# WANDER

Brandeis Abroad Issue III Fall 2012







## Letter From The Editor

### **D**<sup>ear Traveler,</sup>

The journal you hold, *Wander*, is a recounting of your fellow Brandeisians journeys and studies abroad. While Brandeis sits in the city of Waltham, our tendrils reach continents far and wide. This edition of *Wander* will take you to the streets of Madrid where the foibles of cooking stir cultures together. Then, these pages will treat you to a Passover Seder tale of the last Jews of Calcutta. After which, cross the contenents and reach Edinburgh, where women from Italy, France, and the US, find a home in a foreign abode.

My road less traveled was through South India and Sri Lanka this past summer. I taught female high school and college students in subjects from astronomy, photography, to philosophy. While teaching for the Women's Education Project, an NGO, I flew, trained, bussed, and boated to capitals of yesteryear, where temples, natural beauty, vivid hues, street-side chai, and scrumptious dosas (fermented-rice crêpes) flourish.

Our vast wanderings are contained on earth, the only home we have ever known, as Carl Sagan described. Wandering goes back millennia. When the Greeks studied the heavens they took note of several outliers, wandering stars. These celestial beings didn't conform to the usual sky sweeping patterns of their constellational cousins. They traveled and traversed the night skies, exploring the solar system on their own. These *planeta*, or wanderers in Latin, came to be called planets.

Just as we wander near and far, our terra firma (earth) is in constant motion. So too, this journal will elicit one's mind to wander. We hope your inspired mind will take you to the exotic and obscure, with no road but discovery and curiosity to lead the way. As your thoughts float intercontinentally, your feet might find the urge to follow, and a journey will ensue. Just make sure to write!

Bon voyage,

Isaac Steinberg

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By Dan Tassone: Pune, India



### Baw Kaew By Lena Morrison

Class of 2012 Khon Kaen, Thailand

have always thought that I wanted to work with an international NGO in some capacity. While in Thailand, I started questioning this ideology for the first time. During the Land, Food, Dam and Mining units, I have seen the importance of grass-root Thai networks such as the Alternative Agricultural Network and the Thai Land Reform Network in empowering villagers to fight for their human rights. Since this empowerment came from such a grass-roots level with everyone in the organization really dedicated and involved in the issues, I started to question how an international NGO could truly help Thai villagers. The international NGO's I have experience working with provide funding to developing countries, but after seeing the importance of networking, the power in numbers, and the importance of empower-

ing people to fight for their rights, I'm wondering how much money from abroad can really do. Is simply providing funding that effective? How do you know where that money is really going and if it is really helping to empower and enact change? How do international NGO's truly know how to help people when culture, language, and government structures are strikingly different in every country?

For our Community Consultation Unit, I went to Baw Kaew, a protest village in Northeast Thailand, and had the opportunity to ask them questions about the role of international NGO's in their campaigns as well as to further explore these ideas. In the 1960's, the government took over the land of many villages in northern forest regions for commercial use in order to plant and sell eucalyptus trees. Baw



By Kayla Dinces: Bali, Indonesia

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By Ariel Zommer: Qinghai Province, China

Kaew was set up as a protest village composed of people from all of these different villages who had been kicked off their land in invasive and violent ways by the government. After protesting for their land rights for two years, Baw Kaew is finally in the process of obtaining a Community Land Title. Since they are confident in their attainment of land, Baw Kaew has decided to switch their focus towards becoming a truly sustainable community.

Their first step in becoming sustainable is to create a seed bank with the purpose of collecting and distributing local seed varieties that have been lost overtime due to expiration and the government promotion of cash crops. When I asked P'Promot, an NGO, if he had any relationships with international NGOs, he answered that they had a connection with one international NGO called AJWS which is helping them to become more sustainable. I immediately thought of American Jewish World Service, an NGO I have been in connection with in the past. But no, could it be? Could AJWS, headquartered in Washington DC, actually have found and be working with the rural village of Baw Kaew? After the interview, I asked one of the translators to come with me to ask P'Promot what AJWS stood for, and sure

enough P'Promot sounded out "American Jewish World Service" through his thick Thai accent. I immediately asked what exactly AJWS helped with and why he thought their help was valuable. AJWS provides Baw Kaew with the funding for staff and educational activities and helps connect Baw Kaew with other international communities working towards sustainability. Under AJWS's "Fighting Hunger from the Ground Up Campaign," AJWS internationally promotes local food production with a focus on food sovereignty. AJWS is taking two Baw Kaew village members to India in the coming months to network, collaborate, and offer solidarity and support with other international communities' sustainability approaches.

Needless to say, I am ecstatic that an international NGO I am familiar with not only sought out, but is also helping such a hardworking and inspirational community like Baw Kaew move towards their goal of sustainability through promoting local seed varieties. I got to see, first-hand, the important balance of the collaboration between international funding and networks with a grassroots movement that empowers people for the success of a movement like Baw Kaew's.

