passage
1999-2000
images and reflections of study abroad
kalamazoo college
# Table of Contents

*Letter from the Editors*  4

*Kadush HaShem*, Mike Collins  5

*Public Footpath*, Mara Cramer  6

*Butterfly House*, Annie Robertson  7

*Journal Entry*, Matt Guay  8

*17th September, St. Petersburg*, Rachel Collins  10

*A Born Leader*, Kevin Nesburg  11

*Untitled Photograph*, Mike Kane  12

*Sunday Dinner*, Matt Kime  13

*Ring of Fire*, Elizabeth Reiter  14

*Untitled Photograph*, Chris Wrobel  16

*Shifting*, Mara Cramer  17

*Ride Downtown*, Carrie Wolanin  18
Spice of Kalamazoo College, Juliana Wilth
Ethnic Food, Shannon McVay
Photograph from Senegal, Juleen Morford
Excerpts from a Journal, Jennifer Vasas
To the French Lover, Claire Thompson
Finding Purpose in My Journey, Ken Bark
Photographs from China, Jessica Scheidt
In the Metro, Rachel Collins
When the Beast is Asleep, Katie Kolon
In the Eyes of Los Madrilenos & Eavesdropping, Maria Sinanis
Remembering, Beth Hodgkiss-Lilly
Email home, Emily Van Strien
Credits
A Letter from the Editors

Many will note that this year’s study abroad magazine has been renamed Passage. The editorial board thought this change would be an important step in recognizing study abroad as truly changing the lives of those who participate. Passage, in the traditional sense, can be described as the journey itself. Yet passage, to us, is more than the physical journey, it is a “rite of passage” as experienced on study abroad through growth and challenge.

This collection of prose, poetry, and photography reflects the passage of “K” College students through interactions, insights, and emotions as a “foreigner” creating memorable experiences for all those who chose to participate. It is impossible to capture fully our experiences on these pages. Yet through Passage, we offer snapshots of students’ lives abroad.

We’d like to thank the following people for their generous donations: Gilclear® white 17# light translucent paper by Karen Anderson of the Gilbert Paper Company and Terri Spaulding of Xpedx, Plainwell Matte 70# text paper by Bob Tardiff of the Plainwell Paper Company, and Jim Van Sweden, Director of Kalamazoo College Communication. Without their support, we would not have been able to create this publication as you see it.

Anne Robertson and Carrie Wolanin, co-editors-in-chief
Kadush HaShem

Would that all God’s people were prophets.

- Moses, Numbers 11:29

Before the cats fell out of trees,
screaming like children, clawing
each other for space, maybe
scraps; before rifles;
before Goyim; before invisibility;
before drinking hatred like bad vodka;
before strength;
before the old Hasid screaming at us
for holding hands; before Jesus spoke
on the bus; before we laughed;
before eyes became weapons;
before victory swallowed me whole
before sleep broken by explosions;
before I let death become a habit; before
I threw the hand-sized kitten out of the door
after it ran into our kitchen, the way you throw
a rock into a river, or a baseball
past an opposing batter; I stood
in the Western Wall on the first night,
afraid to disturb it. I thought
God could punish, that terror was holy.
Later I would learn enough
of their language to know that my name
is a question: Who is like God?
I met a red-haired child while mixing drinks
at a wedding in Kalamazoo. She made
a game out of handing me the right glasses
for each drink. She told me she spoke a language
her mother did not understand, a fun one.
The words made her laugh.
I remember asking to learn.

- by Mike Collins, Jerusalem, Israel
Public Footpath

An arrowed sign points at an angle off across one green green sheep pasture, ‘Public Footpath’ it says, carved out in wood, gray and crooked. The green gives under my feet to the dark mud of an old soil forever soft with rainwater and mist. There is no footworn path here now, only the forgotten sign, pointing at a certain angle across an expanse of field. My hiking boots leave indentations of flattened grass trailing behind me, weaving around the vaguely shiny clumps of sheep droppings piled every few yards. The young rams of this field each raise their accusingly stoic eyes, as if I am responsible for their plight of being. They watch me as I walk to the drystone fence, climb up the rusty ladder and down the other side to the narrow bridleway that leads to the farmhouse a quarter mile away. The first crocuses grow in the edges of this landscape, purple and white, still closed to the wind. The bridleway wanders past the entwined shadows of two twisted bare trees and then down to the stream with the stone bridge. A bridge of stepping stones, old stones, huge stones, placed to lead in lingering strides from bank to bank. Two feet of clear water swirls around them and slides downstream to the bend where an old diaper is caught in the stray branches of a once tidy hedgerow. The shiny bottom of a crushed Pepsi can gleams upward, settled tightly into the creekbed rocks. I step out. My foot fits plainly into grooves centuries old. The moss grows thinly, faint green on the rounds and curves.

Public footpath in Lancaster, England.
by Chris Wrobel, Lancaster, England
Butterfly House

Journal Entry: 4 November 1998

I lie here in my small bed with the covers pulled up to my chin. The bed sinks deep in the middle, enveloping me within the mattress that molds itself around my body. This is the cocoon I have made for myself here in England. Piano solos bathe my ears through my headphones. I feel settled again. A week ago I had lost the hearing temporarily in my right ear. Now I am finally able to hear the soothing sound of the piano again.

Earlier today I hiked up the hill to the Ashton Memorial, the highest point in Lancaster. There was a butterfly house behind the memorial. The house was a two-story high glass building overflowing with tropical plants and trees inside. The atmosphere was moist and warm like a jungle. Hidden among the trees and vines was a white gazebo sitting in the middle with benches placed along the inside. I didn’t see any butterflies until I sat down, stayed very still, and watched eagerly. It was incredibly quiet, as I was the only person inside. Then one by one the butterflies revealed themselves to me. They soared from the high tree branches to the lower plants and then way back up to the ceiling again.

There were butterflies that looked like leaves when they were all closed up, but once they opened their wings they were splashed with purple, orange, pink, and a shimmering black. A butterfly with transparent wings rimmed in black landed on my arm and stayed there for awhile, stretching its wings wide open and then closing them tightly. I also watched one slowly come out of its cocoon in the glass case nearby.

