

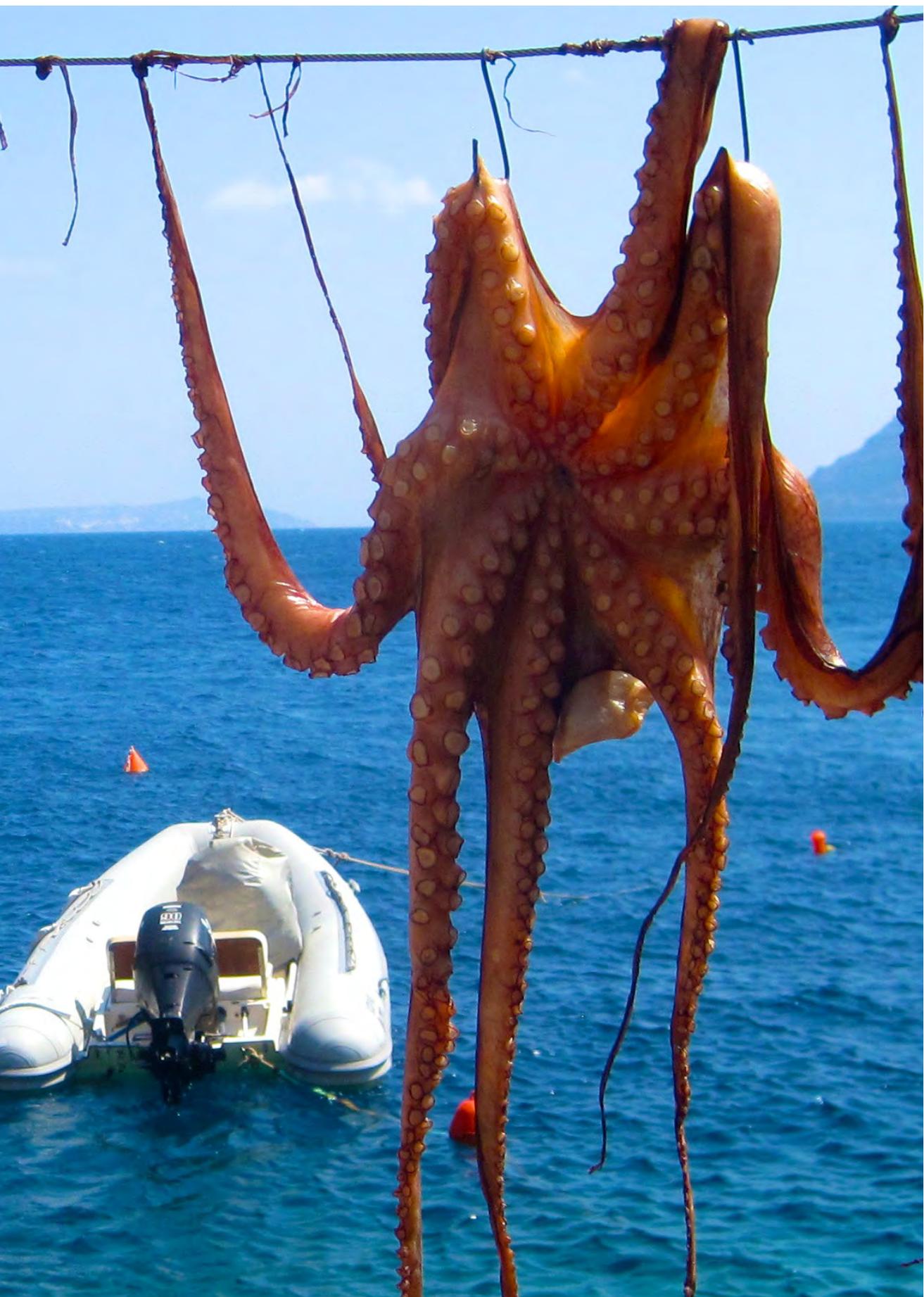
WANDER

Brandeis Abroad

Issue V
Fall 2013



Wander: Brandeis Abroad



“When he approaches the light his eyes will be dazzled, and he will not be able to see anything at all of what are now called realities.”

-Plato
Allegory of the Cave



Letter From The Editor



Dear Traveler,

These pages span the time, distance, and existence of your colleagues' continental recountings. Swim in Balinese culture as you decontextualize in the Island lifestyle (page 33). Ripple through Western European cities of grandeur (page 19). Explore perspective as you shuttle across Argentina (page 11).