### A Real Passover Miracle By Sophie Golomb (2nd Prize)

Class of 2013 Calcutta, India

While studying abroad in India for the second semester of my junior year, I have had a number of interesting experiences ranging from challenging to incredible. Some experiences have been frustrating—like the time I spent 20 minutes arguing over a fair price with an auto rickshaw wallah, only to be ripped off when reaching my destination. Some experiences have been educational—like the week I spent in Jaipur learning the traditional technique of Indian miniature painting. Some experiences have been cultural—like the time I learned to cook a range of Indian delicacies. Some have been bonding experiences—like the



**By Sophie Golomb:** Magen David Synagogue, Calcutta, India

time I befriended a group of Bengali monks at a monastery in Bodhgaya. Some experiences have been purely enjoyable—like the afternoon I spent in Khajuraho, biking to and sketching medieval temples. And some have been ironic—like the time I had Delhi Belly while visiting the Museum of Toilets. All of these experiences were foreign; unlike anything I had ever done or seen before. In thinking about my life in India, however, I'm surprised to find that the most amazing experience I have had during my time here has been the experience that was most familiar; the experience that most reminded me of my life at home—attending a Passover seder.

I always knew there were small, but active communities of Jews throughout India. In Delhi, there are a few functioning synagogues, while in Varanasi, there is a Chabad. Although small today, the city of Cochin in Kerala is thought to be the oldest community of Jews, while the largest community is found near Mumbai where there is not only a Chabad, but also a Jewish Community Center (JCC). Naturally, I believed finding a Seder to attend would not be a difficult task. March rolled around and I started to make plans for my Independent Study Project in April. I created a schedule for myself and it was only after I had made travel arrangements for the initial part of my research that I realized I would be in Calcutta on the first night of Passover. Still, I wasn't concerned. If you flip through a Calcutta travel guidebook, you are certain to read that two of the biggest synagogues in the world are actually in Calcutta! I thought I had hit the jackpot of Jewish communities. In my mind, where there



By Dan Tassone: India

is a synagogue, there are Jews. I went right to the Internet. I Googled: "Synagogues in Calcutta?" Nothing. "Functioning synagogues in Calcutta? Passover Seder in Calcutta? Passover in Calcutta? Jews in Calcutta?" Still nothing. It became clear to me then that finding a seder in Calcutta would not be as easy as I had thought. Then something caught my eye on the Google search page. There was an NPR report entitled: "In India, A Struggle To Pass Down Passover." I clicked on the link and listened to the five-minute podcast that aired in 2011. My jaw dropped.

The story featured 81-year-old Flower Silliman, one of the two dozen—that's right, two dozen—Jews remaining in Calcutta, with the youngest being 56 years old. At one time, 5,000 strong, the Jews of Calcutta, who were traders from Iraq and Syria, once filled the enormous synagogues that still exist today. They had schools and hospitals, sports centers and restaurants. The NPR reporter, Sandip Roy, grew up in Calcutta and used to frequent the famous Nahoum and Sons Bakery, where he was conducting his interview, unaware that it was a kosher bakery. Through the years, with the founding of the state of Israel and for various other social and political reasons, the community dwindled. Generally the Jews of Calcutta kept to themselves and never really identified as Indian, despite that there was a time when they were a very vibrant part of the community.

When I came to the close of the NPR report, I had tears in my eyes. I knew what I had to do. I was going to find Flower. I searched for her contact information on the Internet without luck until finally I realized the only way I would reach her was through NPR. I wrote a long comment in the feedback section of the website and left the rest up to fate. At this point I thought, whether or not NPR gets back to me, at least I can say I made the effort.

Two days later. An email appeared in my inbox:

A real Passover miracle. Please phone or e-mail me regarding Passover. Seder will be at the house of Mr. NAHOUM, but I will ask him today regarding a few guests.

Love and Hag Samayeh, Flower Silliman I couldn't believe it. NPR had read my comment and passed it along to Flower Silliman herself. I was going to a Passover Seder. I was going to a Passover Seder in Calcutta. I would be sitting down to Passover Seder in Calcutta with two of the two-dozen Jews remaining in the city.

April 6th rolled around faster than I had expected. That Friday morning, I arrived in Calcutta and immediately phoned Flower for Seder details. She was incredibly pleased to hear from me.

The Seder was more wonderful than I could have ever imagined. Gathered at the table were Flower, Mr. Nahoum of Nahoum and Sons Bakery, his brother visiting from Israel, an Israeli woman who has been staying with Flower while working in Calcutta, a friend from my program, and myself. The Passover Hagaddah, the retelling of the Passover story, was in Arabic and Hebrew. As I would have done at home, I sang the Four Questions, asked by the youngest child at the Seder. The first question never had so much meaning to me. It asks: "Why is this night different from all other nights?" Having grown up in the Ashkenazi tradition, the Iraqi Sephardic traditions were different, while at the same time completely familiar. Flower explained that Sephardic Jews prepare the sweet charosets, which is meant to recall the mud the Israelites used to make adobe bricks when they were enslaved in Ancient Egypt, with dates, not apples. When it was time to make the Hillel sandwiches of matzo and moror (bitter herbs), Mr. Nahoum sat at the head of the table, tossing pieces of matzo to each person, just like my own grandfather had always done at my Seders at home. The meal even accommodated my vegetarian diet for lack of kosher meat in Calcutta. Everything was perfect. Up until that moment, I hadn't felt such a sense of belonging in India, a feeling of being home. It was incredible. Throughout the evening, however, it became clear to me that, while being so warmly invited to share in a Passover Seder in India meant so

much to me, it had immense significance for my hosts. My being there brought a Jewish community to Calcutta that had not existed for nearly 50 years. Mr. Nahoum apologized for not remembering the Seder well—he hadn't conducted a real Seder with a real community in ten years.