Right now I feel like I’m up there in the thin air above the foliage cover with those black and white striped butterflies with velvet wings. I am at peace with myself as I have made a new home for myself here in Lancaster.

- by Annie Robertson, Lancaster, England
Today I decided to invite my host brothers to a concert by a premier Russian pop group, *Ryki Verh.* It’s sort of the equivalent of the Backstreet Boys, and I was already pretty sure that the concert wasn’t going to be that great, but it was the only concert during the time I was in St. Petersburg and I wanted to take them to a real show. I had been running around all day and decided to grab some food to eat while I was on the minibus. I guess eating on the go is still a very “uncultured” move to make if you happen to get on the bus with too many grannies. So while I was chowing I had the pleasure of constantly being stared at by grannies who looked like they had all had just about enough of this new generation of kids. “This kid can afford to get food at a restaurant, and I’m starving on bread,” was the comment one of them whispered to her friend. Then of course comes the dialogue between them of just what is wrong with today’s kids. Although at first interesting to me, it sort of sounds like the same conversations that take place anywhere, even in America. As one of them stares at me and talks about how “they” don’t even appreciate the family anymore, I begin to lose interest in my *shaverma* (rumored to contain rodent meat, but for the taste and the dirt cheap price, who’s being picky?). No big deal though, I think, as we approach the subway station I am to meet my brothers at.

After finding my host brothers, Andrush and Sergei, ages 14 and 16, we waste some time commenting on their new outfits. Nothing special, fake Adidas sweat pants, and untucked flannel shirts. The classic Russian outfit of the ‘90s, but at least they are clean and new. My host brothers really are well off compared to most people these days. If something were ever to go wrong, or if their grades weren’t good enough to get into the university for free, their parents wouldn’t be able to help them. But as far as day-to-day things go, life isn’t too tough for these hooligans.

At the entrance to the sports complex we find ourselves in the midst of many *Ryki Verh* t-shirted fans and a swarm of military guys (the group’s biggest hit is about a guy whose girlfriend forgets about him while he is in boot camp). The legion of police officers that accompanies any Russian musical event is there too.

Whenever Andrei finds himself surrounded by his peers, his undeniable reaction is to light a cigarette. Soon every young kid around with a habit and rude social skills was thrusting their hands into his pack, saying, “give me one!” Within minutes, including a struggle to keep the pack at all, he gets it back in his pocket with three cigarettes left.

Sergei and I started laughing at him until this punk girl strolled up from behind. She looked about 16 and in addressing Andrei, put her hand out asking for a couple of rubles for vodka money … to which the response is obviously no. However, apparently she had more elaborate plans for my unfortunate brother. She grabbed hold of his arm and wrapped her hand up in his new shirt, declaring that she wouldn’t let go unless he gave her the money. We all insisted that we were broke, but she only latched on more tightly. She gave Andrei a yank and demanded immediate payment, saying she was too poor to get tickets, so she had all day to wait.

I decided to try pulling her off and got in her face, thinking maybe we could scare her away, but then four of those tough guys dressed in black who seem to be lurking everywhere in Russia made themselves visible. Due to previous experiences with these types, I backed off. Both Sergei and I tried without result to unwrap her fingers from his shirt, and Andrei began to panic as one of the guys started pushing him around.

By now I was fully revolted by the scene. I tried to find help, but going to that legion of police officers seemed like a lukewarm idea. I ended up giving the girl and her band of dropouts the rubles for vodka that they wanted, but for
the rest of the day I was bothered by the character of that girl. She probably paid for all her less glamorous habits that way, but maybe the scams my host brothers pulled in the store weren’t much better.

To change the subject, I asked how my host brothers’ last night at the dacha was. Immediate smiles pop to their faces along with the flicking of their fingers under their chins, the expression in Russia for being drunk. It was the last blowout before all the kids had to go back to school and find out if they would make it into the university system.

Apparently they both drank too much too last night, since Andrei spent the night with one of Sergei’s girlfriends, while at the same time Sergei was with one of Andrei’s girls. No big deal though as they pat each other on the back. They both have too many girls for them to handle by themselves. I guess we have Beavis and Butthead to thank as their role models.

The concert was an instrument-less disaster, except for the hit about being in boot camp, at which point the military guys got on each others’ shoulders and went crazy knocking each other over. I sent my brothers home early enough so their mom wouldn’t get worried, but they were late anyway. I am struggling in my research. I really want to display my host brothers in a more positive light, but each day another bleaker picture of this nation’s youth is displayed before me. When I lay in bed I remember that girl, and how little respect she had for anybody. As much as I despise her, I wonder how I would have acted if I had grown up seeing life as she did.
I feel winter closing in today when my nose
grows cold in my still room and the dawn chills me
to the point of waking, in search of more blankets.

Leaves rust at the edges and the sky
is a sharper, more pessimistic blue
(verging on middle aged;
no longer innocent, this sky).
The mornings are settling
into their autumnal routine of
scattered showers—There will be rain, Larisa says
and presses an umbrella into my hands
which are stuffed inadequately into my jeans pockets on my way
to the Metro.

The Gulf of Finland is always on the verge of tears lately—
Larisa said the warm September was compensation
for a cold summer—
but now the golden autumn is letting go
finger by finger
and a greyer, moodier late September is rising up
out of the dead grass
getting my shoes all damp and cold in the early morning,
and I smell winter waking with my first breath outdoors.

Good apples at the market now,
those who don’t have the heart to walk in the dying summer
fill the already-packed bus
with their wool and fur and breath and cabbages,
and today,
for the first time,
the watermelon kiosk was gone
and the corner looked very empty.
Walking home, the wind cut clean
through my clothes
just to show that it could.

- by Rachel Collins, St. Petersburg, Russia
A Born Leader

My friend called him Death, because that was probably the best way to describe the guy. The way it was told to me, he looked like a zombie, with sunken eyes and a countenance so emaciated that he couldn’t close his lips enough to cover his teeth. Rather than walk a few blocks to his job or wherever he had to go, he would sit on the streetcar for a stop or two and give people chills.