The context-bound self shatters in uncertainty and greenery of new places. Our bodily boundaries and sense of self, flow into their environment. As settings change, our identity incorporates its cultural surrounding. To fully open your mind, you have to become a locational sponge and live in the here and now. The now is taken care of but we can choose here and direct where.

To wander is to flux and move across a landscape. Its very nature is that of impermanence. The ephemeral nature of travel is both its flaw and beauty. A change of place over the span of time can illuminate the vibrancy and diversity of the world, but it also constrains our interaction with the locale as we move on to our next destination. To fully imbue ourselves in a culture we must forgo travel and be there.

When traveling, boundaries are broken. You see things as they are and progress things that are not yet. It is in its constant change and unpredictability and that travel fosters experience and leads to discovery. So go, be, sense, and travel wherever you are in life.

Selamat jalan (Good travels),

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read 'Isaac'.

Isaac Steinberg '15

Isaac Steinberg

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With Support From:

Brandeis Office of Study Abroad
The Student Union and the Finance Board

Special Thanks:

Allyson Goose, Office of Study Abroad
Alisha Cardwell, Office of Study Abroad
J. Scott Van Der Meid, Office of Study Abroad
&
To all who submitted entries!



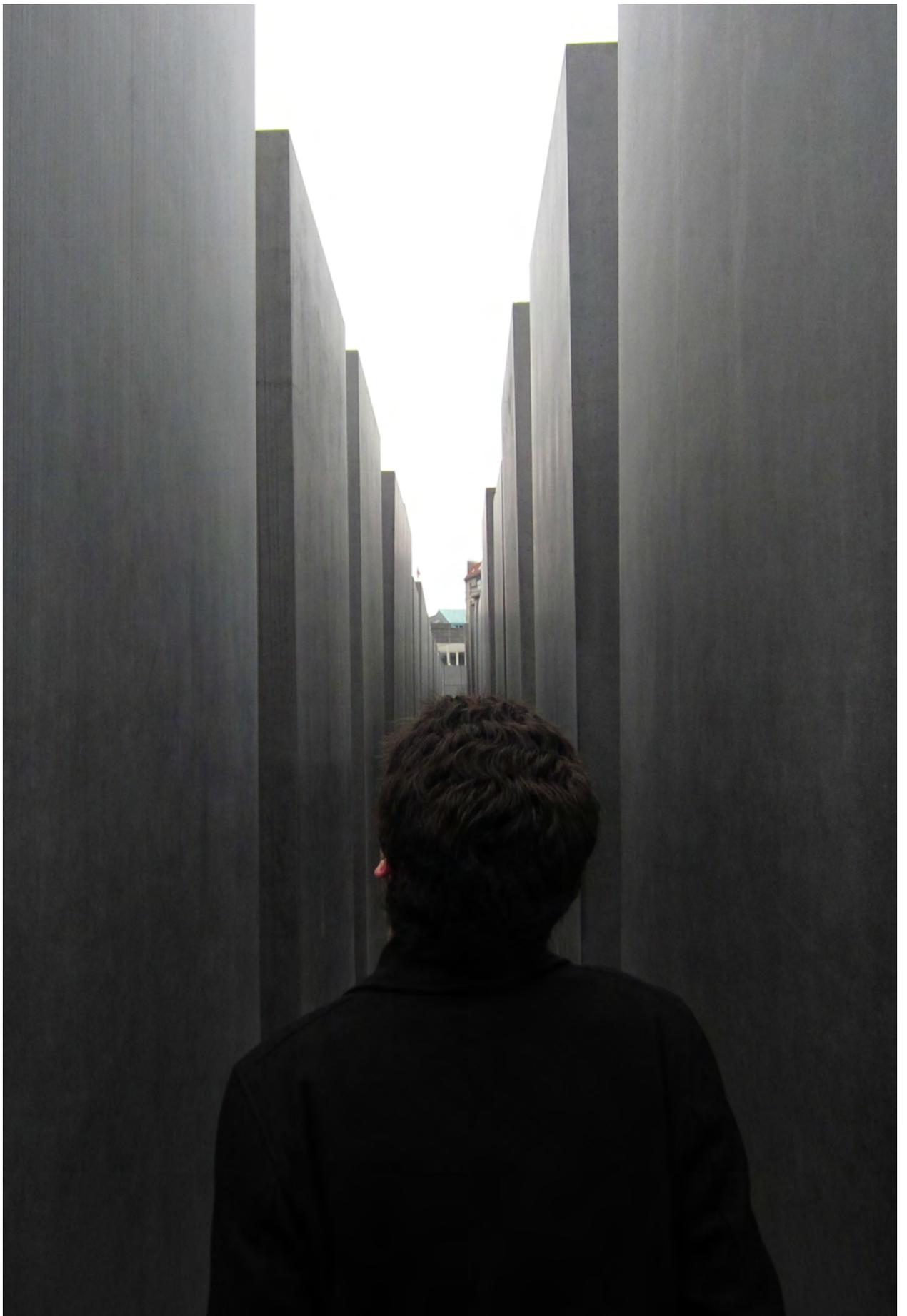


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Cover Photo: *Ben Udo: Inle, Myanmar (1st Prize)* Cover Design: *Isaac Steinberg*
Inside Cover: *Haemee Kang Santorini, Greece*
Opposite Editor Listing: *Marlee Rosenthal Pune, India*
Opposite Letter From The Editor: *Isaac Steinberg: Mt. Fuji, Japan*
Opposite Table Of Contents: *Mia Katan Berlin, Germany: Holocaust Memorial*



Mia Katan *Amsterdam, Netherlands* (2nd Prize)



Fighting Complacency

By Sam Terris

*Class of 2014
Buenos Aires, Argentina*

It had only been a week. But when traveling and without shower, a week could just as well be a month. For either way, the dirt pervades your skin so uniformly that you are satisfied with your new and dark complexion. So, fuck sun tanning; rub some dirt on it and you'll be bronze and beautiful. And now forever "rub some dirt on it" is freed away from its rugged and masculine nuance.