With less than a month left of my study abroad program, I know I will leave India with the fondest memories of seeing incredible sites, feasting on the most delicious food, and meeting the most fascinating people. I will never forget all the amazing foreign experiences I had. But I know what will stay with me most was that moment of coming home. That moment of familiarity that forged the strongest connection I have felt to India; that sense of belonging.

The day after the Seder, Flower took my friend and me to see the old synagogues. They are no longer in use, but Mr. Nahoum has vigilantly kept them preserved as pristine Indian Heritage Sites for public viewing. There was once a motion to move the larger of the two synagogues to Israel brick by brick so that it could function again, but Mr. Nahoum and a tiny committee maintain the faith that a Jewish community will exist in Calcutta once again, and when that day comes, they will have a synagogue to pray in. After our tour, Flower made us matzo brie and matzo ball soup for lunch (with coriander in the Indian fashion). We sat and talked for hours. Before we left, she wrote down all my contact information so that she can come visit my home the next time she is in the U.S. I was already feeling so connected to Flower when I learned that she has a son who graduated from Brandeis and now lives with his family in Lexington, MA, and her daughter lives only a few neighborhoods away from my home in Brooklyn, NY. When we left, we thanked Flower profusely for her hospitality. She said, "Please, call me Safta. Everyone does." Safta. Ok! Safta-my grandmother of India.





By Jon Edelstein: Siena, Italy

### A Land Leaves its Mark By Aliza Gans

Class of 2015 Jerusalem, Israel

💽 itting at the cluttered desk in my dorm at Brandeis University, my year in Israel with Masa Israel's Bezalel Experience seems like another world away. My new campus is not inlayed with white Jerusalem stone, there is no Muslim call to prayer several times a day, and the supermarket down the street is frigid with tight aisles of cans and packages—nothing like the open markets of Machaneh Yehudah. I leaf through the pages of my journal from that year, festooned with ticket stubs from Israeli concerts, pressed, dried lavender from street corners in Jerusalem, and my nude sketches from life drawing classes at Bezalel Art Academy. The sights, scents, and sounds of this intoxicating country instantly bombard me.



Prior to last year, I had visited Israel as a tourist many times. However, when I landed last August with one year's-worth of belongings, I understood that this was going to be my home for a while. It was a daunting prospect at first; I would be living in a foreign place for ten months, separated from family and friends by an ocean and many time zones. I was to see a full cycle of seasons, holidays, and celebrations. I was to drink the water, eat the produce, and sketch the scenery of an exotic, holy landscape.

For the first month of my Bezalel Experience, I lived on Dizengoff Street in Tel Aviv in the heart of the city and a 10-minute walk from the shimmering azure Mediterranean Sea. I bonded with 21 other artists on the program who, like me, were committed to a yearlong creative journey. Three weeks of intensive Hebrew ulpan gave me confidence to study the follow-



By Aliza Gans: Israel

ing month at the Bezalel Academy of Art and Design in Jerusalem and to interact with Israelis. I remember beaming with pride after I communicated to a non-English-speaking repairman that the air conditioner was broken, and asked if he'd like a drink to cool down — all in Hebrew.

While ulpan allowed me to adapt

to a new language, the various group trips and expeditions familiarized me with the land. I did most of my best sightseeing from coach bus windows on the way to our various destinations. Along our trip to the North, we visited Ein Hod, an artists' village near Haifa that was ravaged by forest fires in January. As we exited the bus, we smelled the charred earth. Our group spoke with a music box-maker, whose livelihood had been singed by the flames, but he still re-



mained hopeful. He wore a shirt that said, "Keep Your Shin Up." It did not take long for me to realize that, despite its size, Israel's community and Jewish life is more vibrant than anywhere else I have been. I spent Rosh Hashanah at the Heritage House, a small women's hostel in the Old City. After watching the sunset in an unusual hue of gold, I, along with a bunch of girls I met, pulled our mattresses onto the terrace under the night sky. I had never seen stars that bright. I fell asleep smiling.

Another holiday memory takes place at Hadassah Hospital on Mount Scopus, where I volunteered as a visiting art instructor. It was the fourth night of Chanukah, a particularly dreary, rainy December evening, and I had walked to the hospital.

As my volunteer partner and I unloaded our cart of supplies, an old man handed me a bundle of candles and motioned me towards the chanukiah by the windowsill. I lit the candles, the faces of the patients illuminated by a flickering glow. We sang Chanukah songs, kissed, and hugged. I was struck by the sensation of belonging to a group of complete strangers. Here, extraordinary moments are embedded in the fabric of everyday life.

The real locus of my development as an

artist was within the walls of Bezalel. Prior to last year, I had no formal art education. I was an eighteen-year-old, novice artist, sitting among ambitious, post-army, 25-year-olds, dripping with artistic talent. I struggled to use my remedial Hebrew to comprehend lectures on abstract expressionism, glazing techniques, and optics in drawing. However, as the year progressed, I became fluent in the language of art: a universal dialect. I spent late nights in the pottery studio, spinning clods of clay on the wheel to sculpt vases and mugs. My fingertips were constantly blackened from smudging charcoal to shade the silhouettes of nude sketches. My teachers praised my improvement and urged me to push even further. Eventually, every article of clothing I owned became stained, splattered, and smeared. Art had left its mark on me.