One day I finally saw Death. It was cloudy and cold. German classes had just ended, and a few of us from the Bonn program had decided to get something to eat at Donor Kebab, a fast food stand next to the main university building. We were standing there eating french fries, chicken kebabs, and pizza when my friend pointed him out. He was standing about 150 feet away on the street corner, yelling around the bend at somebody we couldn’t see. He really did look like a skeleton, a casually dressed skeleton, with a massive mop of red hair that shot up way above his head and then ran down past his shoulders. I said “oh” and went back to eating. We talked for a few more minutes before we realized that the yelling was getting louder, and that he was still on the street corner. He was clearly enraged by that time. He was almost doubled over backwards with his hands at his sides, yelling something that sounded like gibberish: “AOOAOOAOO.” He would take a lurch in our direction before lurching back at whoever was around the corner and yelling some more. By then everyone at the fast food stand was intrigued and watching intently. I asked one of the better German speakers what Death was saying, and he said, “I don’t think he’s saying anything, it just sounds like ‘AOOAOO’ to me.”

After Death had made some headway towards us, we could see who he was yelling at. Some jovial German schoolchildren, probably no more than ten years old, began to appear around the corner with their hands cupped over their ears.

They taunted him, saying “Excuse me? I can’t hear you. What did you say?” to which Death would turn and repeat his unintelligible tract. He might have lurched toward them, but they only stood their ground and giggled some more. He wasn’t scaring anybody. Finally, he high-tailed it towards us, if you could call it that. When he walked past, you could see that he walked by turning his whole body left and right, like a book walking on its two bottom corners, but with a sort of urgency about it. A group of about five schoolchildren tagged along behind him, earnestly begging for clarification, and he would swivel periodically and yell some more. We could see another five children on the street corner, waving around the bend, telling other children to come and join them. When Death was a bit further down the street, a group of about ten kids rushed past to join the fun, and bystanders watched them go.

The two people I was eating with were smitten with curiosity. Classes were done for the day, and since we didn’t have a whole lot to do, they decided to follow the skeletal Pied Piper and his entourage to see what came of it. I had a meeting to go to and opted not to join them. They said that Death eventually ducked into a store to try to lose the kids, but his plan backfired, and while he was holed up in the store even more children joined in. I walked back through town to my meeting. On the way, I stopped myself in front of another fast food grill. I thought for a minute, and then ducked inside to grab something else to eat.

- by Kevin Nesburg, Bonn, Germany
Older man in Oaxaca.
by Mike Kane, Oaxaca, Mexico
Sunday Dinner

We sit down at a white plastic table in the middle of a stranger’s living room on matching lawn chairs, *Tecate* printed on the back, a local beer of choice. A woman slides out of the kitchen and asks Silvia if I speak Spanish. *Claro que sí*, I respond and order *sopa de chiva*. Ram Soup. My family is disappointed I don’t order something more solid but all the meat was making me constipated. My father orders for the rest of the family. *Cabeza de chiva*. The translation, ram head, runs through my mind like a ticker. Must be code for something else. Cokes are bought for Silvia, Román, and me. A double shot of mezcal for Simitrio. To cut the fat, as he likes to say. The television shouts, “*Gol!!*” Chivas 1, Cruz Azul 0. Simitrio is not pleased. He shoots the mezcal and orders another. My soup arrives, floating garbanzos, kernels of corn the size of eyes, ram meat. My attention turns from the soccer game to my square spoon; I pile the ram off to the side. Simitrio’s bug eyes widen as *la cabeza* approaches, the platter landing softly in the middle of our table. A charred black mass the size of a football. Forks and knives attack from all sides. Flesh from the cheeks, lips, and jaw is torn, then jammed into hungry mouths. Slowly a skull emerges and Román pulls at the brain stem with his fork. They cannot fathom why I won’t even try a piece of the tongue that lies behind the buck teeth. Román fishes around and pulls out an eyeball, makes it peer at everyone at the table, turns it toward me. *Estoy mirándote*, he says with a rare cackle. Simitrio rips out the tongue, swallows it, orders another mezcal. Apparently the ram is thirsty too. I look out the window. Rams, sheep, and lambs graze in the field. I picture my true family, my brothers, and sister, parents, gathered at the kitchen table, gazing through the window as snow collects in the yard, pulling chicken meat from the thighs, wings, and breast bones, thinking of me thinking of them and how extraordinarily ordinary life can be.

- by Matthew Kime, Oaxaca, Mexico
Ring of Fire

Part I

What I saw in Joshua was the ability to walk on fire. He was a tall kid with dark hair and light skin for an Aborigine.

“I burn a lot,” he told me as he applied a second coat of sun cream to the lines of his wet suit. He sort of kept his head down when he spoke. He was seventeen. Despite his desperate posture, his words bounced back off the dried out earth and just kept bouncing.

“My friends, they all dropped out of school,” Joshua told me, now looking intensely into my eyes. Then he turned abruptly.

“They’re getting money from the government; they don’t do much these days. ‘Wonderful to wake up to the smell of fresh cash on dole day,’ one said to me the other day,” Joshua said without a hint of intonation. It was a moral debate and not just for him but also for every other Aboriginal person. Having a government that will virtually pay its people to keep quiet. Keep quiet about just about everything, including the fact that it is more profitable to remain on social welfare than finish school or be employed.

“I like computers and books, I hate the heat.” This from a boy who came from a city hotter than Phoenix, Arizona, and hotter than Cairo, Egypt. A city where the kids play ‘pop the tar bubbles’ with their naked toes during summer time.

“I like the morning and evening and I read during the day.” He looked up from his cheeseburger.

“I read science fiction and, well, anything,” he said with conviction.

I tried not to show emotion. I had learned by this point that the best way to let people talk is to, well, listen, but not be surprised by anything, and certainly not show it, even if it makes you want to cry.

Part II

“See over there, that is where my kiddies were born. One in the toilet, and one in the bed,” Laura said pointing at the run-down apartment building. “They’re ripping it down.” And it was true. We felt the thick dust in the air coat our skin and heard the bulldozers just next door.

