the question moved to the next raised hand.

We all sat, spread across the wide seats of the train, as it rocked and sped up through the foothills of the Blue Mountains. I turned to look out the window and I saw past my reflection, past the houses and clotheslines that rushed by, past the rows of orchards. I saw lean, dark men, their hair in thick bunches, carrying burning sticks and loping over the grassy hills. They faded in and out like shadows in the sun. There was more to this country than was shown on the surface. An enduring history was running, like an underground river, strong but muffled by cement and noise. I tried to dig down.

That deep river ran behind the midden, sheltered from the wind. They had lived here. They had gathered and cooked in this very spot and dropped, all around us, the shells their hands had cracked and scraped clean. Shells coated the floor of the valley, bedded in the stiff mud and swimming in the sands as if they had been dropped there a few weeks ago and not a few hundred years ago.

There was no fence, no entrance fee, not even a sign, but here it was, a genuine piece of history. Without the trappings I had come to expect in historical sites, without directions about where to look and what to think, it felt so real and secret, as if our gasps were the first this sand valley had heard in centuries. I could see their dark ghosts, huddled by fires, running to the water, leaning against the shady side of dunes with shellfish, pried open, in their hands. Their history had endured here, tucked back from the beach and not betrayed by signs so that the deep springs could well up and show the careful observer how the world has nearly always been. I was entranced.

I imagined a child, a small girl perhaps, chasing the waves back and forth while her mother and father watch from the side of the dune. They look out past the waves to the dark islands and tell stories about them. They sing songs about their creation and the girl runs up to join them. The sun is low and their bellies full with shellfish gathered along the rocky shore. The father puts his hand on his daughter's head to hold her near him and together they gaze out to the island that white men would call Flinders, the island that would become the little girl's last home before she is buried in its rocky soil.

If only for her sake, I thought. If only because to be forgotten is a fate far worse than death and she should not have to suffer both so cruelly. I felt, like the sucking tug before a wave, the change that was all around me. I saw white sails breach the horizon for the first time. I felt the crunch of leather and brass on these old sands. I heard war cries and musket bursts and crying in the night in ten different languages. The deep river sank back, paved over by generations of ignorance and power-lust. Some truth flowed there, deep and dark and nearly forgotten. I could never pull it back to the surface, but if I could only get close enough, I might dip my hand in and understand.

Thus, I became absorbed in the Aborigines of Tasmania. I felt the power exerted by the group's 40,000–year legacy and wanted to find out where that group was today. Opinions flew fast and tempers often flared when this subject was broached among Tasmanians, so I could be sure there would be no lack of data. Aside from an appreciation of the intricacies of both ancient and modern Tasmanian Aboriginal culture, I learned a great deal about group dynamics in general.

I learned how groups maintain boundaries, how identity is asserted and how membership criteria are formed. All of these seemingly esoteric pieces are instrumental in evaluating the status and the prospects of the Tasmanian Aborigines. What I found was a defiant will to assert identity despite a long-standing public denial of that identity. I found that identity is determined primarily by choice, an alignment of a personal and shared history. I also found a white Tasmania largely inoculated by myth and stereotype, but, contrary to all the accounts I read, there *are* Aborigines in Tasmania. They were not exterminated.

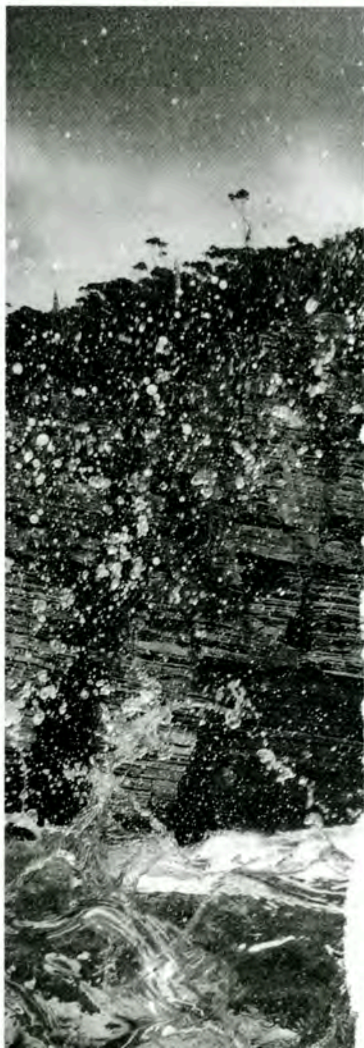
Tasmanian Aborigines are a people with a history in three parts. In pre-colonial times, they were a nomadic, hunter-gatherer people that inhabited the island in small, scattered tribes. After colonization and the decimation of most mainland Aborigines, the Aboriginal women and their white, male captors populated the islands of the Bass Strait and passed on the Aboriginal bloodline and way of life. Today, self-professed Aborigines are everywhere in Tasmania.

Historically, colonial government arbitrarily set the standard for Aboriginality by means of a blood quantum, using

it as a tool for further oppression and racial discrimination. Generations later, the definition was expanded to include self-selection and community recognition, moving to a more liberal view of identity. Threatened by this influx of new members, the Tasmanian Aboriginal Council tightened membership criteria in a bid to consolidate and secure their power in the Aboriginal community. Today, with more people self-identifying and a high incidence of mixed marriages, Aboriginality is starting to include a much wider spectrum of socioeconomic classes.

Tasmanian Aborigines take great pride in the three major cultural traditions that have survived, namely basketweaving, muttonbird hunting and shell necklace-making. These function as badges of membership and as visible distinguishers from the white majority. Aborigines have recently begun to use language as a means of teaching and asserting identity. While present knowledge of the traditional languages is limited, the goal of this project is to substitute native words for English ones, to subtly affect the worldview of the speakers and integrate Aboriginal identity more firmly into their lives. Exercising sovereignty over land rights and human remains forces the white public to recognize the existence of Aborigines. Finally, identity is powerfully stated and broadcast through visual art and poetry in which notable similarities can be found to other indigenous traditions.

Becoming Aboriginal in the state's eyes is a process all its own, with required documentation and a review process. Becoming Aboriginal on the personal level



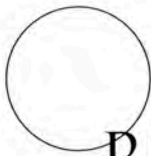
Tasman Peninsula, Tasmania: Last Land Before Antarctica [Katherine Newingham]
From Aleph 8

does not mean that a new person emerges or that a false mask is donned, but rather that a subtle reorganization of priorities occurs to publicly position the individual closer to their heritage. Aboriginals never left Tasmania but their public presence was vehemently discouraged for many generations. Today, while the struggles are numerous, this ancient ethnicity employs cultural tools of assertion to make their identity known and proclaim their unbroken legacy.

—Andrew Maryniuk

From Aleph Volume 6

90 Mile Beach, New Zealand [Ben Michelak] From Aleph 7



Reflections of Resistance III

*Faire Zyew Chwit Pwaw**

Shhh! Listen! Listen, and listen very carefully. As one of the proud daughters of the West Indies, St. Lucia, the Helen of the West, to be exact, I feel it is my duty to let you know my views on a problem that has been plaguing me for quite some time. I have never been one to make the bitter cocoa tea sweet, and I have sweetened enough things in my twenty years. Don't expect me to sweeten this one. I will tell you like it is.

One day, I was giving a prospective student a tour of the campus. His mother, who struck me as a show-off the minute I met her, recognized that I did not have a pure American accent and asked me where I was from. "I'm from St. Lucia," I replied. "Been there, done that!" she exclaimed. I said to myself "*madame si out e only sav*" (lady, if you only knew) and laughed quietly in my heart. I wondered if she knew that there was more to my homeland than Sandal's Resort.

The first question I felt like asking her was whether she had gotten off the cruise ship and done so much as to let the pretty white sand engulf her feet, let alone allow her feet to soak in the sea water after walking on the hot sand, to let out an imaginary ssshhhh sound, almost as if the water were urging her not to share their intimate moment with anyone. I wanted to ask her whether she even knew the name of our capital, whether the word *Castries* sounded familiar to her.

Had we had time for more conversation during the tour, I would have felt obliged to ask her whether she even knew what our currency was. She must have purchased a souvenir of some sort.

You see, tourists enjoy the privileges that we, as natives,

*(Make your eyes cook your peas.)

do not even think of enjoying. I know, you're probably thinking, "Well, it's their money; they ought to get their money's worth." This I am not going to argue with, because I do believe in the saying, "One man sweat, one man eat." However, what I am saying is that as tourists it is important to recognize that you have access to resources that natives in that country do not. Some of the people who provide you with services at the hotels where you stay may never be able to take a vacation like you do because they barely make enough money to buy a pound of sugar to sweeten their cocoa tea. Thank God, most people build their own houses from plywood so they don't have to pay rent. Perhaps their entire paychecks would be going to rent. People who can't afford to buy food in the supermarkets generally have land, where they pick a breadfruit, some coconuts, some green bananas and dig some dasheen and yams to feed their families. But even with that comes a problem. The local fruit venders face stiff competition from foreign investors, particularly those from the United States, who want to sell their processed canned food to islands like St. Lucia. Therefore, the natives are made to believe that the orange juice with all the preservatives is much better than picking a fresh orange from the tree in the backyard and squeezing it to make some juice, or better yet some green mango Cayennes (a special kind of mango). They are made to believe that the chicken grown overnight using hormones is safer than the domestic fowl that you chase down, behead, dunk in hot water, deplume, and then serve to your six-year old for dinner, and after he or she eats it tell them it was their pet chicken, just like my aunt told me after I ate my pig Shutsy.

Do you think that your hard-earned U.S. dollars are helping the islands out when you pay for your all-inclusive hotel? Think twice about that because the majority of the money goes right back to U.S. and European shareholders. These gluttonous, selfish, constipated pigs have no consideration for anyone but themselves. Why am I calling them pigs? Have you ever watched pigs when they eat? They devour everything in sight, dirt and all. They don't care that there's not enough food for everyone. The Prime Ministers of some of these islands are

pigs, too, because they allow these foreign investors to bribe them. When they see a couple of U.S. dollars, they begin to drool all over themselves like "big old babies."

When you walk along the beaches in the islands, have you ever realized that the only other people who walk on the beaches look like you? It's because these beaches have been privatized, thus preventing natives from also enjoying them. You must think that it is for your own protection, so you will be be safe from being hassled, robbed or attacked. But let me ask you, how would you feel if you were not able to walk freely in your own land? How would you feel if you were made to feel like an alien in your own land? I'm not asking you to start a revolution. Neither am I looking upon those who can afford to take vacations with scorn, because I go on vacations, too. All I'm asking is that you *"faire zyew chwit pwaw"* (make your eyes cook your peas). By that I mean: be observant and learn the truth for yourself. Before you tell me, "Been there, done that!" like the prospective student's mother, at least learn that the capital of St. Lucia is Castries and that we have a culture.

—Lervan Johnny

From Aleph 2

La Cienaga, Dominican Republic [Hilda Castillo] From Aleph 4

Verse and Vision IV

Sing of Those Days

Doh stop de music
Let de banjo play
Beat de *tamboo* until it cry (drum)
Give my old bones a chance to dance
one more time to yesterday's tunes
Sing *chantwel* of the days of old (female singer)
Sing of the sweetness...the sweetness of life

When children their parents did obey
when youngsters threw fists
instead of reaching for guns
Sing chantwel, sing it I say
Sing of those days...those days of old

When for a good time all you needed was friends
A good night of *krik krak* (call and response to Creole folk tale)
a good game of mamou poul
right under the Julie mango tree
did the soul just fine
Sing chantwel, sing it again

Sing of those days
oh those beautiful days
when *fiksyon* and bush tea (home made ointment)

put doctors to shame
when walking miles to fetch water
invited conversations and built community

Chantwel, don't you stop singing I say
of the days when there was *lanmou* in marriage (romantic love)
not Irene today and Lucy tomorrow
Not show me the money or kiss me goodbye

Sing, Sing, Sing
Sing that beautiful song
Let me feel it once more
river water kissing my toes
and the cocoa tree's shadow
hand in hand with the light of the *flambeau* (torch)
as the crayfish gets away in the stillness of the night

Chante chantwel; chante...chante (Sing!)
of the taste of roast breadfruit, saltfish and oil
all washed down with some *dlo coco* (coconut water)
Organic to taste, organic to quality

Sing...sing...sing..sing it chantwel...
sing of those days when fair Helen was blessed

Sing not of tomorrow
don't you sing that song
sing of today for we live for today
our young bones

tap tapping to the beat of the dancehall
Kissing each moment for it may be our last

No fears...No worries...
Can't you sing about that?
We live by the sword and we die by the sword

Don't sing that sad tune of the days of old
when the sun was witness
to old backs toiling all day

Chantwel, change that tune
to a song of today
when *liming* and theatres (hanging out)
is our idea of a date
no time for a gyal
who wants to act like a lady
Sometimes it is best when we just keep it moving

Sing chantwel...sing my song...
Sing of creations
creations by man
sing of machines that
better our lives
and put our brains to rest

Sing...Sing...Sing...Chantwel
Sing of those...those days...those days...
those days when bliss caressed the soul

—Lervan Atticot (Johnny)

Elephant Taxis at the Amber Fort in Jaipur, India [Elizabeth Marder]
Riot Police in Lima, Peru [Alysa Austin] From Aleph 8

Andes Mountains in Chilean Patagonia [Alessandra Knight]
Running Towards the Photographer in Barbados [Nancy Borowick] From Aleph 6

Taking a Break in Tiananmen Square, Beijing, China [Bùi Duy Thanh Mai]

Justice Lady, Vietnam [Kelly Biggs] From Aleph 9
Man Trimming Peppers in Incheon City, Korea [Jenna Lohre]

Sadhu, India [Otto Foerster] From Aleph 4

Charles Bridge in Prague, Czech Republic [Andrew Moyer] From Aleph 6
Cao Dai Worshippers, Vietnam [Patrick Allen] From Aleph 4

Street Musicians in El Rastro, Madrid, Spain [Jessica Cardinale] From Aleph 8
San Juan, Argentina [Sophie Ann Price]