In the same way, so has Israel. The smell of turpentine in the studio, streets infested with stray cats, the acerbic Israeli humor, warm potato burekas at the shuk, the olive green uniforms—all of these things are ingrained in my memory. Although I am unsure whether I can ever recreate the experience of living in Israel, it is a place I still call home.



By Ilana Sidorsky: Prague, Czech Republic



### A Literary Snippet From Sicilian Travels By Natalie Janfaza

Class of 2013 Sicily, Italy

**M**y time in Sicily was probably one of the most inspiring, and for such I decided to book-log it. Here's a snippet, for your interest, from my Sicilian makeshift diary:



The Sicilian sun would beat upon me, my bare skin so vulnerable to the sting of the baking sun. Lines of gold shined below like streams of shelter from a shy and salty breeze. The horizon shimmered against the edge of waves that swayed and splashed in layers upon each other, and sparkles bobbed in and out of sight across the broad ocean pastures. Serenity was a silence hummed among us on the Aci Trezza Lido. Eve-



By Natalie Janfaza: Sicily, Italy

ry now and then I would crack open an eye to find the heavy sun still lying down on me, like a blanket that I could be sure would hold me long hours into the evening. And even when it would decide to nap itself and slip below the endless horizon until the next day's wake, it was sure to return strong again, to shine through the split of my rooftop window, and whisper me good morning.

The next daybreak cried itself awake with a pitter-patter of raindrops and sips of wind that pitied them through that same split in my window. The day passed with not much but a usual pass to the salumeria where a grown-to-be-good friend would greet my entrance with his hearty key phrase, "giorno!" You knew with certainty that it came from the heart.

I flipped pages to a cookbook that was gifted to students of our program, finding the form of smiles spread way to a new existence across my face. The pages jumped to me, alive with color and culinary history of Italian cuisine. Tagliatelle, melanzane, photographed with elegance and repose; I could only imagine the pretentiousness of its photo-shoot and picked myself up to go warm some water.

With the blurp blurp of boiling some minutes later and a cup of mint tea sitting tilted at the edge of my lips, the rain began to tatter itself to a beat upon the rooftop, accompanying a faint start of nightly band music playing somewhere far over the rainbow, the dull, almost muffled American tunes somehow seeping themselves through the split, the split almost bribed by their plead to enter. Like the sun, I could certainly count on their re-arrival the following day.



By Jon Edelstein: Siena, Italy

Excursioning myself through the untreated streets preserved of their ancient history, unmanicured but maintained as what they were to be, I stumbled, and literally so, into a little square that hosted a beautiful, secluded trattoria. Tables with patterned tablecloth embodied a simplicity checkered green and white. Serenity sang in a wind that raced to greet the faces of newcomers like eager licks from a clumsy puppy's tongue, a ball of fur and fire trampoleining to a doorbell's resonation. The wind blew a kiss and continued its scurry throughout the piazza, fluttering alive the ends of otherwise neglected tablecloths who, without the wind's course, would be left suspended as victims of gravity.

The sun played peek-a-boo for quite the hour, only to turn itself in to destiny and light the city to life. It crept like a predator over and through buildings, sky lighting every crevice of the city's center. It washed away the darkness that had grown comfortable in the streets, inhabited in the night's break. Slowly but surely it devoured the moon in its entirety and swallowed the stars with an earthly glow, without reserve. The Sicilian sun penetrated the little world that lay at its touch, impenetrable in its quest to be heard by light.

It was the day of what had become for me a weekly regimen-la fiera. Up Via Etnea and descending Via Umberto, I reached the swarms of people, the shouting vendors, and the chaos from which I am now facing withdrawals. The tarp of rugged merchant tents wailed in the wind and bags filled with fresh groceries swung every which way through the streets. Dieci centesimi! Ecco qua! Dialect orchestrated the sound of the streets, vendors - conductors of their work – manipulated traffic their way, and Piazza Duomo was their domain every single Saturday morning. I strolled the last endpart of Corso Vittorio Emanuele as merchants packed away the day's surplus into trunks and folded stands and tucked them deep into their trucks, fastened to safety as the precious cargo pieces that they were.

### An Unexpected Home By Rebecca Sanders

Class of 2013 Paris, France

**B**eing an American in Paris is ambiguous. Some Parisians are absolutely fascinated, while others decide to tell you everything they dislike about the American government. Everyone has an opinion. I was explaining this to my Afghani host mom over dinner one night. I was telling her that it's frustrating that people sometimes blame individual Americans for everything the government does. She responded by saying that she understood because when people learn she's from Afghanistan, she is besieged by a litany of offensive comments. In that moment I was truly inspired. An American and an Afghani were bonding over how others dislike us. Isn't America at war with Afghanistan? Well, there we were, actively not hating each other.

This relationship with my host mom would prove to be vital to the success of my stay in Paris. I had never met anyone from Afghanistan before, and to be honest, I was a little nervous that my relationship with my host family might be a bit awkward since our countries aren't exactly the strongest of allies. On the contrary, my host mom could not have been kinder. She would spontaneously make me crepes for breakfast, bring me fresh fruit while I was studying, provide me with medicine



By Jane Zitomer: Paris, France

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### By Isaac Steinberg: Salvador, Brazil

when I was sick, force bananas and juice boxes into my purse on my way out the door, and generally make it very clear that she was happy to have me there.