“I knew the second one would be born in the bed,” Grandma intervened with a look that said ‘I knew.’ Grandma continued, “I told Laura so. That baby was eager to come, in a real hurry, and not going to wait for a trip to the clinic.”

The children still ran around in circles, their energy from a source unknown to anyone over the age of nine.

“See all these kiddies,” the 22-year-old said as she sat in a child’s plastic chair fanning herself with a piece of construction paper. “They all live with me.”

Her voice was a product of this, an accent unfamiliar, but now a part of my own. I tried to picture her apartment full of children. It brought about a throb in my forehead. Every day I collapsed for an hour on my bed after returning from the Community Center. For Laura there was no relief. The situation was considered normal because of the complex family ties of Aboriginal people. A parent might raise not only her own children, but also those of her sister, brother, and maybe cousins. A literal mob.

Above the roar of a squabble centering around a broken bike and water gun, I looked out at the emergency housing. These apartments were dilapidated and had been closed for health regulations. For weeks fliers had been overflowing from the abandoned mailboxes. A week ago, the red tape had been raised. The government called the apartments, actually the entire neighborhood, a “ring of fire” and the Community Center the “bull’s eye.” They had created a new suburb plan
The government plans to start all over, get rid of crime. No drugs or fights or drunks. “They’ll relocate the people,” Biv told me, “but they won’t be near one another or have access to the services they need. They’ll build another Community Center on the other side of town, but it will not be the same.” She casually poured the colored bubbles into the wading pool as she spoke. Once again I thought of the people, forced out, separated, and

I tried to imagine these people not living together. It just didn’t fit. From the four-year-old twins who no one, not even themselves, could tell apart, to the Grandma. Grandma who loved to hear about America and laughed. They all laughed. Laughter was a tool. “We are all just silly apes,” they told me and we laughed.

So now, if I return, they won’t be there. The Community Center will be gone. There may be a rich man’s lawn instead. The deep trampoline hole pushed over for an indoor garage. And all this for what? Revitalization, relocation, redistribution, or even government handouts will not solve these problems. I still think of Joshua and I wonder if he knows I am counting on him.

Apply your sunblock and walk through fire. Your people are waiting.

- by Elizabeth Reiter, Perth, Australia
Woodlot near Lancaster University.
by Chris Wrobel, Lancaster, England
Shifting

Zurich. I was on her brick streets in December. It was glaringly sunny at times, but cold. The tangy wind from the lake and river swept up to sting my cheeks red and whip my hair around my neck. I walked along the river, alone, and bought a pretzel with butter for a few francs. I gauged Switzerland expensive, and tried to keep my few francs to myself. I wandered into a few shops, glanced at watches and knives, thought about gifts for my brother, but mostly I just walked, surprised at the occasional adult-only shop that squatted on this main street. I bought a scoop of raspberry sorbet at a Haagen-Dazs, a red luxury with a tiny plastic spoon. The attendant told me I wasn’t allowed to sit at the small round tables if I only bought something at the counter, so I ate on a park bench by a green statue and a group of competitive pigeons, heads bobbing in search of crumbs. The sky sprinkled rain, and I watched a woman in heels run to an awning where she struggled with her pink umbrella.

I crossed over the river to look at the churches. I gazed up at the largest clock face in the world for a few moments, and began to wend my way back toward the train station. The old town, the original, with narrowed streets and cobblestones, surrounded me. I found a little church with a hidden courtyard, and sat on a bench for a moment, watching the wind rustle the branches of a little tree, thinking how the green of the moss reminded me of England and how the average tourist would never find this special place. I sniffed the breeze, and the pungency of alcohol and urine drifted into my nostrils. A beer bottle lay behind me against the stone wall, the last swallow resting in an amber pool. I left, uncomfortable, and found the main street to the train station and flowed with the walking crowd, nameless, until I walked into an English-American bookstore. I bought a $7 copy of *Newsweek* with a teary soon-to-be-impeached Clinton on the front cover. Mostly I bought it for my friend, my other half, my traveling partner lying on the bunk back at the YHA hostel, vomiting, sick and drained. Both of us reached for bits and pieces, news of home on the airwaves, the newspapers, magazines, conversation of other languages. A week ago, in the Santa Margharita train station, an old Italian man had pretended to hold a rifle, demonstrating, what you think, he asked, Clinton shoot Saddam. We could only shake our heads and walk away into the Italian winter, hurriedly, afraid of being followed. In the bookstore, a young dark-haired American boy cried and screamed at his parents, tried to hit me with small fists, then played peek-a-boo and tag with me in the small square room. Our language shelved, bound and waiting above us.

I caught the black trolley back to the hostel, a 20-minute ride. I chose a silvery metal seat at the joint of the two trolley cars. As we turned gentle corners, and the evening darkened into night, the perfectly round section of floor rotated left and right, smoothly, joined and jointed beneath. I stopped in the grocery store to buy orange juice and crackers for my friend, walking up the small hill back to the hostel, the wind from the lake in my face. The neon YHA sign glowed orange-yellow, pine tree alongside a small house framed in a triangular border. Hostels, cheap hotels, rooms with beds, had become our homes, our personal islands, small refuges of safety and sanity. I slid the key into the lock of this particular island, waited for the click, and slipped into the warm smell of sickness bearing my gifts. My pack stood in the corner alongside his, containing all our earthly possessions that we added to periodically—a ceramic pitcher from Florence, a hand-dyed silk scarf from Paris, a postcard from Aix en Provence, a blue candle from Innsbruck. He lay on my bunk. His breathing, steady and even, was as familiar as my own. I knelt beside him, the black hair just above his temple was slightly sticky with sweat. His world today had been this bunk, this room, and the toilet; mine had been the city of Zurich, mine had been finding my own within the foreign. I lay the *Newsweek* on the floor where he would see it when he awoke, carefully ripping off the corner that priced the pages of our dog-eared reality.

- by Mara Cramer, Lancaster, England
Ride Downtown

It is interesting, and it is shameful, and it is awe-inspiring. It is just one more symbol of what suffering is and what I have never suffered.