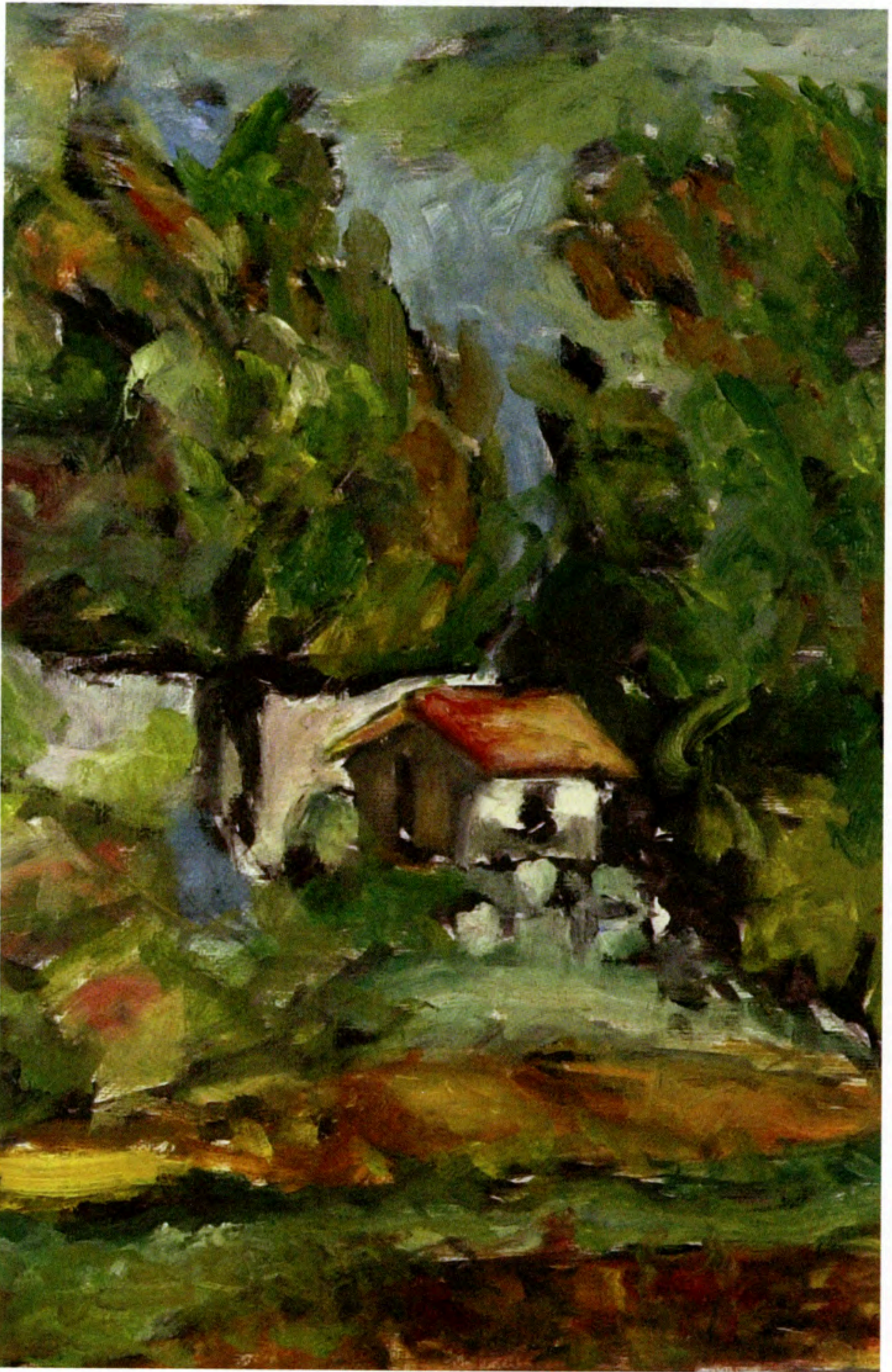
Three Boys at Lake Baikal, Russia [Katrina Havrish] From Aleph 9
Three Trees on Bornholm, Denmark [Ian Barton] From Aleph 8

Bia Hoy and Conversation, Vietnam [Bryan Harris] From Aleph 7
Sunrise Worship at the Golden Temple in Punjab, India [Katy Goodrich] From Aleph 7

Guard Dog on the Dingle Peninsula, Ireland [Sarah Marlow]

Boy with Paper Airplane, India [Tobias Leeger] From Aleph 6
Atomic Beach, Brazil [Jessica Trotter] From Aleph 6

Tannery in Fes, Morocco (opposite) [Madeline Caryl]
Tour Guide in Prague, Czech Republic [Matt Beenan] From Aleph 8

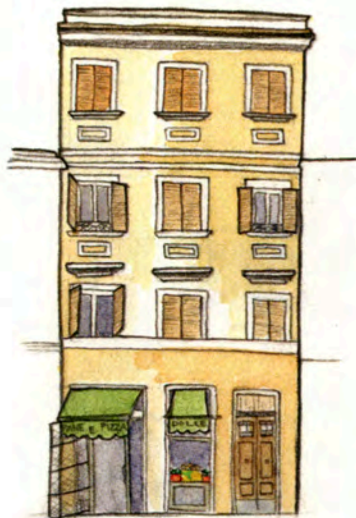


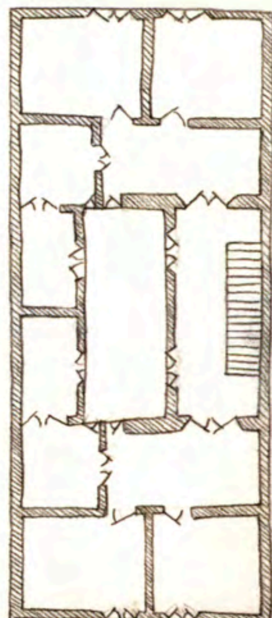
Landscape, 2002: Aix en Provence, France [Karl Cragnolin] From Aleph 2

Grand Mosque at Touba, Senegal [Sylvia Krajniak] from Aleph 1
Apartment in Rome, Italy [Lauren Schwarzenberg]

BORGO PIO 160, ROMA

NATO A ROMA
PER TRE MESI
CON TRE AMICE
SU BORGO PIO,
VINCINO LA
BASILICA DI
SAN PIETRO.





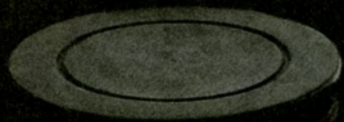
THIRD LEVEL FLOORPLAN OF BORGO PIO 160

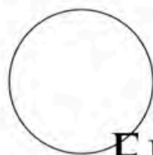
Candid in Bologna, Italy [Camille Berjoan] From Aleph 9
Bullfighter and Bull in Training, Spain [Megan Rechin] From Aleph 9

Graffiti in Rome, Italy [Allison May]
Castel Sant'Angelo in Rome, Italy [Laura Faith Butera]

JOUR•NAL

n. [1] a book of dated entries with news and events of a personal nature [2] a bound space for private writing that invites reflection, honesty and creative risk-taking





From my Journal

Siberia

THE NIGHT BEFORE I LEFT FOR RUSSIA...

I was walking up Washington Street. It was unseasonably cold and I heard a frantic chirping, and turned to find a robin hopping up and down next to a chubby black and white housecat under the yellow light of a street lamp. I followed the cat's intent gaze and spotted a quivering baby robin huddled on the pavement. It hopped away from me, still too young to fly. Meanwhile, the cat was watching...waiting, so I picked the robin up and cradled it in my mittens. The mother, still chirping, flew up to her nest in a tall oak tree, far out of reach. Unable to return the baby bird and certain he would become cat food, I named him Herbert and put him in a cardboard box, where he finally settled down after a few unsuccessful attempts to escape. Because I was leaving for Russia the next day, I left him in his box with a note for my housemate, asking her to look after him until he could fly...

Now I'm on a plane to Siberia, listening to the bings of fasten seatbelt signs and incomprehensible announcements in Russian. Herbert's been on my mind all day. I, too, feel like I have been shaken out of my nest, dropped into a frightening world of darkness, chilly air and lurking housecats. Like Herbert, I'm still testing my wings, but I'm flying now—exploring this vast and diverse planet. I was picked up and cradled by friends and family who guided me to independence. I made my way through the rigors and temptations of college, through the many "interesting differences" of South America, and now I'm off to the other side of the planet to explore the world's largest and deepest lake, the Pearl of Siberia, the great searching blue eye in the center of the Asian continent—Baikal. Come September, I will fly off into my greatest test yet, two years of

Peace Corps service in Mozambique. Each of my adventures prepares me for the next, opens my eyes, strengthens my wings, but is also an amazing gift on its own. Remembering to live in the moment—I am on a plane, flying over the spring ice flows of the Arctic and into the heart of mother Russia, to the great Lake Baikal.

WE ARRIVE IN MOSCOW AND...

despite my jet lag and dimmed awareness, I absorbed some sense of this vast power center, the showcase city of Russia, where everything is designed to be the biggest, the most beautiful, the most expensive...even in times of hardship and famine, huge sums of money were pumped into poorly managed construction projects. The result is a somewhat haphazard city of gilded onion domes and ornate European façades nestled amongst dreary Soviet-era construction. One of the city's signature monuments is the Moscow metro, an underground ballroom of marble, ornamental brass grates, plaster moldings, and elegant light fixtures, overflowing with well-dressed commuters, pressing past each other in the orchestrated daily dance of city life. We clearly did not know the dance, and sloppily bumped through the crowd of stone-faced Russians in their high-heels and suits. The stick-thin and impeccably groomed Moscow women around me may well have walked right off the pages of Vogue. I felt like a slob—a giggling, camera-happy idiot—in other words, an obvious American tourist.

FOR OUR FIRST GLIMPSE OF LAKE BAIKAL...

we drove south along the Angara River from Irkutsk, past wooden dachas (summer cottages), with cobalt blue shutters, through stands of larch and pine and small tilled plots awaiting planting. We listened to our guide Natalie, a Russian with tight black pigtails and a neatly pressed pencil skirt and heels, rattle on in textbook English the entire ride without taking a breath. I'm sure she was telling us something fascinating, but I was distracted by fatigue and the anticipation of finally laying eyes on the object of this journey that had dragged me halfway around the world. Then, all of a sudden, there it was.

The river opened up into a large bay, beyond which loomed strange-looking clouds on the horizon. No...not clouds... distant snow-covered peaks. We escaped the stuffy bus and ranting of our guide into a crisp breeze, cool sunshine and the peaceful sound of water lapping at the shore - water that was so incredibly clear that, looking straight down, it was as if there were no water at all, just air, rippling like a mirage over the rocky bottom. I frantically took photos, trying to capture this moment for eternity...then paused and felt the breeze in my hair.

Lake Baikal...longest, deepest, clearest, 20% of the world's fresh water...magical, invincible, alive...floating through my mind were all the bold claims about this place—a water-filled seam in the earth's crust, spreading ever wider, sinking ever deeper.

WE REACH THE VILLAGE OF THE OLD BELIEVERS...

after bumping along dirt roads through rolling hills and patches of taiga forest. This tiny village is called Bolshoi Kunapi (a Buryat name meaning "big fold in the earth"). We ambled down the dusty streets lined by fences and wooden homes painted in bright green and yellow, with cerulean blue shutters and intricate white trim. Above the village lies a cemetery with gravestones and crosses of the same blue as the shutters, arranged not in rows but in odd clusters, perhaps by family, which may span several generations in this place.

We stepped off the bus to the wailing song of a chorus of old women, young men and children in brilliant costumes. One of the little girls, her hair in braids, stamped out a dance on the dirt road, spinning so that her skirt and hair and ribbons lifted in a circle around her. A little boy in a red shirt and black pants stepped forward next and began a leaping dance, flinging out his arms and legs before tucking into a ball and flinging his limbs outwards again. The singing continued as we were ushered from our tour bus, through a door in the tall, wooden fence and into a green log house with blue shutters.

There, we crammed into a hot kitchen, completely whitewashed down to the massive stone and plaster oven that took up a third of the room. A fire was blazing, heating the

room to an uncomfortable warmth and cooking up small cloud-shaped pancakes that were being dropped on an iron skillet by a woman in a headscarf. The house is an interactive museum to teach visitors about the traditional lifestyle of the Old Believers, who made their way here in the 17th century after exile from Poland and Western Russia.

As we ate the little clouds, with a sweet nutty sauce and tea with milk and sugar, we observed the furnishings of the room. It was the winter sleeping place, where entire families would share a single bed next to the great white oven. In the warmer months they slept elsewhere, understandably, as we were all sweating in there on that bright June day. In the corner was a shelf with placards of saints painted in gold leaf—the "red corner" found in every traditional Russian Orthodox home ("red" derived from the original Old Slavonic word for "beautiful," and having nothing to do with Communism). We were ushered into another room where young girls were displaying their handicraft skills by making hooked rugs and cross-stitching, and at the far end of the room the colorful chorus had again arranged themselves for a concert.

Their music was entrancing, unlike anything I had heard before...melodic in an unsettling, soul-stirring way. It was as if they had learned to sing by mimicking the accordion that accompanied them—a young man held that cacophonous note, that piercing discordance that gives the accordion its eerie sound. He covered one ear so that he could lock onto the elusive note and hold it. The melodies were repetitive and entrancing. They sang upbeat and cheerful songs with dancing, whistles and dialogue, and also mournful, wailing tunes that seemed to be full of sorrow, but instead spoke of pride and devotion to their pioneering home, their traditions, and, of course, the mighty Lake Baikal. All of the women, young and old, wore strings of amber beads around their necks, some as large as small potatoes. The necklaces were heirlooms brought here by their ancestors so many generations ago and were not for sale at any price.

My favorite was the old grandmother and leader of the group, her head wrapped in a bright orange kerchief dangling

with beaded jewels. She had a warm face with the wrinkles of a hard but happy life. As one of the women said, "Life is hard, but summer is beautiful!"

LAKE BAIKAL BECKONED...

so three of us headed down to the sandy beach in the south cove of Shaman Rock to take our first dip into its famously frigid waters. I had butterflies in my stomach as we descended the hill to the little cove. [There were a few other beachgoers lying on the sand—spectators.] We all stripped to our suits and giggled nervously, hopping up and down like runners before a race. Then, a hearty old Russian man yelled from the deck of a nearby boat, *"odin, dva, tri!"* ("one, two, three!"), and we ran in up to our knees and fell backwards, submerging ourselves. The water enveloped me in a heavy blanket of cold too intense for my body to register. It was as if I had sunk to the bowels of the lake, to the depth of the rift, for a split second that felt like eternity...