Following a 22-hour bus ride from Junín, Patagonia up to Buenos Aires, I reluctantly stepped into another means of transportation. Annie, Maddie and I live the closest so we split a cab. We were weary—my scraggly beard felt like the lowest-grade wool sweater, driving my face into a frenzy. Annie, bloated and anxious, hadn't shit in three days. Maddie, who had finally found home in the bucolic Chiquiliquean, was wildly depressed upon our return to the overheated and overcrowded city. More than anything, we all just wanted a shower and a nap and some privacy—all which had been entirely absent for the previous seven days.

The cab driver, to our dismay, was not awed by our 22-hour ride. The apathy of our endless journey meant fervent discussion about anything and everything else. Reference points in BA, historical synopses of his favorite Coup d'états, Easter. We turned, giving each other those "why us?" and "this guy needs to pipe down" eye-rolls we all know too well.

Our curt responses were soon reduced to absolute silence. The cab remained this way, mute, as we pulled up to Annie and Maddie's respective apartments. As we set off toward mine, the cab driver asked me where we

were all from. Perfect, I thought—wait until the girls hear about how he talked his mouth off yet again. I replied and he was surprised, Australia, he had thought. And then I was half-listening, for I had heard it all before—he has family (daughter and son-in-law) now living in Miami and he travels there once a year and the locals don't sound like we do and so on and so forth. But then he said something that caught my attention.

Matías spoke in Spanish so I roughly took it to mean something like this. Language is like a stone thrown into the ocean. In original form, it is blockish and rigid. Slowly, water and minerals and sediment eat away at the rock like macrobiotic sandpaper until the edges are smooth. Rocks in their initial form align with the speech of the affluent. Here words are crisp, treated with acute delicacy and noticeably segregated. While in impoverished communities, words are filed down to stubs, meshed together and stripped of all rigidity, distinctness.

Conceptually, it wasn't some profound observation that led me along to any semblance of Eureka moment. No, the topic was irrelevant altogether. It was his cadence and passive delivery of this poetry that slapped me in the face. There is of course an open-mind morality lesson here. We (I) had wrote this cab driver off immediately just for being a cab driver. Stereotyping, dehumanizing him in accordance with his job title—etc etc all ways of saying the same thing. But equally poignant to my experience here was how quickly I had succumb to complacency.