She has suffered so; she is my Russia. She is my sign now, my symbol, my gauge. She is suffering, and suffering is not only in the lives of these people, but in me because I see it around me. I cannot participate no matter how I wish to. Make a wish, blow it out. Don’t tell anyone or it won’t come true. I suffer now knowing I never did.

I am blending suffering with image in some archetypal mosaic past its prime and rotting at the core. The odor rolls off it like the perfume of Gostinii Dvor and the aged smell of Sasha’s old boots that have seen too many winters and summers and springs. Like those of the kontrolor on the bus in her moon boots. They beat a rhythm into the dank floor, never to complement her red beauty-queen sash and smudged, fake leather purse never meant to match her white-grey knit hat. A hat askew on a head that knows the tub but never the shower.

They don’t know what I think, standing there among them; they don’t know that I observe them, committing to my foreign memory all that they do because it is unlike anything I have ever done. I step down to the street into a wind that threatens to sweep my core away.

The metro ladies in their glass cages hear the escalators escape and with their paddles walk among the beggars on benches at nightfall, pounding Soviet sensibility into shoulders that know it too well. The commotion is outside on every street. Old women sell cigarettes to leather-covered teens who can’t afford them . . . always old women, covered in griaz from the streets, standing along the sidewalks bordering canals. Peter’s prize, Russia’s glory. His glory is his shame as well.
The slush and the waste melt together into some spectacle of cold, wet horrors and the children running in the mix it forms with the sand, the snow and the remnants of another life pay no heed to what they have never known. They hold babushka’s brew in their hands and grip it tightly like the life they want.

The eternal unending grey hurts my eyes as I descend. I yearn for the colors of the life I know. Sasha tries constantly to paint them for me, reveling in the stories I tell her, describing to me her pride in Russia. She joins me in the station, her fur-lined face rosy against the cold. Her bright eyes take in the shopping bags I hold in my hands, full of food. We step wordlessly into the wagon, crushed against the black and grey, and the crowd of pallid faces.

Fur collides with my face as I am startled into movement by a woman whose head, topped by a dingy fur hat, has lapsed onto my shoulder in sleep. The musty smell of fur exposed too long to cruel weather envelops me. The metro’s dingy quiet surrounds me but for the silence of the children gazing upon me – upon my face. Fundamentally different from theirs because it has never known what theirs has. Fundamentally different because I ache to know it, to take it; I ache to know why their strength makes them so weak.

Your smile taints mine, I think as Sasha glances, amused, at the woman asleep on my shoulder. I look at pictures of us and the warmth keeps me staring at us, at you. At you – not at your face, but at your past. I fell in love with your life because I could never have it; I fell in love with your suffering because I could play god from the distance between your tears and the lack of mine. No matter how dearly I want them, I do not cry. Though on these dark, cold nights when I sit with you over fake American food and cheap wine to the blur of our voices, my soul cries because it is the only chance. It cries because I am exhausted with your life. And if I am exhausted, how you must feel as you peer down at hands ravaged by the most difficult life I could never imagine and then look over at mine. Yet perhaps it is not my hands you look at, but the guilt plain upon my face. You are Russia’s shame and my vision of glory.

I am compelled to locate myself in this place.

- by Carrie Wolanin, St. Petersburg, Russia

1 St. Petersburg department store and metro stop
2 my Russian host sister, a law student in St. Petersburg
3 ticket collector
4 slush
5 Peter the Great, founder of the city in 1724
6 grandmother
The Spice of Kalamazoo College

The first thing I liked when I came to Kalamazoo College in September was the campus because it is so different from Potsdam University, where I study in Germany. Potsdam University is divided into four parts spread all over town. The main part of the university is located almost within Park Sanssouci and another part in Park Babelsberg, both of which are beautiful. The only advantage of this is that you get to know the town; you don’t get to know many other students very well, though. It’s not like here in “K” College, where almost all the students know each other. I’m really impressed by this kind of community. Everyone cares so much for each other, no matter how well they are acquainted.

Something else that is different here is that you cannot be a very lazy student like you can be in Germany. There, you could graduate and get your degree without sitting down for hours a day. It takes longer if you’re lazy, but nobody really cares about it, at least in public universities. Here you really have to sit down every day to study because college is over after four years. During the first week of school here I was so surprised when I walked through the hallways, looked into other people’s rooms and saw so many of them studying, even on Fridays and Saturdays. I wonder if it’s really just because of these four years, or if it is also due to a different attitude of the students towards graduation and getting a degree. It could also be due to the money that it behind education here, causing students to be very industrious. Up to this point in time, I cannot really say which system I’d prefer. In Germany, higher education will soon be for people who can afford it because the government is cutting the budgets for universities. This would mean that students will have to pay a higher tuition, (in Potsdam I pay approximately $30 per semester) which would be bad for talented poor students. On the other hand, it would reduce the number of students who just study in universities because either they didn’t find a job or they don’t want to work right away after school. That decreases the educational level sometimes.

I was amazed to see that so many students want to learn German, and I hadn’t imagined that I would have so much fun teaching my mother tongue. I hope I’ll meet some of “my” students again when they come to Germany. Actually, I would like to see more “K” students going to Potsdam because it’s simply a wonderful place to live. We have all the historical sites there and a very good pub and club scene. The latter is even better in Berlin, which is so close to Potsdam that you can go there every week. Oh, hey, don’t think I’m not studying in Germany – the courses offered in Potsdam University aren’t that bad!

What I learned to appreciate about Germany in general since I’ve been here is German food and the public transportation system. I haven’t seen much of the United States so far, not even Kalamazoo, because I don’t have a car to go to other places on the weekends and bus service is horrible here. I have the feeling that they only go once an hour.

However, I am really enjoying every second here. Even if I’m running around like crazy on the campus (I live in Crissey and have to climb up the hill several times a day!!), or I’m fed up with reading or writing papers almost every day. I enjoy being away from home so much because it was time for me to get out of Germany and see something different. I was tired of always being in the same places my whole life and tired of studying the way I did. I read about the U.S. so much, but it was only in books. I didn’t have a real connection to it. Here now, I am finding that
connection through new studies and new friends.