Then, without any conscious movement, I sprang out of the water and was, again, hopping up and down on the sand. The consensus was that it really wasn't so bad after all, that we felt invigorated, clean...WONDERFUL! So we did it again, but the second time, as if my body were punishing me for repeated abuse, I felt the sharp, crushing cold of the water. My skin hurt; my bones ached; I felt like someone was pressing their knuckles into my temples. Again, I sprang out of the water and warmed my feet on the sand and my face in the sun...this time not eager to jump in again—the lake had won.

THEY SAY...

that if you cup the sacred waters of Baikal in your hands and whisper a wish, it will come true...

that every time you swim in her frigid waters you add a year to your life...

that if you wash your face in her waves, you will someday return.

BOLSHOE GOLOUSTNOE...

is a rural lakeside village where we gather in the tidy yard of a round-faced woman named Faina. She lives there with her husband, Misha, and a son in his late twenties, Zhenya. Faina is one of the kindest women I have ever met—with the features and mannerisms of a Mongolian grandmother, and the patience of a teacher (her profession in the village school). When walking down the road, she will link arms and pull you to her side to chat, never mind that you only speak broken Russian. I sat around one evening with Faina's family plus Ireida, our faithful coordinator from Irkutsk University, and the three Russians leading our volunteer effort, Sveta, Igor and Olga. Faina brought out tea and fresh milk from one of their cows then said "*davayte govorim po-ruski!*" ("Let's speak in Russian!"). Somehow, between my broken Russian, wild hand gestures and occasional translating by Ireida, I communicated my studies, my future plans, and my impressions of their village. When the Russians got talking, I tried to pick out words, then gave up and let the strange sounds of the language wash over me, joining in Faina's contagious laughter over jokes I didn't understand. We chatted and laughed until the light got low.

TODAY WE WORKED...

with the Great Baikal Trail Association (GBTA) building trails for hikers on the Sacred Mountain northwest of Bolshoe Goloustnoe. Hacking away at the rocky ridge with my pick axe and sledge hammer, I felt an increasing unease weighing on my shoulders, draining my enthusiasm. I looked out to the spreading view of the flood plain delta of the Goloustnoe River and wondered what exactly I was doing. I was building a trail, but there was already a permanent, if rugged, trail. I was building a more defined, more accessible trail for tourists, since they say increased tourism will help the local economy.

But says who? Some group of Americans who know what's best for everyone? Some Russian NGO from the city with a grand vision? Did Bolshoe Goloustnoe ask to have a trail hacked into the side of their Sacred Mountain or were they resentful of our destructive presence?

I thought of Olkhon Island and the sacred monuments home to great and powerful spirits, places where only shamans may tread. How would our work be viewed by those whose ancestors would not farm because they felt that plowing hurt the earth? On top of these concerns, I saw us smashing rocks into pebbles, ripping out the roots and grass that hold the earth together, essentially tearing apart all of the natural stabilization of the existing trail. It looked like a recipe for erosion.

When I shared my concerns, I was given many assurances—that the Sacred Mountain was not registered as a protected sacred site, that the work had been approved by the town assembly, that an American-trained expert had directed the trail design...but I still felt uneasy. It's an uncomfortable position, being a foreign volunteer on a project designed and implemented by others, knowing little about its history, the motives behind its founders, how it's viewed by the local community. We just show up and do what we're told, putting our faith in the organization, hoping we're doing good, swallowing our doubts. Who are we helping and who are we hurting? Who wants us there and who doesn't? I'm still not really sure.

WE HAD A LESSON IN SPINNING SHEEP'S WOOL...

into yarn by Faina's grandmother, Dora, an 87-year-old woman with Mongolian features and enormous cheeks. Her swollen hands skillfully worked the wool around a long wooden spool, worn smooth from decades of use. Dora still spins all her yarn by hand and knits socks, gloves and sweaters that keep her grandson and son-in-law warm while they fish. She explained how important it is to have warm clothes like these in Siberia, that we don't need them in America where it is so warm. Kristen explained that we have cold winters, too, and must also bundle up. Dora just shook her head. You wouldn't know her age by the way she was lugging around the bag of wool, leaning over and showing us how to use the spool.

Kristen explained the story of how, during WWII, Dora took over the position of postmaster. She would travel down the lake to Listvyanka in a rowboat to get the mail, and then deliver letters and packages to two other settlements before

Welcoming Committee of Bolshoe Goloustnoe, Russia [Katrina Havrish] From Aleph 9

returning to Bolshoe Goloustnoe. It was an arduous journey that took at least two days, longer in bad weather. Dora is a hard woman with a soft heart, smiling and encouraging our attempts at spinning with many a *"kharashoa!"* ("good!"). After a few of us had tried, Dora said, "You Americans don't work, you just laugh."

WHY DON'T RUSSIANS LIKE DISCUSSING POLITICS...

I asked Ireida, our coordinator, and Nadya, my host mother. They explained that they have had such a dark political history—both women recall the days when they feared the KGB and Russia was isolated from the outside world. Even now those most outspoken are in danger and journalists still mysteriously "disappear." On top of this fear there is custom—politics are not to be talked about, or even thought about. Russians tend to be uninformed politically, preferring to let things play out as they will. Most Russians love Putin and see Medvedev as a feeble figurehead. Ireida openly endorses Putin—"It is not just because he is a handsome man," she said, "he is a strong man, he has strong character." Russians seem comfortable letting a strong authoritarian hand lead their country. There's not much they can do about it anyway—it's not exactly a model of participatory government and civil engagement. Nadya would not comment on Putin, but she feels that there is more freedom in a place like Bolshoe Goloustnoe, far from the watchful eyes of Moscow. She remains optimistic. "We don't have a choice," she explained, "living here we must be optimistic in order to survive."

MARINA WITH THE GOLDEN TEETH...

was our professional cook in the guest house of Nadezhda Nuzhdina. When I walk through the tiny kitchen on my morning trip to the outhouse, she greets me with a flash of a smile and a *"dobroye utra!"* ("good morning!"). The teeth suit her—an entire upper grill of gold, a glamorous glint amidst a land of cows and dowdy flower-print dresses. It's a phenomenon here in the Siberian countryside—men and women with golden

smiles, flashing them as they drive home the sheep, lean on cars, smoke cigarettes, pull weeds behind a picket fence... Perhaps in their life of practicality and necessity, of scraping out an existence in this unforgiving corner of the world [under the shadow of oppressive regimes and dark winters]... perhaps they are expressing a need for glamour—impractical, unnecessary, flashy.

WE DROVE OUT TO THE STEPPE...

north of the village in the low light of evening—a plain of cropped grass on rocky soil, blanketed by purple and yellow wildflowers. The grass stretched out to the lake shore and skirted steep hills draped with dark stands of pine. We unloaded from Misha's pickup and Zhenya's van and stood on the grass, awaiting our surprise. It came in another van—four Buryat *babooshkas* in traditional dress of bright Chinese silk and hats with dangling beads. One of them wore a green robe that complemented her gold teeth, which she flashed every time the *babooshkas* fell into a fit of giggles. They were a cheery bunch, and welcomed us by inviting each guest to drink from a bowl of fresh milk. Then they sang in rusty wailing voices about love—love of family, of lovers, of their land and the sacred sea that formed the faint horizon behind them. They sang in Buryat and in Russian, and when they tired, we all picked up and began dancing in a circle. Faina, Zhenya and the green-robed *babooshka* led the way, animatedly demonstrating hops and stomps and singing all the while. Zhenya then brought out his guitar and joined his parents in singing us Russian folk songs. Like the *babooshkas,* their songs were about love. The words brought tears to Ireida's eyes and, when translated, to ours as well. Standing on the Siberian steppe in the sunset, singing of love while wild horses grazed around us and the horizon of Baikal glowed in the distance...it was hard not to become sentimental.

BACK IN THE STATES...

in peaceful, slow-moving Geneva, I felt quite meditative all day, partly due to the persistent grey sky and drizzle, partly

due to my confused internal clock. I met up for dinner with a few friends who were in town. The talk was of future jobs, what mutual friends are up to, how my latest trip went. I tried to give a brief description that might rekindle the essence of my Siberian adventure—describing the gloomy and oppressive introduction to Irkutsk, the culture shock, and the gradually increasing brightness—in weather, in surroundings, the warming of people's reactions to us, the incredible sense that "it can't possibly get better than this" and then finding that, somehow, it does.

It would take hours, novels, lifetimes to tell it all, but the conversation moves on. I didn't tell them how I wanted to leap off the cliffs of Olkhon Island and fly away, how I wanted to spend a year with the *babooshka* of the Old Believers, listening to all her stories, learning how she gets by, like her ancestors did. I didn't tell them how I'd like to spend another year with Faina, Misha and Zhenya, learning how to spin yarn from Faina's ancient mother and knitting it into sweaters, learning how to fish in the stinging cold, how to skate on the frozen surface of the lake, to sing all the words of traditional Russian and Buryat songs and know what they mean.

I didn't tell them how I want to scuba dive through the depths and along the lake bottom, observing the sponges, gammarids, sculpins, mollusks, golomyanka, nerpas, sturgeon and omul in their native habitat. I didn't tell them how I want to pack up and escape into the Khamar-Daban range, scaling its snowy ridges, traversing one of the last truly wild places on this planet, how I want to learn the ways of a shaman, hear legends passed through generations and splash offerings of sour milk on sacred stones, how I want to sail the lake from one end to the other and back, even if it takes months. I didn't tell them that I want to soak up all of that place and its people, and fill my soul with their energy. It's this longing, this vivid attachment to a place I inhabited only a month that keeps it real and alive in my memory.

—Clancy Brown

From Aleph 9

Local Festival in Japan [Liane Gray]
Spring Blizzard, Mongolia [Julia Gibson] From Aleph 8

Scene from a Hanoi Bridge, Vietnam [Patrick Allen] From Aleph 4

n. [1.] the action of moving across, over or through something [2.] a place where two roads, paths or routes meet [3.] a passage through a border

CROSSINGS I

Four Generations in a Flag Store

Viet Nam is very far from America, both literally and figuratively. This includes the twelve-hour time difference, which leads to me living life in "tomorrow land," as my best friend says. After more than two months in this country, I have reached a mental state in which I am hardly fazed by anything. I live with thin, red worms in my water, the looming threat of cholera on my vegetables, and my room is constantly invaded by mice, hoards of giant cockroaches and their tiny ant comrades, and the occasional rat. To walk down the street is to chance coming within inches of a slaughtered pig on a motorbike, the animal halved and its head stacked on top of its torso. Late night features children playing ball on the sidewalk beside twenty-three lanes of motorbike traffic, while their homeless counterparts beg for money as I surf the Internet and eat my dinner in the café. I have become accustomed to things that, had I only visited the country for a week, would have seemed odd and possibly troubling. However, I have learned the basics of the language, taught English to sixth graders, viewed the beautiful people and landscapes through the lens of my camera, and made myself part of the society (and not just as a tourist and a consumer). I believe that I can make some observations concerning one of my favorite topics—Vietnamese families and their businesses in light of Confucian philosophy. In fact, one of my fondest memories of my time in Viet Nam focuses on this exact topic.

It was a sunny Monday morning and I had just finished teaching my English class at the local secondary school. My fellow teachers walked to the bus stop while I hailed a *xe om* (motorbike taxi) instead. Since it was one of my last full weeks

in Ha Noi, I wanted to finally find the special Vietnamese flags I had been looking for. After donning my helmet and then telling the driver which street, naming my price and haggling for a bit, I was soon racing through Ha Noi. I reached the street, paid the man and walked past a couple of stores until I spotted the telltale colorful merchandise hanging outside.

As I entered the small space, I backed up and added my sneakers to the pile of cheap, plastic sandals that are a staple of the average Vietnamese wardrobe. That is one very important thing I have learned while living here—when in doubt, do what the locals do. The family perked up as they saw me abide by their rules without having to request that I do so. As I tore my eyes away from the array of flags that adorned every available space, I was handed a laminated sheet of paper with pictures of almost every country's national flag. After perusing it under the watchful eye of a woman who must have been about fifty-five years old, I handed it back and announced, much to her and her husband's excitement, that I was not looking to buy an American or British flag, but a Vietnamese one. They showed me the different sizes for the national flag (red background with a large yellow star in the middle) and I picked a very large one for my room back home.

Apparently, their real surprise was yet to come as I turned, walked outside, and picked two more obscure Vietnamese flags for my collection. One of them is a general festival flag and features a square of white in the middle that is surrounded by frames of blue, red, yellow and green, in that order. The flag is edged by red, uneven, flame-like appendages. The five colors represent the natural world (fire, water, earth, etc.) and are prominently featured in Chinese philosophy. I also had been searching for a Vietnamese Buddhist flag. This flag has five vertical stripes—blue, yellow, red, white and orange—and then the same five colors in smaller boxes at the edge of the flag. These are the same five colors of aura that emanated from the body of the Buddha when he attained enlightenment. The blue stripe represents universal compassion, the yellow represents the Middle Path, red for blessings, white for purity and liberation, and orange for wisdom and Buddha's teachings.

The Security of Grandma, Vietnam [Caitlin Seadale] From Aleph 7

Immediately after paying for the flags, a young woman entered the store from the back room. On her hip was a beautiful, chubby toddler with huge brown eyes. I greeted them both in Vietnamese and the little boy even shook my hand. Feeling someone behind me, I turned to find the woman's smiling father offering me a glass of hot tea. I thanked him and pulled up one of those small, well-used red plastic stools that, for me, will always characterize Viet Nam.

As I sat down to drink my tea, I began to talk with the woman's mother, while she began to work on making some flags. Until that point, I was unaware that she actually made the flags herself. She rolled out a huge swath of red fabric and made a chalk line before grabbing a yellow star and lining up one of the star's sides with the chalk line. She then pinned the star into place, folded the unfinished flag into fourths, and grabbed the next piece of red fabric.

Her husband wandered in and out, cleaning the front of the store and sweeping the sidewalk, only pausing at the threshold to either remove his shoes or put them back on. Their daughter toted around her toddler and left for a few minutes to get the little boy some breakfast.