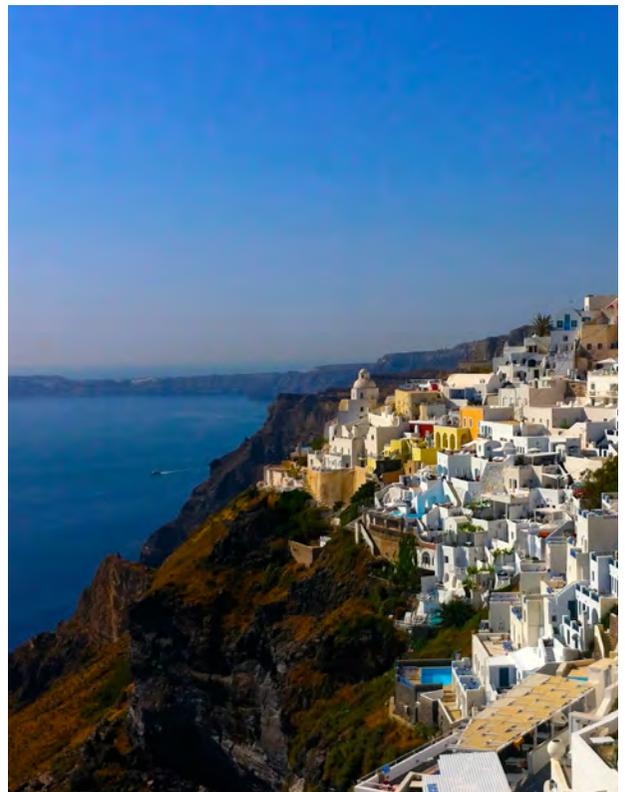
It felt like just another cab ride to my apartment. There can't be "just another" any-



Alisa Partlan *Lima, Peru*

thing while I'm here. It is easy to blame our in-souciance on a long bus ride, or a week of traveling, but that is the recipe for stagnancy.

While on this surreal opportunity, each event needs to be recognized as its own. Matías was a philosophy teacher before the school he worked at shutdown, as did seemingly everything in wake of the economic crisis in 2001. I spent 20 minutes with him parked by my place as he spoke in great (and only now appreciated) detail about his forthcoming book about proportionate reality. If I can access a greater level of awareness and presence, hopefully there won't be "just another" anything regardless of where I am—school, home or abroad. **W**



Alexandra Cottrell *Athens, Greece*

Talking to Strangers

By Mia Katan

*Class of 2015
Brandeis in the Hague, The Netherlands*

My children will talk to strangers. In fact, strangers are the best possible people to engage in conversation. Each individual and conversation holds unlimited possibilities. With a stranger you never discuss how your day was or what you ate for lunch, especially backpackers, hostel goers, and mountain climbers. There are always far better things at hand to discuss.

There were the three Australian girls who you meet on an eight-hour bus ride to Croatia who tell you about the time they accidentally hitchhiked from Brussels to Italy with Mormons. Then the Harvard psychology grad student who dances with you to Scottish music in the streets of Split to compare with the University of Rochester Engineering professor who tells you about his time in the Navy while you climb a mountain. Despite traveling alone, I have never actually been alone. I have only made myself available to the limitless possible conversations and the endless fascinating individuals who surround me.

There were the three American college

grads who brought medicine to my tent outside Venice when I was sick and the two girls from New Jersey who made the guards at St. Peter's Basilica laugh. It's these fleeting connections with fellow travelers that remind me of all the amazing types of people which make up this big world. These temporary attachments reassert my belief in the goodness of others and our inherent desire to understand.

Yes, backpackers are probably more friendly and open to new people and ideas than your Average Joe. We are, after all, chasing newness. We are seeking fresh perspectives and actively breaking down our preconceived notions of the world. But aren't we all travelers? Isn't backpacking just exaggerated living? Going new places, meeting new people, learning new things ... only faster. Why should learning about our fellow human beings be limited to young travelers with full bags and empty pockets? Strangers will remind you that life isn't limited to yours and that people aren't limited to the ones you know.

So talk to strangers, it's good for you. **W**



Mia Katan *Keukenhof, Netherlands*



Lindsey Weiss Bariloche, Argentina



Top: Lindsey Weiss *Temuco, Chile*
Bottom: Rachel Benjamin *Bath, England*



Piacere Perugia

(Nice to Meet You, Perugia)

By Haemee Kang

*Class of 2015
Perugia, Italy*

I was terrified my plane ride to Italy would be my last— and that is not hyperbole. A little before landing, we hit brief turbulence. I just shut my eyes, gripped the armrests ‘til my knuckles shone white, and prayed under my breath. Safe landing prompted a smattering of applause for the pilot, for the weather conditions, for the many prayers answered, and for living to experience authentic Italian pasta.