– by Juliana Wilth from Potsdam, Germany, on study abroad in Kalamazoo

Neuschwanstein, near Fussen, Germany
by Jennifer Vasas, Bonn, Germany
Ethnic Food

I was never offered French toast during my stay in France. Shocked that it wasn’t consumed daily, I finally mustered up the necessary vocabulary to approach my host family on the matter. When my description of French toast didn’t ring any bells, I took to the kitchen.

The French toast I prepared surely must have rivaled the finest any chef could ever have hoped to make, complete with a dramatic “voila” as the slices of bread achieved a perfect golden shade. I expected cries of “ooh-la-la” and “bravo” and perhaps a few red roses strewn at my feet. What I got were furtive glances at the toasted concoctions and polite smiles as my host family choked down a taste of what I had created. As it turns out, French toast isn’t French at all.

Other inquiries led me to discover similar truths. French bread, for example, is simply called bread in the country where it is a way of life. The same goes for French poodles, French windows, and French kisses, which are just dogs, windows, and smooches. I suppose the same could be said of German Shepherds in Germany and English tea in Great Britain, though I never inquired on the matter.

Talking with my host sister one day, I asked her if she knew how to French braid and demonstrated one on her long brown hair. Holding a mirror up to the back of her head, she said “Oui,” she did know how to do an Egyptian braid.

My definitive test, however, was the French fry question. Surely they had the same name in France!

Standing at a local sandwich shop one midday, I ordered a sandwich and French fries.

“A sandwich and French what?” the man behind the counter asked.

“French fries,” I repeated, clearly enunciating every syllable en francais.

“Oh, you just mean fries?” he said.

I nodded my head, dismayed at my latest discovery, and started making my way to a table in the back of the cramped restaurant. The server stopped me before I was halfway there, though.

“Hey,” he called, “do you want those fries American style?”

“How is that?” I asked.

“You know,” he said, “with the fries inside the sandwich. American style.”

- photograph and prose by Shannon McVay, Clermont-Ferrand, France
Pounding corn at Dienne Dialla, a Peace Corps village.
photo courtesy of Juleen Morford, Dakar, Senegal
Excerpts from a Journal

April 7, 1999

We stepped off the train at about one o’clock in the afternoon, a bit dazed from our lack of sleep, and perhaps even a bit confused. We stood on the platform to the Bahnhof, gaping and trying to search for someone looking for six lost American kids from Kalamazoo. Finally there she was, speaking with a familiar sound . . . English. I thought for sure we’d be bombarded with the German language the minute we arrived in Bonn, but this was the first of many times I would be surprised by the German people. We were taken to the Auslandsamt to be given our housing assignments within minutes of our arrival. Within a half an hour we were dropped off at our assigned Studentinwohnheims and introduced to the international tutors who checked us in. That was something I was a bit unprepared for, and at that moment I felt rather alone and a bit apprehensive about being in the outskirts of an unfamiliar city and country.

May 12, 1999

We are half-way through our program now and feeling more adjusted to our surroundings. It is strange to think that a mere month ago we were all new to Germany. In fact, it is strange to feel this comfortable in a foreign country. We have frequently taken the Zug on trips across Germany. The history here is incredible. It is an unbelievable feeling to actually see so many landmarks. I’m amazed by the mix of old and new in this country.

June 11, 1999

The end is unfortunately here now and we’ll be saying auf wiedersehen. The memories we have made will stay with us. It really does seem like yesterday that I arrived here with no real idea of what to expect. What we all received in return was a fun-filled, historical, and language-packed three months. It is hard to say goodbye to the place that we have called home for some time. Riding the Strassenbahn into town the last time and seeing each stop, I remembered what had taken place there, knowing that I may not have another chance to return. At eight o’clock in the evening we stand again on the platform of the Bahnhof, only this time, we are not strangers. We are Studentin leaving a place we have learned to call our home.

- by Jennifer Vasas, Bonn, Germany
To the French Lover

We wandered the aisles
searching for chicken, not duck, never duck,
I hate duck.
And you would sing me songs
while I claimed my territory on your bed
thinking of all those romantic paths past
poets laid out so well.
There was always something -
the passion, the concern,
the bumps on your shoulders,
Poetry you mastered in any language,
your dark ponytail, the hair that slipped to your face
the candles and the mattress on the floor.
If you let me
I will read all those romantic stories with conviction.
I will buy us a car and we can see
America.
We will conquer the West
follow the roads which make history,
if you can stand it. If there is such a thing as love
I will feed off you until I become fat
and rich,
a delicacy for any table.
I will abandon the Milky Ways
of my youth,
let white wine drip from my mouth,
share yogurt in the midnight hours,
walk foreign streets with a foreign language.
If you can live without duck.

- by Claire Thompson, Strasbourg, France
Finding Purpose in My Journey

Just as Christopher Columbus made his voyage from Spain to America nearly 500 years ago, I embarked on a journey of my own that took me from America to a land that I came to know as “España.” Columbus knew he was looking for a passage to the Indies, yet the purpose of my journey did not become apparent until I had already reached my destination. I brought with me a sense of excitement, trepidation, and curiosity, which later helped me realize the significance of my study abroad experience. During my time in Spain, a broadening of my cultural awareness and a bonding of friendships occurred.

The experience began with all of the “K” students meeting at John F. Kennedy Airport in New York City. We gathered in front of the terminal as we waited out the delay. That is where it all began. A motley group of students, who faintly recognized each other from various classes and activities on the safe and secure campus of Kalamazoo College, began to mesh and realize that everyone was feeling the same type of anxiety in a realm outside of the confines of “K.”

We eventually got to Madrid. We were groggy from the plane ride and we tried to clear our heads a bit, yet everything still seemed hazy. We realized that we had just experienced the first cultural aspect of Spain: “Everyone smokes!” Some people believe that the best way to learn or adjust is to be thrown into the situation and through your survival instinct, you will survive and learn quickly. I guess that’s the philosophy of our director because the moment we arrived, she dropped us off with our host families and then told us to meet at Plaza Mayor at 7:30 (actually 19:30) for Tapas, a traditional custom comparable to bar hopping. I could not believe that she expected us each to learn the transportation system and find a place in a gigantic city that we had only been in for a few hours. Needless to say, we were not all there at 7:30, but we later realized that we were fitting in quite nicely, since punctuality seems to be a lost trait in Spain.