One of my favorite parts of studying abroad was meeting people from all over the world. When I decided to study abroad in Paris and live with a host family, did I ever imagine that I would be living with a family from Afghanistan? Not at all. Am I glad it worked out that way? Absolutely. I learned about French culture all the time—at the French university, while walking around the city, and just by living my daily life. But at the same time, I had the opportunity to learn about Afghani culture at home. On the weekends, my host mom would cook Afghani specialties and sometimes talk about her childhood in Afghanistan with her family. Sometimes, we compared words in French, English, and Persian.

When the director of my program was

talking to us during our orientation about our host families, she kept stressing that our relationship with our host family should be one of exchange. I didn't really understand what that meant. I knew she meant that everyone should learn from one another, but it seemed like something very obvious that didn't need to be emphasized as much as it was. But I think I finally understand what my director was talking about. While each individual conversation I have with my host mom doesn't necessarily begin as a learning experience (for example, one night at dinner we spent a fair amount of time swapping stories about times we had been hit on by men on the metro), it all adds up to an understanding of each other's cultures, as well as each other as people. Considering the tense relationship between the United States and Afghanistan, I think it's inspiring that an American and an Afghani can not only be friends but also be each other's family.

### Tortilla Española By Jessica Gokhberg (1st Prize)

Class of 2013 Madrid, Spain

There are currently thousands of international students studying in Madrid, and, obviously, each one of us has had a completely different four months. The whole point of the experience is to find your niche in this loud, wine-filled, llenísima de gente city. For some it's the squatter neighborhood of Lavapies, full of ethnic food and fruit stands. Others prefer the center and its seven-story tall club Kapital, or maybe Gran Vía, the Broadway of Madrid.

Whatever your cup of tea is, I've discovered that Madrid will have it—and will present it to you with a side of fresh olives and chorizo. Once you realize that no, it's not a lisp, and that in Spain 8:00 means 9:40, it's easy to settle right in.

My niche: el barrio Salamanca, living with Laura Rodriguez. Salamanca is what Madrileños would call pijo, or posh. On the scale of pijo-ness, the block I live on is pretty low. My host's family has been living in this three-bedroom apartment since the 1930s, sometimes with eight children all at once and right now just the sixty four year-old Laura and her students.

Across the street and down the block is Pedro (no last name) who sells all the meats and breads to the residents of the neighborhood and has for twenty years. He probably eats as much meat as he sells, so his belly is almost as large as the store itself. Next to him are the Cubans who sell the fruit, then the older Spanish woman who sells the desserts, and so on. Although everyone has known each other for twenty years, every time one person passes another on the street it's all "Venga, hombre! ¿Qué tal la vida?" even though they asked the same questions about Roberto's cousin's wife's uncle whose best friend is moving to Oviedo.

Although the metro system in Madrid is one of the best in the world, I always choose to walk the three kilometers to class, simply to say hello to these shopkeepers. Every morning on the way to class I would pass by them sweeping the leaves off of the sidewalk in front of their stores. Lunch is the most important meal of the day in Spain so I walk home for lunch with Laura and see all the businessmen and -women drinking a beer together, eating a couple tapas before heading home. I walk back in the afternoon at the same time that the parents pick up their little children in uniforms and give them little jamón sandwiches to stave off hunger until the regular 10:00pm dinner. In the evening I see the same shopkeepers greeting every known passerby with the exuberance only a Spaniard could give to a conversation.

My walk is like clockwork: the same women wearing the same fur coats buy the same newspapers from the same convenience stand every day.

Señora Laura Rodriguez, however, knows how to spice up any pijo lifestyle.

When I first met Laura, she regaled me with magnificent stories of Maltan prime ministers and Arabian lovers while simultaneously inhaling an entire pack of cigarettes. She claims to be the ex-stepmother and occasional drinking partner of Nicholas Cage. She was also the wise voice who guided Antonio Banderas into his career in acting two decades ago in a little pueblo outside Madrid. There's also the detail that she is the ex-wife of the grandson of José Ortega y Gasset, the great Spanish liberal philosopher.

My first day with my host was a struggle. I was so nervous about speaking Spanish to real Spaniards that I could barely summon the words "número noventa y un," her house number, to the taxi driver just fifteen minutes before meeting Laura (thankfully my program had given me a slip of paper with the address written on it so I ended up where I needed to be). I'm also lactose intolerant and, at that point, vegetarian so there was, well, nothing she could think of to prepare for me to eat. Our first big lunch together and all we could agree on was red wine; and man, was there a lot of

wine during that lunch.

In a stroke of genius Laura runs into my room and yells "tortilla de patatas!" Tortilla de patatas is a classic Spanish dish, a type of potato-and-egg omelette that tastes better than an olive-skinned, green-eyed tall Spanish man named Nacho. Little

does she know that tortilla de patatas is the reason I came back to study in Spain over any other Spanish-speaking country. What's more, is that she asked me to help her cook it so I can prepare it at home for myself.