As I began to speak with the woman's mother about my Vietnamese studies, English teaching and travels in Viet Nam, an elderly woman woke from her nap on an old plastic lounge chair in the corner of the room. She barely moved her head and looked at me groggily before asking her daughter a couple of questions. Her daughter immediately halted her work on the flags and dutifully filled her in on my story. I was actually surprised and quite glad to find that my Vietnamese was good that day. The elderly woman looked me over one last time and seemed satisfied. She then went back to sleep.

As I finished my tea, I looked at the bustling business that I had stumbled upon and realized, to my amazement, that I was seated before four generations of this family. There was grandma napping in the corner, her daughter and son-in-law working in the store and their daughter taking care of her young son. I finished my tea and tried to commit the scene to memory, since I was both fascinated and heartened by four generations in a flag store.

On November 15, 2007, Pham Quang Minh spoke during my Vietnamese Life and Culture class. At the end of his talk, entitled "Globalization, the End of the Cold War, and Viet Nam's Renovated Foreign Policy", he noted that "family is the center of Vietnamese society." I had already seen this fact exemplified during my visit to the flag store. Minh also noted that no matter how important you are, you must be loyal to your parents and respect them. This call for respect for elders, he pointed out, is outlined in Confucianism.

One of the main beliefs in Confucianism is *Hsiao*: love within the family, love of parents for their children and of children for their parents. In fact, Confucianism is "primarily an ethical system" that guides how one relates to and respects elders, teachers and other leaders. One of Confucius's most important teachings is the construction of the five basic relationships, which are "those of husband and wife, of parent and child, of elder and younger brother, or generally of elders and youngsters, of Ruler and Minister or subject, and of friend and friend." I was able to see most of these relationships when I visited the flag store.

It has been said that the hundreds of teachings of Confucius can be summed up in one word: *Jen*, or social virtue. Included in *Jen* are values by which a society will maintain "social peace and harmony like benevolence, charity, magnanimity, sincerity, respectfulness, altruism, diligence, loving kindness, and goodness." As a visitor to this store, I saw most of these virtues. The family realized that I could speak some Vietnamese and that I knew something about Vietnamese traditions and culture. This was quite apparent when I removed my sneakers, stood there in my mismatched socks and addressed them in age-appropriate and proper Vietnamese pronouns. Their demeanor visibly changed and I was offered warmer smiles, a bounty of questions spoken entirely in fast and excited Vietnamese, a plastic stool and some piping hot tea. I drank the tea slowly so as to stall and speak to them and observe their familial relations for a longer period of time.

While observing the store full of colorful flags, I noticed something I had overlooked. When I first arrived in Viet Nam, I was constantly noticing the small red and gold altars in businesses. They are usually adorned with fruit, flowers, pictures of family members and thin, red sticks of incense that let off small swirls of pleasant-smelling smoke. I have seen an occasional Buddha statue as well. As Pham Quang Minh remarked at the end of his lecture, these altars to the cult of the ancestors are refilled on the first and the fifteenth days in the lunar calendar. The altar in the flag store was between two long tables over which flags were draped. In actuality, this altar signified that the flag store was home to *more* than four generations of this family.

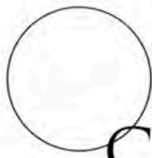
After getting used to seeing them in almost every store, my experience in the flag store and the comment by Pham Quang Minh has rekindled my interest in the ancestral altars. There are very simple reasons for the existence of these altars—veneration and respect. Confucian ethical philosophy stresses the need for harmonious, respectful and obedient relationships between older and younger family members. The ancestral altars are a way to continue this harmonious relationship after the elder's death. In Confucianism, however, "death does not mean the annihilation of man (as the spirit is thought to survive the body)." Followers also believe that "upon death the 'spirit' wanders in space as in exile. Filial duty requires that it be brought back to the family altar and worshipped."

This sheds new light on my encounter with the flag store family, as merely counting the presence of four generations was short-sighted on my part. As the revered ancestral altar illustrated, there is a tradition of reverence, respect, and harmony inherent in this Vietnamese family. More than four generations are being honored in this small space.

—Caitlin Seadale

From Aleph 7

Children Playing Hopscotch at an Islamic Center in Malmö, Sweden [Lela Rosen] From Aleph 7



CROSSINGS II

Sport: The Common Denominator

The past year has been one to remember. I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to do real anthropological field work in Barbados and Tasmania, Australia. In Tasmania, I did a field program where I designed my own research project around an internship. In Barbados, I was awarded a Summer Research Fellowship to study tourism and its impact on local culture for an updated edition of my professor's book. I could write at great length about how each of these experiences has shaped me and opened my eyes to a bigger and more exciting world than I had ever been exposed to. I could tell you about how my host families took me in, loved me, and showed me a truly authentic Bajan and Tasmanian experience. I could tell you about the lifelong friends and the global connections I now have. However, I don't want to make you too jealous.

Instead, I want to talk about sport, the real common denominator between my two very different, but equally wonderful, experiences. I'm an athlete and always have been. I play soccer and run track. Athletics is a part of who I am, and I'm a big sports fan, but I never anticipated how influential sport would be in immersing myself abroad. Whether through competition or conversation, I found that sport was my way in; it gave me street credibility. It was a way to connect with other people, even when I felt like we had nothing else in common. Sport is a global form of communication and has the power to break language barriers. To highlight this, I am going to share a few of my unique experiences with sport in Tasmania and Barbados.

In Tasmania, I interned with an organization called Reclink. Reclink, in partnership with numerous local member organizations, puts on recreational activities for various disadvantaged segments of society (i.e. homeless people,

immigrants, inmates, mentally-challenged people, etc). The purpose of these programs is to give participants the opportunity to engage in sports, where they can work with other people and build the confidence and skills to better integrate into mainstream society. The activities provide people something to look forward to when they feel like they have nothing else. While reaping the health benefits, people learn to work together and help one another, something I saw time and time again at different activities I attended.

My first Reclink activity was a beach soccer game for the members of the Migrant Resource Center. I remember being nervous for the participants to arrive—worried about how smoothly things would go, if they would listen to me, if I would remember their names, if they would have fun. When they arrived, they looked just as apprehensive as I felt. I couldn't understand their names, I wasn't sure where they were from, they weren't dressed in athletic clothes, and they weren't very responsive when I was explaining the rules. It felt awkward. After I made teams and threw the ball out to play, my anxieties disappeared. They just played. They ran around, they laughed, they cheered, and everyone was included. They didn't know each other before they arrived, but by the end of the day, they were teammates and friends. It was beautiful. Because of their different origins, they didn't speak the same language. But they played soccer together and that's all they needed. That's all I needed to connect with them. At every other Reclink activity I attended, I saw similar results. Unlikely groups of people participated in activities and connected through sport. It didn't matter why they were there or what challenges they faced—and it gave me the opportunity to connect with them. I may not be from the same country, but I could play the same game.

Another key aspect of my Tasmanian experience was playing on a local Gaelic football team. Gaelic football is a sport that I had never played before and I had only seen it on Youtube the day before my first practice. I didn't know any of the local players, but I thought I'd join because it would

give me the opportunity to meet new people and to compete in a sport. The first day I played, no one knew me and no one really passed me the ball. It's an awkward sport and I wasn't very good at first. The next practice, something clicked and I was good. My soccer skills kicked in and I was a real presence. People noticed me and their respect for me increased. We spent the next few weeks training for a major tournament in Melbourne, which I was lucky enough to attend. Our club's women's and men's teams didn't win any games. But we were all together, 20 of us, in Melbourne. What was there to complain about? In true Gaelic spirit, we went out together, laughed together, and I made real friends.

After the tournament, the Gaelic football season was over, but I still had a few precious weeks with my new friends. I ended up spending almost every day with them. They were the most welcoming friends I could have asked for, and were kind enough to welcome the other Americans from my program into their lives. They hosted a Superbowl party for us (a *Gaelic* football team, watching the *American* Superbowl, in *Tasmania*: talk about a cross-cultural sports experience!), they hosted a going-away party for us, and they came out with us every weekend. I was invited to the small, intimate wedding of the president of the club. And I was invited to an engagement party for another one of the players. I have never been adopted by a group of people so quickly. Although I had never played before, Gaelic football was the "perfect in." It was the initial glue that bonded us together and sustained our friendship. I am still in contact with the friends that I've made from the team and I can proudly say that they are my lifelong friends.

My experience in Barbados was a bit different. I had recently had surgery and was unable to engage in much physical activity. However, I still found sport to be my gateway into a new community and new family. Upon arrival, we were in the midst of the NBA championship between the Celtics and the Lakers. The first few nights in my new home were spent around the television with my host mom, host brother, and his girlfriend yelling at the TV, and at Kobe Bryant in particular.

My host brother had decided to be a Lakers fan, but through the playful bickering, we bonded.

Soon, to my delight, the World Cup began. Barbados doesn't have a national team, but they celebrate like they do. From the beginning until the end of the tournament, there was a constant buzz (literally, I could hear the unmistakable drone of the *vuvuzelas* coming from every television set as I walked down the street of my village) about who was going to win, who scored the prettiest goals, and the biggest upsets. Even in a culture that doesn't quite appreciate athletic women, being able to talk about "football" was my in. When I met someone new, I would ask them what team they support. When conversations lagged, I would talk about the wildly popular Brazilian team. The country came alive during the World Cup, and I was right there in the midst of it. It was the perfect way for me to engage with people given the fact that I couldn't play myself.

Sport is a global language. I cannot overemphasize the role that it played in my experiences and how advantageous it was for me to be an athlete and to talk about sports. Through conversation or competition, sports can serve as the basis for relationships, and from there, one can develop lasting friendships. Sport has the power to bring people together in ways that verbal communication often cannot and my experiences abroad would not have been the same without it.

—Pearl Jurist-Schoen

Pick-up Soccer in the Old City of Jerusalem, Israel [Andrew Mahoney]
Hockey Fans, Yaroslavl, Russia [Thomas Luly]

Crossings III

Russian Thanksgiving

So far, Russia has been a mixture of both the unexpected and the expected. I spent the summer worrying about adjusting to life in such a different culture but I was surprised to discover that I love it here. The Russian people I have met thus far have been welcoming and kind in a way that is almost staggering. Of course, living in Russia has its ups and downs, like when our group organized a Thanksgiving dinner for our host families and tutors.

In the spirit of American-style potlucks, each of us was supposed to make a dish to share. My friend and I volunteered to make pumpkin pie, thinking that maybe with teamwork this could actually be achieved. Ha! It turns out that finding canned pumpkin in Russia is not possible. True, we could have done the whole thing from scratch but, to be honest, we just didn't have enough time with homework and finals coming up.

So we gave up on that and decided to give pecan pie a shot. However, pecans also do not exist in Russia. Or, at least, they're not easy to find. In the second grocery store we went to, there were walnuts, almonds, pistachios, even Brazil nuts! But no pecans in sight. We even ventured to ask one of the women working at the store but she said she didn't even know what pecans were. Granted, we may have been pronouncing the word for pecan wrong. These things happen.

Anyway, we gave up on that and began considering apple pie but then realized that there are probably no pre-made pie crusts in Russia. Anyone else noticing a pattern here? In the end we just decided to make chocolate chip cookies.

When we brought our new idea to our program director, Anya, we got a very positive response. Upon seeing the recipe in my hands, she gave a little gasp of joy and clapped her

hands together. She explained that when she studied abroad in America, chocolate chip cookies were her favorite food.

So we were good to go and just in time, as we needed to bake the cookies that night for the dinner the next day. As we sat through our last class, I made a checklist of things we needed for the cookies: flour, sugar, butter, eggs, brown sugar, cinnamon, vanilla extract (this got a little red star for being a *potential difficulty*), and chocolate chips. Just as our class was coming to an end, Anya came in, looked directly at me and said "Melissa, do you know how to make cranberry sauce?"

"No," I told her. "But isn't someone else already doing the cranberry sauce?"

"Well, yes, but they decided to make stuffing instead and now no one is making cranberry sauce."

This is where I made a classic Melissa split-second decision, fueled by my loyalty to cranberries.

"You know what? Sure, I can try making the cranberry sauce! I'll figure it out!" I could feel the stare of my baking partner burning into the back of my head as we walked out of the classroom.

"Really, Melissa. Cranberry sauce! I don't even like cranberries!"

I counted to ten in my head in an effort not to faint at this blasphemy (I really like cranberries) and said "It'll be fine! We can do both."

I found recipes for the cookies and the cranberry sauce on the computer in Anya's office and got her recommendations on where to find more difficult items...like cranberries.

Anya's idea was to look in the "Центральный рынок" (central market) which is about a ten-minute walk from school. So my friend and I headed over there.

We forgot to factor in the weather. Russia had just gone into what I call "Narnia Endless Winter Mode" and it was, more or less, a blizzard outside. Although I'm pretty used to this kind of snow, my friend is from Tennessee. "I can't see

anything! I can't lift my head! The snow gets in my eyes!" He was a little out of sorts.

Although his distress was amusing, I had to agree. It was *really snowing*. After a brief stop by the house of one of our program mates who was rumored to have vanilla extract in his possession (he did), we continued to trudge to the market.

Upon arriving and winding our way through the vendors to get to the produce area, I began to stride with purpose and ended up walking straight past the fruit. Thankfully, my friend is used to my absent-minded behavior and called me back. The fruit vendor was looking at us expectantly as I asked "У вас есть клюкви?" (Do you have cranberries?).

At this point, as often happens during my interactions with Russians, the conversation fell into deep confusion.

"Что вам надо? Что?" (What do you need? What?)

Now, I began to repeat the word for cranberries, changing the inflection in every possible way in the hope the vendor would finally understand. My friend also began to assist, repeating the word for cranberries right along with me like a champ and saying the Russian word for red as well. Finally, the woman seemed to have a realization and asked us if we were looking for a small, red fruit.

Relieved to have finally conveyed our meaning through to her, I said "Да! Можно килограм, пожалуйста?" (Yes! May I have a kilogram, please?)

After I paid, she left to go retrieve our purchase and a few minutes later returned to us, proudly holding out a bag of the promised fruit. I looked into the bag only to discover, to my utter dismay, that it did not contain a kilogram of cranberries but a kilogram of strawberries.

I should explain here that the Russian words for these two fruits are similar. *Klukvi* is the word for cranberries and *Klubniki* is the word for strawberries. So you can understand how these two words could cause some trouble for an unwitting foreigner who doesn't have the best Russian pronunciation...