As anyone can imagine being in such an environment forced us all to grow very close to another. There were some lifelong friendships built along this trip. Memories will last forever from Costa del Sol to Barcelona. It was in Barcelona that one of the greatest bonding experiences occurred. It was our first trip that we planned on our own. We bought train tickets to Barcelona and then started to look for reservations. Everything was booked. We could not believe it, and then we
realized that it was a holiday weekend and that everyone in Spain was traveling. Our señoras told us we should just go, and that we should not worry about such things as reservations. I guess they must have thought we were all pretty anal when we made such a fuss about our lack of reservations. Eight of us decided to go anyway. The ensuing experiences of searching all over Barcelona for a hostel and having the time of our lives at a party at the Olympic Plaza became some of the coolest experiences of my life. As we went from Antoni Gaudi’s Sagrada Familia to Pablo Picasso’s museum we encountered every other landmark in Barcelona. During our Barcelona experience, we learned to go with the flow and not let petty things such as reservations stop us from enjoying life; a virtue the Spaniards have perfected.

I cannot fail to mention how our professors made such an impact on our learning and our experience. From Marisa’s weekly Art History classes in the Prado Museum to Carmen’s tedious yet comical grammar classes, we learned a lot about the language and the culture of Spain. Through my time in Spain, I have also made some amazing friendships with “K” students and others. It is such a cool thing to have friends all over the world: in Spain, Holland, and England. We literally became global citizens through our experience. We have learned that many worlds exist outside of our world whether they are Spanish, French, or Dutch and these worlds are different but neither better nor worse than our own. The sights that I have seen have imprinted in my brain a permanent image of the beauty of the people, culture, and the land that represents Spain. I think back and try to see what my study abroad experience has meant for me, but there are things I cannot put into words. However, I do know that the study abroad experience has allowed me to interact with a culture that was once foreign to me. The Spaniards view life a little differently. “While some live in order to work, Spaniards work in order to live.” They take this quote and passionately live according to it. I now have an alternate view on life that I will use to help me overcome obstacles in my future. I learned a new language, and this learning process has given me friends, knowledge, and memories that will last forever.

- by Ken Bark, Madrid, Spain
900 year old Buddhist monastery,
Beijing (top)

*Tian tan, Temple of Heaven* (middle)

*K students on the Badaling section of the Great Wall* (bottom)

by Jessica Scheidt, Beijing, China
In the Metro

I saw a man who held his fist
against his abdomen as if he were hiding
something
in that hand pressed against the place
where his uterus would be. He was flinty and young,
skinny and intent and walked briskly,
cradling a hope that I didn’t dare touch—

Tell me, Jack, do you have the magic beans
in that fist
sheltered from the wind, warm
against the curve of your stomach? Can I buy them
with American dollars? Can I convince you to hand them over to me,
furtively, under the fierce lights of the metro?
Will they take root in this thick grime
and dust coated and recoated on the tile and concrete
and will they grow green
under fluorescent lights, or maybe underbelly albino white,
but will they grow
past the long frightening descent of the escalators
through the lead pipes and bad wires,
through the faulted asphalt, trolleybus cables, past
the yellow and white buildings, the mantle of smog and rain
and planes overhead
to the waiting lucid sun of a strange land? Will you let me whisper
my wish of escape in your frozen ear? My wish to climb
that long albino vine and alight in my living room—
without the tiresome logistics
of planes and school and money—my secret, my longing
to give up?

- by Rachel Collins, St. Petersburg, Russia
When The Beast Is Asleep

It’s eight o’ clock in the morning, and I’ve been up for 3.5 hours already. Had to go watch birds in el parque metropolitana (the metropolitan park).

So I left my house at five earlier this morning, and there’s no one around. I didn’t even have to worry about being hit by cars flying around the rodondo (circle thing instead of stoplight). I was walking down the hill on Colon to 6 de Diciembre to hopefully catch a bus (the ones at my normal stop were almost non-existent). I walked past this Kareoke bar which I’ve passed many times in its inactive hours of the day, and it was still closed, but the red neon sign was glaring, and some dude inside was just belting out the words to a Spanish ballad. It echoed across the street. I’m sure he thought he was the only one around.

Next I passed the children’s hospital where there are always indigenous people standing around during the day, and they were still there, some sleeping, some just standing around in the pre-dawn hours. Over on the corner, other indigenous people were already serving breakfast out of big kettles and baskets to the few who were waiting for busses.

I got on the first bus and was struck for the second time, by the silence of the morning.

Loud buses, with bustling people and the dude that takes the money shouting out destinations.

Vendadores asking if we want Chicle,
Chicle, un mil, chicle, chicle . . .
Comercio, Comercio,
Extra, Extra,
Venga, venga cumbaya, Tumbaco, Pifa . . .
Estadio, Estadio . . .
Chilenos, chilenos, un mil, un mil, chilenos . . .

The bus raced on by the few people and cars on the road, running red lights like I had only seen taxis do. I arrived at the point of departure 15 minutes early, 45 minutes early if you’re on Ecuadorian time. There, my friend Mark is already waiting, another unlucky earlycomer.

But what is this?
He has a frisbee.

“Come on,” he says, “Now’s our only chance to play in the streets!”

So we do until his frisbee bites the big one on a curb, cracking and chipping like I’ve never seen before, yet we continue.
Toss, soooooooaar . . .
Grasp.
Toss, soooooooaar . . .
Grasp.
The next time I catch it, it takes a chunk out of my hand.

But still we play on.
Toss, soooooooaar . . .
Grasp.
Toss, soooooooaar . . .
Grasp.

How peaceful the city is when no one’s around.

- by Katie Kolon, Quito, Ecuador

Young Ecuadorian boy outside of Quito.
by Karen Schieferstein, Quito, Ecuador
In the Eyes of Los Madrileños


Hey, hey, hey American, what’s up with Friends? How are Joey, Phoebe, Monica, Rachel, and Chandler? Do you like Beverly Hills 90210? What happened with Dylan? And Melrose Place . . .what a mess, no? How much do Levis 501’s cost over there in the United States? Is it true that you cannot drink in the United States until you are 21? So what do you do then?