My program has a rule that the students are not allowed to use their hosts' kitchens. All of our meals are prepared for us, and that's that. Of course Laura broke the rule my first night. She takes her students to lunch with her ex-marijuana dealers. Why would she follow rules?

I cut two potatoes just the way Laura told me to, mixed in the three eggs, and poured almost a liter of olive oil into the skillet. Laura slowly emptied the mixture into the sizzling oil and turned the heat down to the temperature she knows is perfect from her sixty-plus years of experience. Flipping the tortilla is the art of the dish, though; you can't let one side cook longer than the other, and since one side is still uncooked you have to be careful not to spill any of the yolk. You also don't want to drop the entire tortilla facedown on the floor, which is what happened to my first Spanish tortilla. Laura and I both burst out laughing and immediately the ice has broken.

Even better? Laura just so happens to have an olive-skinned, green-eyed tall Spanish nephew named Nacho who loves to cook. So we mixed all of the ingredients over again and let Señor Hunk flip our tortilla.

I have been living in Madrid, Spain, for almost four months now. Just like anyone

who has, is currently, or will study abroad, I have had an innumerable amount of unique experiences that I would love to share with anyone who would ask. Why do Spaniards not consider jamón to be meat, even if you're a vegetarian, for example? How can Madrileños be so cold that they

need a knee-length, down, winter coat in the middle of October when it's still 50°F out?

The experiences that count, the ones I'll take with me and remember for the rest of my life, are the ones I have with the individuals I met here. I'll always remember the toothless Romanian man that plays the violin three blocks away or the old saxophonist who plays masterfully all the Disney animated movie songs in the Alonso Martínez metro stop. I'm sad that when I return to Brandeis I won't be stopped by every friend and acquaintance I meet on my way to Shiffman to be asked to tell the details of my morning using extravagant gestures that passersby have to dodge. So watch out Brandeis, expect this Madrileña to return in a month with tortilla de patatas in hand and dos besitos to give, making sure you get to class on time, Spanish style.



### Erasmus Language By Claire Arkin (3rd Prize)

Class of 2012 Edinburgh, Scotland

During my sojourn in East Newington Place, Block 5 Flat 4, a new language was born—Erasmus. It is comprised of a series of spasmodic hand gestures, a little French, a little bit of interpretive dance, a lot of English, some imitative noises, a touch of Italian, and a lot of love. What is Erasmus, one might ask? Erasmus is the name of the exchange program that my



By Sadye Sagov: Copenhagen, Denmark

three European flatmates were on, the program that brought us together in our fluorescent-lit, Ikea-ed, plaster-walled apartment. Despite its humble surroundings, Erasmus culture flourished, bringing together an unlikely foursome for a year that would ultimately change our lives.

> Like all other languages, in order to truly grasp its meaning, one must locate its origins. In this case, it all started with one Parisian, one Marseillaise, one Milanese, and one New Jerseyite. Clemence grew up in a suburb of Paris, and, although none of us would admit it, we were all slightly intimidated by her sultry cat eyes and Parisian poise. However, this all changed when we had her do an impression of a clapping seal over a few glasses of red wine. She was our intelligent little space-cadet, our mother, and, for various reasons, our Wonder Woman. Then there was Juliette, our charismatic thespian whose dramatic hand gestures and soulful shower serenades were instantly endearing, but whose smile was one of the kindest we had ever seen, and who emanated warmth from the red blouses that she wore almost daily. Giulia was our little Italian charmer. We liked to joke that her blood was made of tomato sauce and her veins of spaghetti, but we all knew that there was much more to Giulia than that—a refreshing personality, but more importantly, an aura of comfort and generosity.

> > Then there was me, the wide-



By Audrey Stout: Chateau de Chillon, Montreux, Switzerland

eyed member of Britain's ex-colony, tiptoeing into European territory like an elephant in point-shoes. I remember my first encounter with the girls, all three clad in tailored pea coats and high-heeled boots, each with a cigarette dangling carelessly from between her fingers, dotting the "i" of a perfectly constructed image. I approached them cautiously, an apologetic American eager to break the unflattering stereotype branded upon her and warm herself in the glow of their European grandeur. But, of course, I experienced much more than red wine, cigarettes, and striped shirts. At first it seemed as though we were from different planets. But on closer inspection we found that we were more similar than we could imagine. We were all artists, idealists, dreamers, thinkers, gourmets, jokers, fun-lovers, rebels, eccentrics, lovers, lovers of life. We all were here for similar reasons: curiosity, discontent, introspection, boredom, fantasy, fear, hope, escape, escape, escape.

We burst into East Newington Place like conquistadors, eager to chart out our own territory, a life truly our own. When we stumbled upon one another, we knew that Block 5, Flat 4 was our new world, but more importantly, our new home. There were the landmark territories that we charted—that one night where we all had too much red wine and talked 'til the wee hours of the morning, the infamous run-ins with the toaster oven, the 3 am picnic in the private garden that we broke into with a screwdriver, the adoption of our cat, Haggis, the fancy meals served with plastic silverware, the night I got a black eye, Clemence got a stalker, Giulia got bangs, and Juliette got a lesbian tango dancer. In this newly discovered place, Erasmus was our commonality, our difference, and above all, our sisterhood. Here's to the ladies of East Newington Place—amour, amore, love.