Although a part of me wanted to laugh hysterically at this situation, I pulled myself together and told the woman that no, I needed CRANBERRIES, not strawberries. After further repetition of the Russian word for cranberries, a crowd of the fruit vendors began to form around us. A manager made his way over to see what the problem was. Finally, when I explained what we needed, he understood.

"Клюкви? У нас нету сейчас!" (Cranberries? We don't have any of those right now!)

This was, of course, disappointing, but at this point in the conversation, I just wanted to escape from the confusing mass of Russian being spoken around me. However, the manager asked why I wanted them and I explained that I wanted to make a sauce out of them, which he seemed to be skeptical of. I think the whole idea was rather odd to them. I started to apologize for the confusion, asking for my money back.

The woman who sold us the strawberries began to shake her head and said "No, no! You don't want those cranberries! These strawberries are so sweet and delicious! You should buy these instead. They'll make a better sauce than cranberries!"

"No, I need cranberries, not strawberries! I'm sorry," I apologized as the manager handed me my money.

"Wait!" called another woman. "I can grow cranberries for you at home, come home with me and I will give you some!"

This offer was generous, but strange. We politely declined and hurried out of the fruit market before someone tried to make us buy a kilogram of strawberries again. We looked at each other and started to laugh. These were the moments we had come for—the confusion, the bizarreness, the awkward interactions. It's a strange thing to love, I know, but it really made life so interesting.

All the Russians around us were giving us odd looks because it's rather unusual for people to laugh so loudly in public. They have a saying: "Смех без причины—признак дурачины" which translates to something like "Laughter without reason is a sign of idiocy." So we kept moving and tried to calm down

a little. Blending in is key for foreigners in Russia and although I never felt particularly unsafe there, I was always careful.

In the end, we went to find our cookie ingredients at a nearby grocery store and I actually found frozen cranberries there. Although the cranberry sauce came out differently than expected (it was more liquid than sauce), I was just proud to have found the cranberries at all.

The next day, my *babushka* and I arrived at the party carrying the cookies and sauce. I looked around at the spread of food, some Russian and some American. It was one of the most memorable Thanksgiving dinners I've ever had, mainly because of the melding of cultures. We went around the table, explaining the meaning of Thanksgiving and then saying what we were all thankful for.

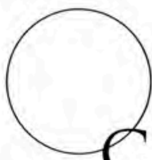
Although I gave a simple answer about what I was grateful for (food, friends, family), the truth is that I was grateful for my entire semester in Russia. I was thankful for my host family, coordinator, teachers, and new friends, both Russian and American. I was thankful for the Russian people who were so patient and put up with my nervous, incomprehensible Russian. I was thankful for the "different" food I got to eat all the time (sometimes without realizing it until after the fact, like the pig fat at my host father's birthday party). I was thankful for the cities we visited, the overnight trains that were impossible to sleep in, and the way Russian *babushkas* could always tell when we were lost and needed help. I was thankful for the silence of Russians on public transportation, the thick layer of ice covering every sidewalk, the onion dome tops of Russian Orthodox churches...

Studying abroad helped me understand that one can find a home in more than one place, more than one country. Russia became a second home for me and I know that when I get back to the US, I'll miss it. However, study abroad has also helped me understand how much I love living in the US as well.

It's a strange feeling to want to be in two places at the same time.

—Melissa Warner

Red Square at Night in Moscow, Russia [Elizabeth Guzzetti] From Aleph 8
Orthodox Priest Blessing Family Car in Kazan, Russia [Melissa Warner]



Crossings IV

Now and Then

"Why did the chicken cross the road?" Almost every American child, by the time they reach kindergarten, can confidently answer: "To get to the other side!" This riddle hasn't crossed my mind in years, but as I whizzed along a dusty Vietnamese road on a rickety motorbike one Sunday last November, it suddenly flashed through my consciousness: we were about to hit a chicken!

Swerving to avoid the kill, my friend Hien just laughed at my gasp of alarm. Never before in my Chicken McNugget world had I imagined places where chickens actually do cross roads to get to the other side!

But as I sat down to lunch with the four members of Hien's family on the bed that served as their kitchen table, the reality was laid right before my very eyes: in honor of me, their foreign guest, the Nguyen family had killed their prized chicken! Feathers and other remnants of the kill could be seen outside, and the tough meat, skin, and bones stared up at me in carefully prepared pieces. My stomach churning, I looked into the face of Hien's kind, eager-to-please mother, flashed a smile, and dug in.

"*Rat ngon*," I said, rubbing my stomach and feebly trying to convey that I found this special feast to be very, very tasty. I hope that my theatrics counteracted the miniscule amount of food I consumed, and the involuntary expressions that crossed my face as I ate it. Whether they bought my act or not, it seemed that the Nguyens found me to be quite entertaining. "Can you believe this crazy American?" they seemed to be chattering as they watched me fumble with my chopsticks and attempt to cram my inflexible body into a cross-legged-position on the bed with the rest of them. I tried to grin and ignore the incomprehensible words that swirled around me, the uncomfortable tingling sensation

of my limbs falling asleep, and the chicken that was churning around in my stomach. "What on earth am I *doing* here?" I said to myself.

Well, I was *doing* diversity, adventure and self-discovery. I went to Vietnam looking for new experiences—and I certainly found them. I encountered poverty that wrung my heart to the core, I continually saw my life flashing before my eyes as I traveled by motorbike, and I experienced homesickness on a previously unfathomable level. I acquired a number of unidentifiable red bumps on my skin, I peed in places that most Americans wouldn't classify as bathrooms, and I learned that the only way of crossing the street was to walk directly into a line of streaming traffic and not stop, trusting that the motorists would go around you. Overwhelmed and frightened though I often was, I was determined to make something of my three months in this country.

In this adventurous spirit, I set out a month ago with the goal of independently exploring the city of Hanoi. Rising with the sun and smog one Saturday morning, I boarded bus 24. Lurching through the city, packed among sweaty Vietnamese bodies, I was quite eager to get off the bus when we reached the stop for the Vietnam Museum of Ethnography.

Bursting out of the bus doors, I looked around to find... a street that looked exactly like every other street in Hanoi. There were no museum-esque buildings in sight, no English-speaking street vendors, no nice cafés to which I could retreat and escape the staring eyes and pointing fingers. Not knowing what to do, I just stood on the street corner, turning my map around and around in an attempt to project a sense of knowledge and control I didn't feel. Crying inside, I couldn't help but think about the paved sidewalks, organized roadways, smooth car rides, and familiar destinations that would have characterized my travels back at home. Here I was just utterly alone, so far from everything and everyone that I had always known, in a place that no one from home could ever possibly imagine.

And then, in the midst of my street-side pity party, along came Hien, a girl who would come to epitomize the generosity of the Vietnamese people. My friendship with Hien completely justified my decision to come to this far-away land.

"Are you lost?" she asked as she pulled over on her rickety bicycle.

"You speak English!" I had just been handed a winning lottery ticket. Not only did Hien understand and know where the museum was, but she offered to pedal me there herself if I'd climb on the back of her bicycle.

Now, I shouldn't get too romantic about all this—the metal bars of her creaking bicycle "passenger seat" provided the single most uncomfortable traveling experience of my entire life. It is no easy feat to suspend one's feet in the air while one's butt is crushing into the metal rods of a "seat." It even made the motorbike taxis look attractive. Eventually, though, we made it, and Hien accepted my offer to buy her an admission ticket. As we toured the museum, we talked and shared stories, experiences, and some very intimate details of our lives. Divulging everything from boyfriend stories to family secrets, our day continued as we went from the museum to Hien's "flat" (once again, riding that damn bicycle!). This small, dingy room, though quite nice by Vietnamese college-student standards, would make an American college dorm room look like a luxury suite in comparison. After talking more and meeting her friends and neighbors, we exchanged home and e-mail addresses, and Hien put me back on the bus with explicit directions to my dorm, promising to contact me soon and take me to visit her home village.

Hien made good on that promise—and that's how I found myself sitting on her family's mattress-less bed being served a feast of freshly-killed chicken. This was a visit to remember—for Hien's family and village, as well as for myself. What I wasn't prepared for, as Hien and I took the long bus and motorbike trip from urban Hanoi to her rural home village, was that Hien's village was a military base, and her parents

were Vietnamese soldiers. I think that I was the first non-enemy American that many of these people had ever met, and they greeted me with remarkable warmth. Except a few misspelled signs forbidding entrance into "No Stress Passing" zones (minor miscommunications across the language barrier were a source of endless amusement throughout the semester), the village was an incredibly friendly and welcoming place. The main comment everyone seemed to have was, "American, huh? You rich, we poor."

To this I would feebly reply, "Oh no, you're not poor!" This was a ridiculous comment to make in the face of such blatant economic disparity; these people were indeed very poor. Being in the military is the primary occupation for those who have little money and no other employment options, and the village reflected this lower-class status. While Hien's family wasn't destitute, I was overcome when I saw the crumbling concrete two-room shack that was her home. "All of this family's material belongings could fit into my bedroom at home," I thought. But sparse though it was, the Nguyens took great pride in their home: the traditional Vietnamese ancestor altar was prominently displayed, and more contemporary decorations like her brother's Harry Potter poster hung proudly on the walls.

And there was love in this house. As I was welcomed into this family circle, I could feel the love among its members that I had so dearly missed in the months that I'd been away from my home. I felt it emanating most strongly from Hien's mother as she prepared the feast, chatted away at me, grasped my arm. While comforted by this familiar warmth, I was also struck by something about this family's love that differed from my own: their love had a quality of determined fortitude that my own family had never been forced to develop. Theirs was a strong, courageous, resilient love that had survived troubled times and would sustain them through an uncertain future.

Hien had been accepted to university in Hanoi and was living in a city that was foreign to her parents; as people from the countryside, they knew very little of urban life. A week

after my visit, Hien's nineteen-year-old brother would leave for Taiwan to work in a factory, where he would earn money to send home. The futures of both children were insecure and held many frightening possibilities.

The roots of this resilient love, I discovered, sprang from the difficult lives that Hien's parents had led, experiences that I can't even imagine living through. They had both fought in the war, lost their loved ones, and survived the years of extreme economic hardship that followed. As the day progressed, Hien translated her mother's story for me. When Hien's mother was four years old, she was out playing in the field when an American bomb hit her home, killing her parents and all but one of her siblings. She was too young to remember her parents, but she will never forget the day that they died. "A horrible, horrible day," she shook her head and cried, softly weeping for the family she never knew, and the orphaned, war-torn years that followed their deaths. "War is a terrible, terrible thing."

"I can't even imagine a life of such heartache and hardship," I thought, amazed that this woman had welcomed me so enthusiastically and warmly into her home. I have never met a more vehement critic of President Bush (some communication breaks through the barriers of language!), but she didn't carry this animosity over to include me. I was relieved by her ability to recognize me for the empathetic, slightly homesick girl that I was, resisting the prejudicial urges that characterize so many cross-cultural encounters.

We were reaching out and embracing diversity in a monumental way that day. While stomaching that chicken was a difficult task for me, I'm sure that it was even more of a leap for Hien's mother to invite this American girl into her home. And yet, for an experience so ideologically grand, it was really quite simple. It was eating chicken and drinking tea and walking through rice paddies. It was glimpsing into another world and finding threads of common humanity. It was a moment in time when the events that happened back "then" became secondary to the connections that we were forming "now."

As the day wore on, it came time for the customary Vietnamese afternoon nap. I never imagined that I would feel comfortable enough to fall asleep beside Hien on the hard mattress-less bed upon which we had just eaten lunch. But surprisingly, I entered a restful slumber, peacefully dozing off amidst the sounds of her father watching soccer on TV, her mother chatting with the neighbors, the birds chirping and the chickens clucking outside. As I gradually awoke, I lay still and just stared at the gray concrete wall, trying to take in the fact that real people live their lives like this, and that I was actually there sharing that life with them at that moment.

That was quite a while ago now. I have long since returned to my normal, comfortable, familiar life—a place where chickens reside in pens and KFC take-out containers. When I think back on my adventures with Hien, the memories of "then" cast a fresh perspective on my trivial concerns of "now." Having been in a place that is so far removed from the reality that I call "life," I can better appreciate how my joys, concerns, dreams, routines and problems are not the whole world. The life I live is not the only reality.

Somewhere out there is a little village where people have never heard of computer viruses or fifteen-page paper assignments or scheduling meetings or counting calories. Somewhere out there, people are recovering from wars and sending their children off to foreign sweatshops. Somewhere out there, people are trusting in love to sustain them through the tumultuous times. Somewhere out there, chickens are crossing roads, just to get to the other side.

—Carolyn Smith

From Aleph 5

Crossings V

Finding Home

There I stood at the crossroads of dust and dustier. I stared at the sign once more, "Garage." Here we would find a car to take us into town, where we could find a bus back to Saint-Louis. I stood helplessly next to my Mauritanian companion Beccro, giving him desperate looks as a stampede of cows came towards us. By now, the idea of a stampede ending this nightmare of a journey seemed strangely appealing. I looked up at the sky for answers but the sun was only a reminder of my current state of frustration as it blistered my face like a cast iron grill. I went and sat under the only tree nearby, but the shade did little to calm my anger.

I had been living in Senegal for a few months when Beccro invited me to his home in Mauritania. The trip had proven to be full of culture clash and confusion. I had made my best efforts to integrate, but being 20 years old with no marriage prospects, I remained a puzzlement. Yesterday he had pulled me aside to explain that his mother was sick and that he had to return with her to Senegal for treatment. Our plans to travel on to Mali were put on hold.

Our travels began early in the morning. I was under the impression it was a simple car ride across the border, but I soon learned that this would not be the case. After hours of stumbling around in the market wasting time, I was quickly herded onto the back of a truck filled with bags of grain and water. Beccro was sitting across from me but had disappeared once again, this time into the market to find his mother. So there I sat, alone on the back of a stranger's truck, all the while horrified it would pull away with only me on the back...and it almost did. Luckily, mother was found and we continued on our way.

After the deliveries were made, we were left at the side of a river. I was not told where we were, only to get into the *pirogue* to cross the river. We arrived at a village, where the cattle easily outnumbered the people, and were told our best prospect was a bus that passed by the edge of town. There I sat, confused, scared and angry. Beccro and his mother discussed plans in their native Pulaar while I sat reminiscing about my own home, in my own language.