Guadelupe, Spain
by Renee Krieg, Madrid, Spain

Eavesdropping

In Madrid this afternoon, I returned from the Sorrolla Museum by bus. As the vehicle stopped through the Plaza Francisco Goya, fellow passengers turned their heads toward the fussing of a construction crew in the center of the plaza. The crew was carefully mounting the bust of one of Spain’s most renowned painters — Francisco Goya, on a huge slab of cement deeply engraved FRANCISCO GOYA. Sitting across from me was an elderly woman who asked her friend (another elderly woman) sitting beside her, “who is this Goya they are venerating?” Her friend shook her head and answered, “it’s probably some idiot of the government!”

- by Maria Sinanis, Madrid, Spain
Remembering

It was a blue and golden time
of quietness and ocean waves.

More than Greek Philosophy
I have learned to see the sand
sparkle on my skin
and sift slowly through my fingertips.
I hold a million grains in my hand
and watch it stretch for miles.

More than Political Theories in Sociology
I have learned how to be with myself
that aloneness is not lonely,
but that loneliness is huge,
big as continent,
swelling over oceans.

More than Clinical Testing in Psychology
I have learned to measure my worth
in terms of my truth
and the weight of the world
in kilos lifted.

I learned a tactile world of
color and light,
of salt on my lips,
of sand under my fingernails,
of grass beneath my feet,
of water splashing against my thighs,
of sunburn on my skin.

I learned every shade of blue
and the rhythm of the waves.

I learned that hearts can beat slower
and how to live inside a moment.

I learned the freckles on my knee,
the curl of my fingers,
and the curve of my eyes.

I learned the strength of a smile
and the silence in my soul.

But as I trace my quickly–fading tan lines
that speak to me of a different time
I wonder if I can remember what I have learned.

- by Beth Hodgkiss-Lilly, Wollongong, Australia
My encounters with Aboriginal Australians, whether they were students in my tutorial, kids on the train, didge players on Hay street, musicians at Munjah, or the people living in the desert community of Laverton, were some of the most important and challenging experiences I had while in Western Australia. Without exposure to the indigenous culture, I believe that my perception of Australia would have been distressingly shallow. The most powerful of these experiences was when I was in Laverton, a small community on the edge of the Great Sandy Desert. The following is the exact e-mail I wrote to my mother immediately after my "most Australian" of weekends.

SUBJ: the most australian of weekends…
DATE: 8/31/98 2:48:10AM Eastern Daylight Time

Mom, mom! I just got back from my weekend with the Aboriginal community, the Wongatha Wonganarra’s. I do not have words for what I just experienced. I haven’t had the time to find the words, I JUST got back. We flew our Friday afternoon on one of those 12 person airplanes. We flew into the middle of Australia, or so it seemed to me . . . by anyone’s standards, it was definitely “the bush.” The “airport” was just a red dirt strip and a gas tank. Flatsville, mom. Oh, and it is wild flower season—so imagine millions of tiny yellow flowers and the bluest sky you have ever seen . . . that’s the desert.

We stayed in a community of about 250 people, at least half of those people are Aboriginal belonging to the same family more or less. What we saw was at times disturbing, at times astounding, at times beautiful. The first day we were there, we did kind of stinky work. I spent several hours underneath a building cleaning up rubbish, diapers, wine boxes, trash, trash, trash. Others helped at the petrol station and the hospital. There were only eight people employed by the hospital and I think they are all nurses (with doctor skills, one told me) Okay, I really just want to get on with the story.

Overall, the living conditions are bad. Very unsanitary from my super-sanitized American standards. The water is barely drinkable yet the Aboriginal people drink it. There is an alcohol problem too. And a domestic abuse one too I guess. One woman I talked to said that last Christmas every single Aboriginal woman in town was bashed by a husband or other male. She said it wasn’t just a bruised eye here and there but like split skulls and bones . . . very very sad. This picture I’m painting isn’t good I know but it was my first impression. I am running out of time but I HAVE to tell you what we did on Sunday, speaking of being impressed . . .

We drove out into the bush with an Aboriginal family including 20 people, from babies to grandmas, in a caravan of four trucks. I’m talkin’ we be makin’ our own trail. These particular Aboriginal people hunt from their own trucks. Cultural evolution? It was actually one of the most phenomenal things I have seen. We would slow down a bit, the driver would pull his gun off from the dash, stick his head out the window, aim at something I never could see and then shoot. Then the five little Aboriginal boys would jump out from the back and bash it if it wasn’t dead and drag it over to the truck. They fought over who would fling it on to the back. Jerry hit a kangaroo in the neck from at least a hundred feet while it was jumping away. The super sad thing is that it had a joey in its pouch almost big enough to live on its own. The little guy was scared, but Hoped, a five-year-old Aboriginal girl, took it home. I think
she is going to raise it as a pet. They also shot a turkey, a guana, and three more kangaroos . . . it was a bloody day for me . . .

We stopped in a seemingly arbitrary place in the middle of the bush. They prepared the kangaroo in the traditional way, cooked right in the ground. The women made damper, a kind of bread that is cooked in the ashes. Even though there were plenty of reasons not to eat the kanga, i.e. there were flies everywhere, it was still visibly coagulating, there was dirt on it, the baby kangaroo was just meters away taking a nap, and oh yeah, I’m a vegetarian. I had a little piece of it. Are you proud of me? I have to go. This simply was the most incredible weekend.

Love you, Em.

-Gum tree found on a ridge during a safari tour. by Robert Feigal-Stickles, Perth, Australia

- by Emily Van Strien, Perth, Australia
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Front cover photo by Mike Kane; Children selling woven bracelets in a market, Oaxaca, Mexico. Title page photo by Chris Wrobel; Fence in the English countryside outside Lancaster, United Kingdom. Photo on facing page courtesy of Rob Fiegel-Stickles; Wave rock formation in Western Australia. Back cover photo by Mara Cramer; Public footpath in Lancaster, United Kingdom.