### "¿Que es Cosmovisión?" By Kapri Kreps

Class of 2013 Arica, Chile

### "¿Que es cosmovisión?"

Sitting on a bright turquoise tour bus, amid various winding rides up through the mountains, I inquired as to this Aymaran belief. Truly, I could not wrap my mind around the concept: "What is cosmovision?"

For the time being, I let the question slip my mind, more preoccupied by the obvious changes in my surroundings and in my body. As we crawled further and further up into the spectacular heights of the mountains, the world covered in sand I had grown accustomed to during my time in Arica, Chile, was slowly replaced by unique vegetation, valleys of green and blue, and breathtaking views. My body felt the change in altitude, especially my ears. The human body is a remarkable thing, alerting you of changes your eyes may not see.

After having spent the past month stationed in the tranquil city of Arica, Chile, which had become my home away from home, I could not be more thrilled for this excursion and exciting change of pace; four days in the pueblo of Putre. The capital of the Parinacota Province in the Arica-Parinacota region of Chile, Putre is home to about 1,200 people, in particular the Aymara, an indigenous population of northern Chile. The altitude of this area is approximately 3,500 meters which translates to nearly 11,500 feet above sea level.

Following the four-hour journey, full of stops to take in the surrounding views and in an attempt to acclimate all of us to the altitude change, I could finally see the entirety of Putre from high above on the mountain road. I marveled at its location; nestled in a valley of mountains, with the majestic Andes, the twin brother's peaks standing tall in the background. It was a scene of utter, majestic beauty. I felt invigorated, excited, and splendid! That is, until the effects of the altitude kicked in a bit more. Feeling a bit light-headed, I opted to get some oxygen at the medical clinic located in the center of the pueblo. We had a few other students feel unwell, including one briefly passing out, but by that night and especially the second day, we were none worse for wear.

During my time in Putre, our program met with local medical professionals in the area, taking a tour of the CESFAM there (the name of the medical clinic, an acronym in Spanish, standing for its emphasis on family and integrative medicine), and attending classes with individuals deeply involved in the medical community. In doing this, I truly began to grasp the health system implemented there and throughout Chile, known as "La Red." As many Aymara and individuals in the area practice "medicina tradicional" or traditional medicine, The Red attempts to merge this system with "medicina occidental" or occidental medicine; it is an effort of intercultural-ism and respect. However, laws now forbid an Aymaran woman from giving birth at home with traditional practices in Putre; she must travel to nearby Arica to give birth in a hospital there. While some still give birth at home, it is becoming more and more rare, and is technically illegal. Just one of many examples in which an "intercultural" approach does not hold true for these people.

In the Aymaran culture, it is tradition to utilize a "paterna," the Aymaran word for midwife. During a special class with a paterna native to Putre, I had the incredible opportunity to learn about her birthing practices. She arrived with a bag overflowing with traditional herbs she had picked herself in the surrounding hills. In juxtaposition to a world I have known full of sonograms and pre-natal tests, to watch an individual utilize traditions hundreds of years old, was fascinating. For example, to ensure a baby will not be born with a cord around its neck, it is tradition to wrap a string around the mother's foot and have her slowly pull it upwards and off.



By Kapri Kreps: Arica, Chile

Within the Aymaran population, perhaps the most honed medical position is that of the yatire, or medicine man (and in some cases, a medicine woman). In Putre, I also had the opportunity to take a class with a yatire. As both a medicinal and spiritual healer, the yatire utilizes herbs and traditional communication with spirits of the earth. In addition, he or she must know how to read Coca leaves to determine health outcomes, the one quality in which a yatire cannot be taught but must know inherently.

The connection between an individual and nature does not end with the yatire or paterna. All individuals follow this approach, and "cosmovisión." Finally, on my last day in the pueblo, I began to understand this multifaceted approach to life and emphasis in which the Ayamaran place on the surrounding world. Amongst other things, cosmovision is maintaining a balance between all living things, and respecting all aspects of the world, which we share.

Before I left Putre, I took a hike amongst the hills bordering the outskirts of the pueblo. Due to the altitude, it was more of a stroll, so as not to tire too much. On a winding dirt path somewhere out in the most isolated piece of land I have ever discovered, I stopped to take in all of the natural beauty around me: the Andes mountains looming majestically in the background, the rolling hills covered in newfound flowers and fauna, and the small pueblo behind me, home to the Aymara. Sometimes in the United States, I believe we get far too caught up in our own lives, our grades in classes, the latest technological item on the market...but the Aymara, they just might have been the happiest people I have ever met, living off the land in a life full of connections to the surrounding world. As I prepared to turn around and head back to the pueblo, I felt it. The pulse of nature all around me, the life force of this spectacular place. For a brief moment, I too was a part of this grand scheme of cosmovision.

We go abroad looking for adventure, to explore the world, collect new experiences and meet new people, and even to take a muchneeded break from the traditional tests and papers that comprise our education in the United States. However, if we allow ourselves, what we find along our journey can be truly spectacular; it can change the way we perceive the world. In Putre, I unknowingly stumbled upon a small speck of life force and spirituality in its purest form.