I ached to be home, to be in Saint-Louis, Senegal, wandering through the back-alley markets looking for vegetables to make dinner, or perhaps a few yards of fabric, all the while the festive Toubab resonating in my ears. I thought about the girls I taught who giggled at the way I spoke, the street marriage proposals, Wolof language class, bottled water showers, all those mundane activities that had stolen into my life. Saint-Louis was the place I had taken to calling home. Everything that had initially irritated me had become the pieces that defined a typical day. Through my sweat, sunburn and sheer exhaustion, I smiled and told myself if I had made it this far, I could make it home.

The sun had started to set when the bus came by taking us to the next town. Here we took a horse cart to a bus going in our direction. I happily boarded and took a seat. As the bus pulled away, I realized Beccro had stayed behind to help his mother. This little tidbit had gotten lost in our broken communication. I was alone for the last leg of the journey.

Just before midnight I arrived in a town, but it was not Saint-Louis. As I was getting off the bus I felt a rip in the side of my dress. My zipper had broken. A man helped me find another bus going toward Saint-Louis, and, after informing him I was married, he left me to fend for myself.

Alone.

I sat and waited as I choked back tears of helplessness. I saw a girl sitting across from me and I asked, in the best French I could muster, where we were and where the bus was going. I explained I was alone, and she looked me straight in the eye

and said, “In Senegal, no one is alone.” She gave me a safety pin for my dress. My dignity restored, she took my hand and guided me to a different bus. This simple act of kindness touched my heart. This girl restored my faith; she is my symbol of goodness. Her kindness is unmatched by anything I have ever experienced.

Finally, around 2:30 in the morning, I arrived back at the university. There I stood, at the door of happiness, at my home—home in Saint-Louis, Senegal.

—Laura Martin

From Aleph 8

Boy riding train across the Öresund Bridge, Øresundsbroen, Denmark [Nicolas Azel]

CROSSINGS VI

Sole Searching

While working in Indonesia as an English teacher I settled into something of a rut, no longer challenging myself and finding little tranquility in the chaotic port city of Makassar. In a quest to find peace and inspiration, I sojourned to Masjid Raya, the city's oldest mosque. Prior to living in Indonesia I would never have imagined going to a mosque, especially on my own. I felt that as a white, non-Muslim woman who spoke two words of Arabic and a few more in Indonesian, I was either asking for trouble, or giving it to someone else.

But I had to go. In the frenzied sprawl that is Makassar, the aesthetic order and tranquility of Masjid Raya draws you in, out of both curiosity and reverence. On one of the busiest streets in the city, the mosque is an unexpected sight—a conglomeration of off-white circular pillars surrounding a massive domed oval structure. The mosque rises from the ground in a way that is, well, quite heavenly. Its large open-air archways welcome you on all sides, so the entire structure breathes. This ventilation system is obviously a necessity of equatorial practicality, but spiritually speaking, the idea that a place of worship has no physical doors is a refreshing alternative to the heavy, wooden cathedral entryways I am accustomed to.

Welcoming appearances aside, I was still hesitant to enter. After all, I am a guest in this country—is it discourteous to invite myself into its most holy sanctuary?

Reflecting on the reasons I decided to come to Indonesia, I remembered that fear is largely rooted in misunderstanding, and that misunderstandings surrounding matters of faith are most difficult to surmount. As an outsider, it's difficult to comprehend a religion organized by a different language, a non-Latin alphabet and a myriad of cultures, which some westerners judge as being synonymous with terror and hate.

Masjid Raya, Makassar, Indonesia [Jane Erickson] From Aleph 8

I took a deep breath, draped my shawl around my head, left my sandals at the base of a pillar and attempted to slip inside quietly. The warmth of the granite floor on my bare feet was soothing as I made my way up the dauntingly grandiose steps, but before I had made it halfway to the main entrance, two men rushed to my side. For a moment I didn't know if I'd be welcomed or turned away, but they kindly led me to the main area of prayer.

During my time in Indonesia I have visited many neighborhood mosques and places of worship, but none came close to Masjid Raya. As with all mosques, no decorative iconography adorned the temple walls—only scripture from the Koran engraved in flowing Arabic calligraphy. Rows and rows of reflective granite tiled the floor, which mirrored everything in sight as the light spilled in from the archways.

Ensconced in silence, I took a prayer rug and laid it behind the smattering of kneeling men. The only sounds I could hear from inside the mosque were soft patterings of bare feet taking their places to pray, and I quickly drifted into the slow pulse of all that was around me. Minutes (or hours) later, I was roused by the call to prayer and quickly gathered myself to leave as the three o'clock devotions approached. But as I neared the place where I had left my sandals, I quickly saw they were

no longer there. After discreetly circling the vicinity several times and eliciting questioning glances from the gathering crowd, I remained shoeless and grew increasingly apprehensive as the mosque began to fill—a friend had informed me that it was impolite to visit the mosque during prayers.

In my state of obvious panic, the same men who welcomed me approached and inquired as to why I was so flustered. I explained the situation and they began to help me look for my sandals. "It is imperative she finds her shoes! We must find her shoes," they exclaimed in Indonesian. As three o'clock grew nearer it became more apparent that it was time to pray. The men began picking up pairs of other women's shoes, trying to pawn them off on me. After what seemed like twenty minutes of politely declining to steal in a mosque, one of the Masjid Raya Imams—Islamic religious elders or teachers—walked by and asked what the big fuss was about. He had put my sandals under the box, right over there, to keep them safe. "Isn't that where you would have put them?" he asked.

We all shared a laugh—mine a bit more tense than the rest. After many bows of thanks with my hands clasped in front of me, I turned to go. The Imam walked me to the street and bid me farewell with many good wishes and an invitation to return. So now when I visit the mosque I am known as *Ibu Sepatu*, or "the shoe lady." My circle of friends grows larger with each visit, but it always includes the men who helped me that first day. It is the most unlikely group of friends I have made while living here, but also the most rewarding. And while I suspect they secretly refer to me as "the crazy white lady who lost her shoes," I know the title is accompanied with a smile.

But an endearing nickname was not the only outcome of this uncomfortable experience; I also realized that differences and misunderstanding are not something to be feared. Misperception tricks us into thinking the surrounding world is filled with locked doors. But through experiences that help us cast aside such misperceptions, we learn that life—much like the Masjid Raya—has no locked doors at all.

—Jane Erickson

From Aleph 8

Pirogues in Saint-Louis, Senegal [Christa Levesque] from Aleph 9

Word and Image I

Hygge

Hygge means "coziness" in Danish. But it is more than just a word; it is the essence and spirit of the Danes. My Danish host family loved to use the word "cozy" when describing things—"dinner was so cozy" or "what a cozy time we had today". *Hygge* came to mean so much more to me as I was welcomed into a Danish home. It came to mean having a late afternoon tea with my host siblings Magnus, Silje, and Niklas, the whole family sitting down to dinner almost every night,

The Author (far right) at a Block Party in Roskilde, Denmark [Rachel Kopicki]

long political discussions with my host dad after dinner, and watching football (soccer) matches with my host brothers. When I think of *hygge*, I think of these things and I think of the warmth of the people.

One of the first things a Dane told me upon arrival is that I might be shocked at how impersonal Danes are to strangers, compared to Americans. I am always surprised when I think back to this because every day, on a bus or a train, on my commute to Copenhagen for class, I would see strangers talking with each other, and sometimes I'd also have a nice conversation with a stranger. They may not realize it, but the Danes themselves embody *hygge*.

—Rachel Kopicki

WORD AND IMAGE II

Com licença

Com licença, com licença. Excuse me, excuse me. Already sweating from sprinting up Rua Bartira in desperate fear of missing this once-every-half-an-hour Ana Rosa bus, I pushed my way through the throngs of people until I spied an opening on the metal rail large enough for my hand to grip. I tried to squeeze another hand into the opening to steady myself but the bus lurched forward... and so did I. Before nearly landing in the lap of a thirty-something man in a suit, my shoulder bag skimmed a young woman's back enough to generate a grunt and a look of annoyance that I rightly assumed was directed at me. *Desculpa-me*, I said defeated, I'm sorry. She said nothing; her grunt said everything. I looked to the businessman apologetically, as my hand was still resting on his shoulder. *Desculpa-me.*

Não preocupe-se. Posso segurar sua sacola? Don't worry. Can I hold your bag for you?

My brow quickly furrowed at the thought of a stranger in a city typically known for petty theft holding my wallet and laptop, but I considered his comparatively generous reaction to my intrusion of his personal space and nodded. *Obrigada.* Thank you. My eyes never strayed from my bag as my mind filled with worried questions. Does he know I'm American? How would I file a police report in my weak Portuguese? Was he just trying to get my phone number? After what seemed like hours, his hand

Street in Salvador de Bahia, Brazil [Anna Lockwood] From Aleph 5

reached up to press the orange button, indicating that the next was his stop. He handed my bag over with a smile, said *boa noite*, and I took his seat. *Obrigada.*

I smiled to myself, filing the experience away as one of those rare instances of unwarranted kindness.

But it wasn't rare. It kept happening. Most of my crowded bus rides for the next four months were accompanied by a tap on the shoulder, an offer to hold my bag, and three simple expressions: excuse me, I'm sorry, and thank you.

—Anna Lockwood

From Aleph Volume 6

Word and Image III

Finding the *Craic*

One of our first assignments upon arriving in Ireland was to define *craic*—not a simple feat, as I learned. The term is central to Irish culture and is thrown around in conversations all the time: "Good *craic* at the Quays, yeah?" "You should come to the soc meeting. There'll be grand *craic*!" However, there is not really an English equivalent; the closest approximation is some combination of "fun," "good times," and "good con-

Mosaic: Music Sessions in Galway, Ireland [Jennifer Libous] From Aleph 6

versation." The point of *craic* isn't to define it—it's to find it. I'm still not able to say with any certainty what *craic* is, but I'm positive I found it.

Two friends and I had planned to go to Castlebar in County Mayo to see a Riverdance performance. One found the tickets to the event, and the other took care of figuring out the bus schedule, which left me to find a hotel and a way to get there from the bus station. I settled on a place that seemed to be in the city center, and called it a day.

The bus ride to Castlebar went smoothly, and we explored the town before heading for our hotel. A few minutes into our walk, a woman walking her dogs spotted our backpacks and asked us if we needed directions. We mentioned the name of our hotel, and explained that we would rather walk than find a cab. "It's three miles away!" she argued, but we were set on walking.

As we walked down the road out of town, we passed the "Welcome to Castlebar" sign—we were officially outside the city limits. It started to rain. We continued on, glancing at our hand-drawn map which was clearly not to scale (Google maps had, for once, been useless). After walking past two roundabouts and accepting the fact that the sidewalk had

stopped, we asked a construction worker for directions—he said we were headed in the right direction. Half an hour later, with no hotel in sight, we followed a sign for a B&B to ask directions again—the woman who answered the door told us we were close to our hotel.

Although the rain had picked up, the animal lover amongst us had decided to stop and look at some donkeys that were grazing in a pasture. I stood back to take pictures as my two traveling mates went to pet the donkeys; I called their attention for a photo and before any of us knew what had happened,

a donkey had eaten our map! It took us a few minutes to regain our composure, but we continued on. We eventually found the local GAA stadium, where a hurling match had just finished. The second we walked in the door, a woman sitting at the bar turned to us and exclaimed "Girls! Ye look like shite!" before finally telling us that our hotel was around the corner.

We took a cab back into town to see Riverdance, but that's not what I remember about that weekend. I remember the three-mile walk to our hotel because it was so much fun. We didn't spend any money, and we didn't actually *do* anything, but that was one of the best days on record. Although it was raining for most of our walk, we laughed the entire way. A donkey ate our map! I couldn't make this stuff up, and I don't think I'd want to—it's best to live it.

That's the point of *craic*, I think—experiencing it, whatever it may be. *Craic* is biking around Inishmore. It's devouring a banoffee pie with friends in St. Stephen's Green on a gorgeous September day in Dublin. It's standing on top of Knowth, looking at the Boyne Valley around you and taking it all in. It's raising a pint to Arthur Guinness with a thousand of your closest friends down on Shop Street. It's also signing peace walls in Belfast and then going to tea at the Assembly. At the same time, exploring a beach in Dingle is also great *craic*, as is explaining the mechanics of American football to your new Irish friend who sits next to you in philosophy tutorial. *Craic* can also be found in the mundane—in cooking dinner, a trip to the grocery store, or a stop at Supermac's for some garlic chips.

Craic comes up in a variety of contexts—it was the first thing my supervisor at my volunteer placement asked me about ("Cheers, so nice to meet you! How've you found the *craic*?") and was the closing sentiment of one of my lectures every week ("Make sure you find some *craic* this weekend...it'll do all of ye some good."). Beyond that, I think *craic* is a way of life. It's about enjoying yourself, engaging with those around you, and putting things in perspective. And it's something we could all use a little more of.

—Sarah Marlow

The Boy with the Accordian in Verona, Italy [Leidy Sanchez] From Aleph 5

POR·TRAIT

n. [1] painting, drawing or photo of a person, often showing only the head and shoulders [2] a representation or impression of someone in words or images

Portraits I

Gort na Coiribe
Apartment # 103

As has so often occurred in the last few months when asked to describe my experiences, I feel the failure of language sticking in my throat. What comes to mind are not the beautiful places I have seen, nor the moments when I may have 'found myself', but rather the conversations, the events and the laughs that happened when I was least expecting to be moved. The anecdotes. My house became the center of my world, as did the people in it: Sarah, Sean, and my roommate, Lisa. I

calculate my time in Galway based on the indefinable value of each of these individuals and the meaning they brought to my overseas adventure.

Room 1a. Lisa Maloney
Hometown: Knock, County Mayo, Ireland

i. when we first met, she told me she hated Americans—the accent most especially.
ii. she claimed to like *me*, though.
iii. the first and only time she ate mushrooms, i stayed up with her until four a.m., making sure she didn't try to jump out the window.
iv. we quoted Borat incessantly, laughing until our stomach muscles burned.
v. we took joy out of cooking for each other, drinking tea on the couches of the living room, and sharing pints of Ben & Jerry's *Phish Food*.
vi. one of our ongoing jokes was the question, "how about a sneaky kiss?"

Room 2. Sarah O'Neill
Hometown: Tuam, County Galway, Ireland

i. she reminded me of Courtney Love, without the drug habit and embarrassing television appearances.
ii. on my 20th birthday, she bought a cake, lit candles and sang, even though there was no one else in the house at the time to join her.
iii. we ate the whole cake ourselves.
iv. i found her drunk to sickness one night in our second floor hallway, a glass of water a couple feet away, her chin resting on her chest. as i lifted her off the floor, she smiled and said, "now you can tell everyone you lived with a real Irish alcoholic, Miss America."
v. she made me laugh the hardest when she did

Windows of Rome [To Thu Tra]

karaoke, spastically shaking her hair in her face.
vi. Sarah and i had a lecture on Chaucer together, which neither of us ever wanted to go to. one day in class, i thrilled her by putting on a pair of sweatpants while sitting down. it was the most exciting thing that ever happened there.

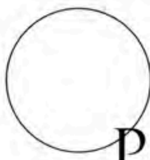
Room 3. Sean Gerrity (Nickname: Gerty)
Hometown: Sligo, County Sligo, Ireland

i. hundreds of freckles dot his face and body. i just figured his skin couldn't decide which tone to be.
ii. one night, he walked home with me at two in the morning through the deserted streets of galway when he could have stayed downtown with his other friends.
iii. every night, he cooked a real dinner for himself. i will never forget my surprise the first time i saw him use the oven.
iv. he loved an australian soap opera called 'Home and Away', which i absolutely despised. sometimes he would forget and ask me if i saw that day's episode and "could i believe what had happened to Peter?"
v. i liked to do an impression of him. it involved me putting on a deep voice and saying, "i'm GERTY, i like RUGBY."
vi. sometimes i would call him 'Seanzie', which he hated. but he hated when Sarah called him 'Gertolomew' even more.

On the day I moved out, December 4th, Gerty, Sarah, Lisa, and Bryan Hannon (from the house across the street) all got up early to see me off. Lisa made Gerty and Hannon bring my luggage downstairs and put it in the taxi. I hugged each of them goodbye in the near-dawn, forcefully willing myself not to cry as the driver pulled away from the house.

—Stephanie Eggen

From Aleph 6



Portraits II

Moses

Mosesi was in high spirits the morning of my final departure from the Naivalurua family. Every week I'd pack up and grab a bite of breakfast before catching the taxi into central Suva for our two-or-three day excursion around Viti Levu. By the eleventh week of my stay, Mosesi (or Mo or Moses) was used to seeing me get ready and leave, but also to return in just a few short days. My usual duffle bag and backpack that day were replaced by a mammoth suitcase that rested on the rusted metal chair, one of the uncomfortable ones that was padded only by hard, brown floral-patterned cushions. This day was obviously different.

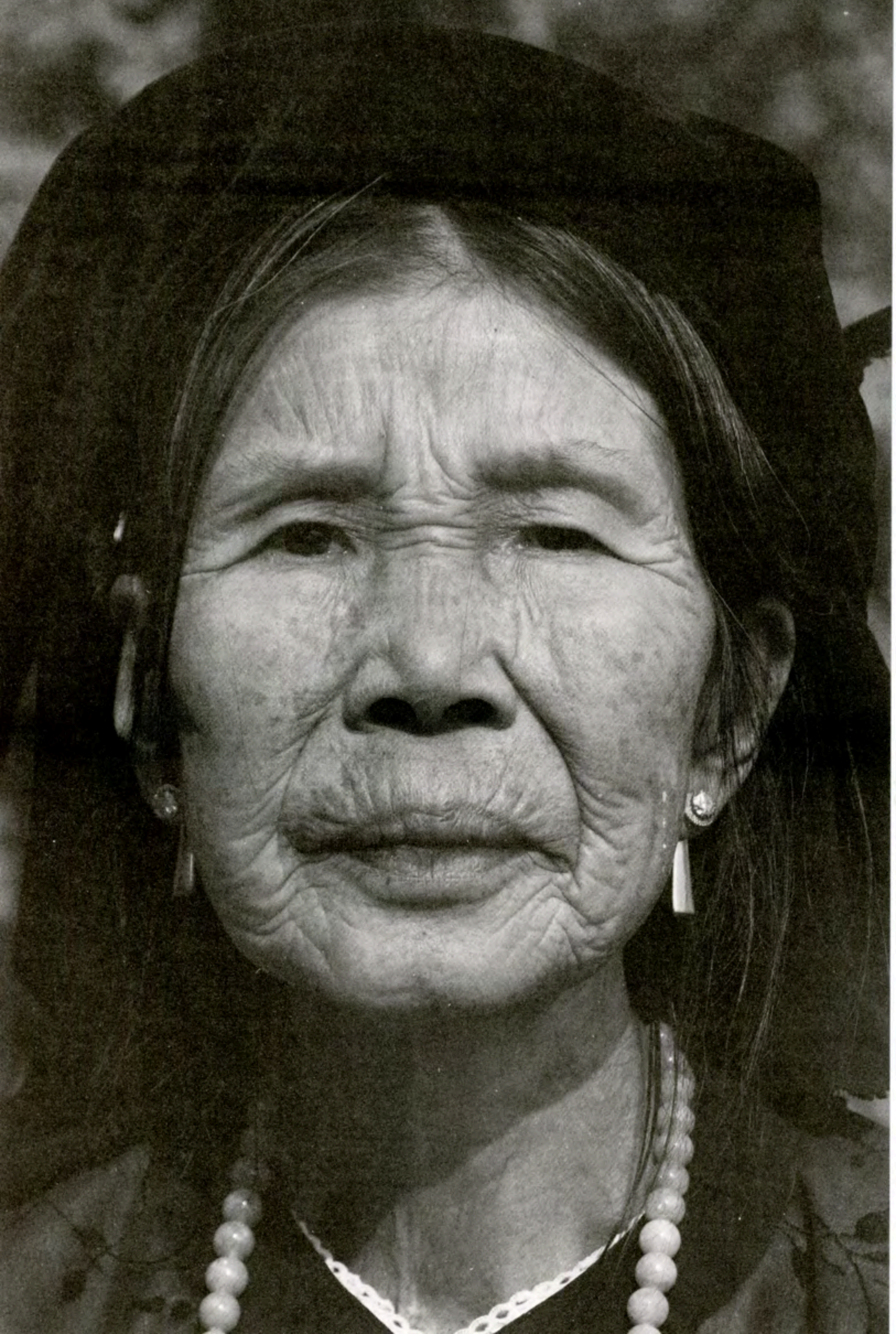
By the time I had woken up that morning the *kava* was already flowing. While there was a farewell party two nights prior, my family insisted on a proper sendoff with the traditional drink of Fiji. Even after tasting *kava* week after week in long nights sitting around the plastic basin of muddy-looking water, I had still not acquired the taste. I'm not really sure Fijians actually enjoy the taste of their "favorite" drink.

Moses' mom, my host cousin Christine, had been telling him for days about how this time I was "really going," but he did not get it. Even as we sat around the *kava* bowl that morning, Moses seemed oblivious. It was not at all uncommon for *kava* drinking to spill over from late nights into early mornings, so Moses had no idea this celebration was for me.

Moses was far more preoccupied by the basket of tiny kittens out on the porch, the same ones that had been born under the kitchen sink just a few weeks before. Never had I imagined kittens causing such major conflict in a home, with family members divided over whether to let them be under the sink or to throw them outside. Moses, dragging the pink basket to the front door, plucked out one of the helpless crea-

Children, India [Sarah Quintal] From Aleph 3

Bà Thuy in Formal Attire, Vietnam [Jake Dewey] From Aleph 4



tures. As he held it by the ears we all yelled "*Kua!*" (Don't!), yet it was of little use. The kitten wrangled free of his grasp, but Moses quickly snatched up another from the bundle—this time latching on to it by its short tail. Our laughter erupted from an honest sense of horror and amusement.

I learned more of the Fijian language by interacting with Moses than anyone else, as he spoke barely any English. Early on in my field notes I even began comprehending the mysteries behind Fijian humor because of Moses. From my notes:

> *Speaking to them reminded me also how the whole family constantly makes fun of Christine's son Moses by calling him "bacigesa" because of his rotten teeth. Even Christine joins in by calling him the name. Moses will usually yell back at them playfully. Laughing ensues in particular after they tell him "Smile Moses!" I thought it was surprising, as his bad teeth obviously are a sign of poor dental hygiene, yet Christine simply told me that when his new teeth grow in they will be white.*

Another day I witnessed first-hand mystical beliefs unlike anything I had ever experienced before.

> *Christine was preparing lunch while Moses ran around the kitchen. Nervously watching Moses instead of the deep fryer, oil splattered onto Christine's arm, burning her. After letting out a loud yelp, she sat down and took Moses by the hand. She then made him touch where she was burned. She explained to me that she has "blood" from Bega Island, where they fire walk and have the ability to heal burns. Moses had the blood within him too as her son, so she touched him to help it cure. She then told me a story of an Indian couple in the hospital for bad burns that were touched by one of her relatives. When they thanked him, he responded "if only my mother was here to help you!"*

I learned how a three-year-old could become a teacher and a friend. Yet, as I look back, the experiences of living in Fiji could not easily be relayed in these weekly field notes. I

tried to remain as scientific and detached as possible in my writing, but my memories hold the sentimental realities of my time abroad.

I made my way up the rocky staircase for the very last time. Moses, as usual, ran up the stairs behind me to say goodbye. A taxi was not sitting at the top of the hill as he expected. A small bus was there instead with a few other students already loaded. As I began saying goodbye to my family members I saw the uneasiness in Moses' eyes; at that point he realized I was leaving. When it was his turn in the line I waved and told him "*Moce*!" (Bye-bye!) He refused to look at me, instead burying himself in his mom's chest. I boarded the bus and looked out the window to see Moses weeping so hard that snot bubbles burst from his nose. The girls on my bus, overwhelmed by the sight, began to cry as the bus rolled off for the next home.

—Brian Rosenblatt

From Aleph 8

PORTRAITS III

The Life of the *Xe Om* Driver

I have always been intrigued by the jobs people do and by how they do those jobs. In Hanoi I lived as a foreign exchange student in the Bach Koa A2 dormitory of the Hanoi National University Polytechnic School. There, I was surrounded by people at work—mechanics in the street repairing bikes, barbers cutting hair, food vendors with baskets of produce, and people hauling potted plants, lumber and furniture on the back of motorcycles and motorbikes.

While in Hanoi, I took an anthropology class, "Photographing Culture," that required me to use photography to explore Vietnamese culture. I chose to learn about the life of the *xe om* (motorbike taxi) drivers, particularly those working in the Bach Khoa district around my dormitory. *Xe oms* (the Vietnamese words for "vehicle" and "to hug") whip all over the city, their passengers often clinging onto the drivers with both hands. Although I interacted with the drivers across from the dorm, I really did not know what their typical day entailed. From my casual observations I knew that they worked long days, without any guarantee of finding customers. When not working, the drivers casually lounged on top of their motorbikes, chatting with fellow drivers. The job required the patience to wait—all day if necessary—for customers, and to never leave your spot without someone seated on the back of the bike.

I approached a driver named Ha who works outside the Bach Khoa dorms. During my stay in Hanoi, he became a friend. A good-natured man, Ha always greeted me with a smile and affectionately called me "Sumo." As part of my class project I gave him two disposable cameras and asked him to use one camera to take photographs of his work and the other to take pictures of his home.

A few days later, Ha returned with the cameras and immediately gave me a lift to the store to have the photos developed. As we flipped through the pictures, Ha asked for my comments, and I began to develop an understanding of a *xe om* driver's world.

Work Life

Many of Ha's photographs of "work" included his friends, who are an important part of his day. When not busy, a *xe om* driver socializes with his fellow drivers and other nearby businesspeople. The photographs illustrate these friendships.

In one photograph a man looks up at the camera smiling. He is a *xe om* mechanic Ha uses. But they share a much deeper and longer-lasting relationship than the 1,000 *dong* (roughly 6 cents) that Ha pays him to put air in his tires.

A second "work" photograph shows a group of women serving food around a table. As I learned from Ha, the actual focus of the photo is the tobacco pipe which he smokes with his friends when it is slow. While looking at another photo of the same eatery, Ha explains that this is where he eats and drinks his freshly brewed *bia hoa* (daily beer) with his friends.

A fourth photograph of "work" shows a man sitting on a corner near a group of *xe om* drivers. This is the man who shines Ha's shoes—a simple luxury. Ha informs me that the shoeshine man, like the mechanic, is his friend.

Home Life

As we looked at the photographs of Ha's home, his comments indicate both excitement and pride. He makes many more spontaneous remarks while showing me these pictures—"very good," "very pretty" and "very happy"—than he did when we were looking at the pictures of his work.

The first picture he shows me is of his living quarters. He tells me that this is where he sleeps, pointing out the curtains that divide the room. He makes it clear that the curtains give

everyone in the house their own space. He then shows me a picture of his children's beds. He looks at me proudly as he counts the number of children he has—five—and then the number of beds in the photo—five.

Another "home" photograph shows Ha's son studying a book and using a calculator. He informs me proudly that his son is a student.

However, another photograph elicits a different reaction. Ha looks at it without showing any sense of pride. Almost as if embarrassed, Ha moves quickly onto another photograph, saying only "He does not go to school."

The value Ha placed on education was evident even if his own occupation suggests he may not have gone very far in school.

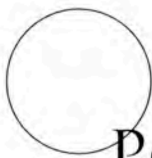
Home is also a place for hobbies and pets. Ha keeps a pet bird—he thinks it's "very beautiful"—in a cage. He also keeps pigeons on the roof. Each pigeon has its own house. They are pets but also an occasional source of food.

We end our conversation about his pictures with a smile. He drives me back to my dorm, where he once again meets his friends. The other *xe om* drivers look at his pictures intently, occasionally laughing. Once again, I am reminded of the camaraderie so important in Ha's job. I leave him smoking a cigarette with his friends, waiting for a customer.

Even though my limited Vietnamese kept me from having a more involved discussion with Ha, I came away from the experience with a greater understanding of his life. Being a *xe om* driver in Vietnam can be frustrating and difficult. But being able to support the family he loves and being surrounded by the friends he enjoys make the job worthwhile. The pride Ha shows in his home and family reminds me that a person's identity is not constructed from their job alone.