"¿Que es cosmovisión?" It is everything

### No Alcohol, Not Even Vodka By Kevin Monk

Class of 2013 Quito, Ecuador

imagine that you're currently reading this issue of Wander looking for articles that show how a student was personally and intimately affected by his time abroad. As a student abroad, it is impossible not to become inundated with your host country's culture as it changes the very core of your being. It is possible, however, to be unable to write, eloquently and accurately, how you have been changed by the experience. I am sure that in this very issue of Wander there are myriad articles that explain how a student left the states as a wideeyed gringo (or whatever epithets we encounter) only to become an integral part of the community that was his home for the semester. This is not one of those articles because I simply cannot describe my experiences in this manner; instead, I'm going to tell you how Ecuadorians just don't understand the concept of alcoholic abstinence.

For my program in Ecuador, we were fortunate to travel on three different weeklong excursions, one of which was to the famed Galápagos Archipelago. As a budding scientist, I learned a thousand and one different concepts while encountering some of the best experiences of my life. Though my parents didn't have enough foresight to have me exactly 21 years before I visited the islands, the parents of my classmate Corey did. In the United States, 21 marks the age at which we can finally drink in public without fear of being denied service or, worse, losing our fake IDs. For this reason, we typically get hammered on our 7665th day of life. Though this age does not carry the same salience in Ecuador, Ecuadorians still understand that alcohol is good, and will take any

birthday as an excuse to get drunk. Using her birthday as a reason to see the nightlife on the island, several of us went to Bar Iguana Point, partly because of the flashing lights but mostly because it was the only bar that we could find. After a little while of just hanging at the bar on the beach, the birthday girl and her host-sister left to look at the stars. While they were gone, the bartender came over with a shot of the finest tequila and began to ask for the birthday girl.

I suppose I should stop the story here for a moment and mention that Corey does not drink alcohol because of her religious beliefs. Seguimos: "Where is the birthday girl?" asks the man with tequila. "Oh she's actually gone for the moment" we respond. "Ah, not a problem, I'll leave this shot of tequila here for her," he informs us as he begins to place the glass at her recently vacated seat. "That's so nice of you, but she doesn't drink alcohol" we protest. "Excuse me? She doesn't drink alcohol?" he asks, in disbelief. "You silly foreigners with your simple grasp of the Spanish language—surely she drinks alcohol, everyone drinks alcohol." Granted, he didn't say this last part explicitly, but it was heavily implied. "No, no, we know what we're saying. She. Doesn't. Drink. Alcohol." By this point he had a look of consternation and incredulousness on his face as if we had just told him that the moon sun had just exploded. "Alright, alright no tequila, I understand. How about vodka? Everyone loves vodka." "That's true, vodka's great," we tell him to reassure him that his offers are not falling on ungrateful hands, "but she really doesn't drink alcohol." "No vodka, no tequila...what the hell



### By Kevin Monk: Quito, Ecuador

does she drink?!" He is now slightly frustrated, not at anyone, but at the sheer unlikelihood of the situation. "Anything without alcohol. Juice, milk, water; if it's without alcohol, it's fair game." "So no vodka?"

Though this back-and-forth (and-backand-forth-and-back-and-forth) continued, by now you know the gist of our predicament. Eventually he left the table, scratching his head, just as Corey returned from her stargazing. We related the story to her, and laughed over the cultural differences. And then the bartender returned with a martini glass. "So you're the girl that doesn't drink alcohol. Here's another drink." Corey, unsure of how to respond, but showing gratitude to our benefactor replies, "um...Thanks?" As she stares at the drink for a while, the bartender can't help but ask just one more time, "No alcohol? None? No tequila, vodka, gin? Nothing?" "That's right. I don't drink alcohol." Now everyone is in disbelief: the bartender can't imagine meeting such a person, and we're staring at the martini glass in front of Corey thinking, "How much more explicit could we be than NO alcohol?" It's only then that we realize that the martini glass is full of ice-cold

milk and there's a pile of cocoa powder resting in the middle. We laugh at the misunderstanding and Corey starts on her birthday drink. She immediately stops, however, and begs the bartender off. "Guys, this has alcohol in it," she informs us. "What?! No. He clearly knows that you DON'T drink alcohol." We begin to debate whether or not he really understood as we pass around the "chocolate" milk. Half of us side with Corey and are convinced that the drink does contain at least some alcohol, and the other half of us contend that it's just a really strong cocoa taste. Personally, I want to think that there was alcohol hidden inside as if the bartender, while relating the story to another client, realized that Corey doesn't drink alcohol because she's never tried alcohol. Because of this, it's his responsibility—nay, his obligation—to show her the wonders of alcohol.

I think this story is a great way to describe the Ecuadorian culture; they are incredibly generous, even to the point of being dangerously so. They will convince you to follow through with their "suggestions" even if it means sneaking you a shot of Kahlua in your birthday chocolate milk.

### Quito, Ecuador

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#### Arica, Chile

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Arica, Chile

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Erasmus Language (pg. 27)

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An Unexpected Home (pg. 23) Rebecca Sanders rsanders@brandeis.edu Major: Psychology Minors: French and Francophone Anthropology Hometown: River Edge, NJ Program Abroad. Academic Progr

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Sicily, Italy A Literary Snippet From Sicilian Travels (pg. 21) Natalie Janfaza Majors: Italian Studies & Anthropology Minors: Economics, Business Hometown: Los Angeles, CA Program Abroad: IES and CET

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### Jerusalem, Israel A Land Leaves its Mark (pg. 17)

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