—Pat Mahoney

From Aleph 2



Portraits IV

Finding Home in Ireland

"Can you do an American accent?" "Naw..." the girl shrugged. "But, eh, can you do an Irish one?" I smiled in response. "I can give it a shot. Give me something to say." "How about... my name is Zach, I live in America?" "M'name's Zach, I live in Amerikay."

"No, no all wrong!" She shook her head, making her blonde, braided pigtails swing. She stopped mid-thought to spot, just in time, a soccer ball barreling toward her. "Mine, this time," she said. She was one of two girls today—surrounded by a sea of grade school-age boys. One of them was dribbling toward the net. Shouts filled the old, yellowing gym—it was strange playing soccer indoors, away from the verdant greens behind the old community center. He looked up, saw his mate to his left, but decided to take a shot on goal. It rocketed upwards, steaming towards Aoife's face. I cringed. Here it was. *A little girl at Westside was going to get clocked in the face. She'd blame me. I'd get fired. I'd be put under investigation by the Garda, the Irish police force. My parents would disown me...*When I snapped out of my paranoia, she had summarily thrown her hands in front of her face, knocked the ball to the gym floor in front of her, picked it up, and thrown it to Jimmy, her nearest teammate, who was already making an outlet pass to Eoin halfway up the "pitch." "Knock it in, Eoin!" she yelped as she turned hastily back toward me.

We had been sharing the goaltending duties on one end. "What a save!" I said with relief. "Oh yeah, thanks," she chirped. She reached out for a customary high-five. "So anyway, the way ye said yer name." Aoife's voice took on an uncustomary serious tone. "It's alright—not great. I'll show ye."

"*M'names eefah* [finding out Aoife morphed into "eefah" was a shock] *and I've 10 years old.* Your turn." I took a deep

breath, checking quickly to see where the ball was. Our team was swarming the opposite goal. "My name's Za..." "Nah! Ye want to say it quickly, Irish-style. '*M'namez Zach.*' Try it." Taken aback by my diminutive professor's chastising, I tried again. "Not bad," she smiled. "Ye'll have to work on it, so."

"Thanks, Aoife." And just like that, she smiled and sprinted up to get in the thick of the offensive action, leaving me alone in goal. It was December 8th, the last time I'd be at Youth Work Ireland—the small, yet vibrant community outreach organization on the far side of town. I wondered how to let Aoife know that in about two weeks, I'd be home.

Before I came, it had all seemed slightly trite, the slideshow, the palpable excitement. I sighed rather audibly, hoping someone would notice that I was being righteously indignant. As the rest of our group seemed captivated by Professor Doyle's introduction of the Ireland Term Abroad, which was to be shared between 20 Union and Hobart and William Smith students, I reveled in my nonchalance. After all, we were only being introduced to the country that would become our home for 15 weeks. My mind wandered away from the verdant snapshots of Ireland that flashed on the retractable canvas screen. The faint shouts of pick-up basketball games wafted in. *I want to be outside*, I whined to myself. The prospect of studying abroad later next fall seemed quite removed from the bright spring afternoon.

I often replayed that otherwise innocuous meeting in my mind throughout the term in Galway. It had dawned on me that all those months before, my flippancy had been fueled by fear. For a sophomore whose adoptive home—Union College—was a haven of comfort, patterns, and familiarity, the concept of studying abroad as a junior represented a frightening step into the unknown, the unexplored. After all, there seemed to be little reason to leave Schenectady. Why embark on a trip to a foreign country with 19 relative strangers? For the kid who wanted nary a thing to change about his environs, "Galway" suddenly became a foul word.

At about 26, Sylwia is the archetype for what author Roddy Doyle might call "the new Irish." She lacks the traditional Irish accent and ancestry, but that's where any dissimilarities end. She is living proof that, as Doyle wrote in his short story "57% Irish," the supposedly quantifiable trait of "Irishness" is not limited to a birth certificate or passport. It is, instead, a state of mind.

For Sylwia, a recent immigrant and full-time employee of Youth Work Ireland (Galway, Westside) the principles of dedication, sacrifice, and community are paramount. Another ubiquitous facet of "Irishness" may be a certain humility; Sylwia avoided self-promotion at all costs. Even when coaxed to talk about her inspiration to devote her career to volunteering, Sylwia seemed reticent.

This phenomenon seems to permeate every crevasse of Irish (or at least Galwegian) culture, as everyone from pub-goers to students are quick to self-deprecate. It is not a nationwide epidemic of low self-esteem, but a general understanding of the value of the unselfish duty necessary to sustain a community. Any xenophobic skepticism that maintains that Sylwia should be excluded from the pantheon of Irishness is not only short-sighted but ignorant of what being Irish means. As a country that has seen millions emigrate, or sent into exile, any definition of a "true" Irishman or Irishwoman must be taken with a grain of salt.

Immigration to Ireland, a novel concept that flourished during the heyday of the Celtic Tiger, has changed the meaning of Irishness; being born in Ireland proper is no longer a criterion for being "Irish." Newcomers to Ireland quickly learn that their skin color or native language has little bearing on their "Irishness." Instead, people like Sylwia understand that it is how they behave that defines their place in Irish society.

Without forfeiting any of her own cultural heritage, Sylwia has found a happy balance between her native culture and her newly-adopted Irish one. (Sylwia will gladly speak in her native tongue, but, again, evocative of "57% Irish," she is not afraid to speak in what Doyle refers to as "the Irish way": her

speech is peppered with the commonplace exclamations of "howyeh," "grand," or "brilliant.") Being Irish is surprisingly unrelated to geography. It is, instead, a cultivated state of mind that finds its residents happily woven into the fabric of a community.

It only seemed natural to talk to Sylwia. She would be able to relate, I figured, to feeling torn between two homes. I was about to open my mouth when something stopped me. *I can't talk about this right now*, something inside yelped. Maybe it was a moment of adopted Irish conservatism, or perhaps anxiety of asking Sylwia about her past. But I think it might have been something more. By even mentioning the prospect of returning home, I would be admitting to myself that my adoptive home—Galway—would soon be like Cork or Dublin—just another place I had visited. But I stopped myself again. It would not be "just another place." For the three and a half months I had been in Ireland's third largest city, it had been nothing if not *home*.

But what made Galway home? Returning to Bill Shore's *Finding the Cathedral Within* may help. He writes about his travels around the United States, where he met many different professionals—from teachers and cookware manufacturers to bankers. He recalls a common link between all of them:

> *The organizations they've built and the programs they run are fascinating, but what has stayed with me more vividly than what they said is what they showed of themselves and confirmed about human nature: that it embodies an irrepressible and infinite ability to create, express, give, and share strength.*

That was it. That was, incredibly, and simultaneously, the essence of Ireland *and* home. It should be little surprise to anyone who has stayed on the Emerald Isle, frequented Irish pubs, or even picked up a hurley. Fabled Irish hospitality is not merely an invention of *The Quiet Man*, perpetuated by years of false stereotypes. Although Ireland is not without its faults, the "irrepressible and infinite" is quintessentially a part of the country.

The Irish are quite possibly the most indomitable people on the planet—even when faced with 2010's economic meltdown of catastrophic proportions, the Irish maintained the same even-keeled veiled optimism that has defined them for centuries. When I first visited Youth Work in September, one of the center's leaders told me that Ireland, since the downturn, was "becoming more of a community—[as we] become less about the money." Although the country is reeling, knowing that the cornerstones of communities like Galway's Westside have such capable and tirelessly optimistic leaders is reason for celebration.

While most Galwegians would suggest the Westside neighborhood where Youth Work Ireland is located needs substantial improvement, the organization's worn buildings do not reflect the vibrant energy inside them. The aging gym that houses Aoife's soccer games and breakdancing classes may not be the most aesthetically pleasing "cathedral," but little of that matters. To Bill Shore, and by association, the volunteers of Youth Work Ireland, places like that old gym are the pinnacle of community. As Shore writes, this "ambitious civic project can't be achieved by government, business, or religious institutions alone...[it] require[s] all of civic society." It is difficult to classify Galway's Westside as "all of civic society," but the neighborhood is fully invested in making Sylwia's haven a meaningful place for the kids of Galway.

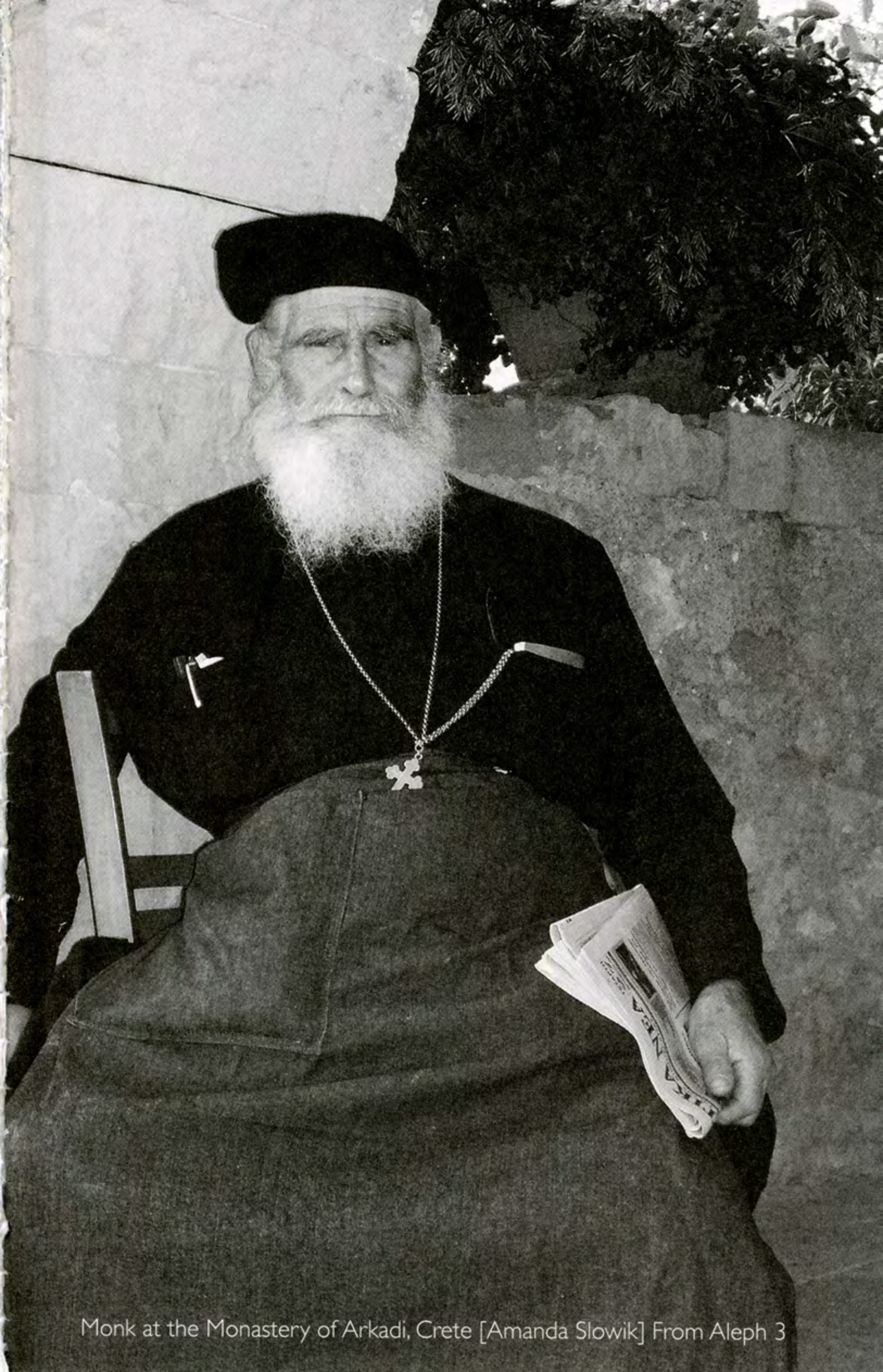
Youth Work Ireland—Galway—Westside provides a unique opportunity for its volunteers (especially the American ones) to experience a part of Galway that is not included in any travel brochure. Quaint shops and pubs on the likes of Shop St. or Quay St. belie the fact that Galway, like any other city, has problems. Sylwia's organization is in the heart of an area that has no tourist shops, no faux-Irish banners that read "*Fáilte*!" No, this is a place where blue collar workers live, shop, and, with Youth Work Ireland, have a place to gather as a community. It is a portrait of Ireland that is not commonly seen by visitors, but it is nonetheless fitting. After all, these people have built an unassuming, but sturdy, "cathedral."

Ireland can also be understood as a metaphorical cathedral born of necessity. After years of oppression, famine, and violence, the natural outlet for a larger national community was to foster the ideal of a cohesive identity. It is an identity shared by people born and raised in the neighborhoods they now work in, or who have come to Ireland from their native countries. What was born out of necessity—community—now has become a staple of Irish life.

Although the task of assimilating into Irish culture seemed daunting nearly four months ago, much has changed since then. It has been a journey smattered with the indelible memories of children like Aoife. It has been one that has been enlightening—observing a non-native's clear "Irishness" provided a lesson in not only globalization but in the viability of a national ethos of community. The cathedral doors, previously locked, have been thrown open, and inside is revealed a society that embodies everything about home.

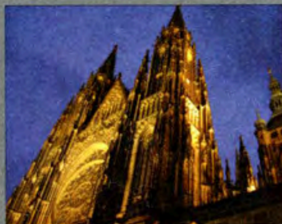
—Zach Pearce

Girl with Dog In Peru [Nick Sadoski] From Aleph 3



Monk at the Monastery of Arkadi, Crete [Amanda Slowik] From Aleph 3

Sketch of Venice, Italy [Anna-Louise Meberg]
Photograph of Venice, Italy [Sean Douglas Falconer]



down the stairs, f head over heels, and when I pened my eyes, I saw the
Aleph."

"The Aleph?" repeated.

"Yes, the place here, without admixture or onfusion, all the places of
the world, seen fro every angle, coexist. I revea d my discovery to no one,
but I did return. T e child could not underst d that he was given that
rivilege so that the nan might carve out a poe ! Zunino and Zungri shall

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