Since that pleasant experience, over a week has passed. The first three days, altitude sickness, along with jetlag, nerves, and a new diet played games with my appetite. Enjoying even the smallest morsel was difficult. But my first Sunday in Perugia was a table turner.

Some twelve friends and I went to dinner at Ristorante del Sole. We had made plans to dine there when we first took a walking tour of Perugia— the view from the cliff upon which it sits is simply astonishing. Rolling green hills in the distance separated from the sky by dark mountains, the town covering the expanse between the hills and the viewer. Our table, positioned perpendicular to the all-glass walls,

allowed us to take in this view as we dined in the diminishing glow of the sunset. An unforgettable sight.

As our server took down everyone else’s orders, I frantically flicked through my Baron’s Italian at a Glance phrasebook to figure out how to say, “I have terrible nausea and my stomach hurts. What can I order that will be gentle enough?” I got as far as looking up “I don’t feel well” (*Non mi sento bene.*) and “a stomachache” (*un mal di stomaco*) when he got around to me.

Sheepishly, I stammered through the unfamiliar words that echoed vaguely of Spanish, my better-known language, as I peered up from my language bible. As soon as he saw that little book in my hands, he— and the rest of my table— burst into laughter. He literally threw back his head, his previously slightly serious expression scattered into a collage of middle-aged wrinkles and laugh lines, eyes twinkling with amusement.

With the help of my friend Sam’s translations (I like to think rubbing my belly and



Patricia Amselem *Saint Petersburg, Russia*



Alexandra Cottrell *Athens, Greece*

frowning helped to convey the message), God bless that man, he figured out my needs and brought out pasta with oil and truffles.

The hospitality at Ristorante del Sole was similar to how a friend's mother would happily receive you into her home for dinner: welcoming, accommodating, and truly concerned about your experience. This reception includes serving good food, making sure you enjoy it, and allowing you ample time to enjoy the meal at your own pace. As I ate my meal, our server came around again to check up on me. He then proceeded to tell me he is a "doctor" and poured extra olive oil on my pasta. My Sicilian friend told me that Italians sometimes think that olive oil is the cure to all. I was reminded of how Koreans think that eating kimchi (a popular side dish consisted of fermented, spiced cabbage eaten with each meal) makes us invincible.

The dish itself was absolutely delicious

and I devoured 90% of the serving. And though it's far from standard in Italy, I took the rest home— I gave myself a free pass for breaking this Italian custom, since I was sick and unable to fully enjoy the meal. I then took my leftovers to Dempsey's Bar by the main square. Italians there poked fun asking what I had brought to eat and if I had eaten dinner that night. Perhaps I should have just eaten everything in one sitting. But I felt no shame! The waiter was right about the olive oil. My appetite returned to normal within the next two days. **W**



Amsterdam

By Mia Katan

*Class of 2015
Brandeis in the Hague, The Netherlands*



I lose you in starry skies and red lights.

Maastricht

I look for you among medieval madmen dancing through the streets.

Delft

I stop to catch my breath between stained glass and cobbled corners.

Berlin

You are far from this cold concrete world.

Utrecht

And the dancehall organs play a one-woman waltz.

Leiden

The canals make a clean cut and I breath the morning air.





Charlotte Erb *Paris, France*

Returning Home

By Damiana Andonova (3rd Prize)

*Class of 2015
Blageovgrad, Bulgaria*

What is it like to walk on soil of a country you haven't lived in for about a dozen years? What is it like to rediscover your native land, a place of birth that is stamped on your passport, a country whose tongue you speak in a noticeable English accent? What is it like to spend a dozen years reconstructing childhood memories only to have them dismantled with a two-month visit for a medical internship?



Visiting Bulgaria for my Sorensen Fellowship, I had these exact thoughts. Arriving in Sofia, I saw what it meant to see a country rise up from the cracks of Post- Communist concrete buildings. I did not remember Bulgaria like this at all.

I remembered sun dripping over kiwi and grape vine leaves. I remembered a highway. I remembered a river.

But on the 140-kilometer drive back to Kresna, nearly a dozen years after I left, the stark beauty of the landscape overwhelmed me to the point that no tears and no words could express the heaviness that filled my chest.

My daily commute to my obstetrics internship in a nearby hospital was a 40-kilometer bus ride paralleling the Struma River, which passes through the Kresnian Defile. Awestruck, I thought of the history written in the rock formations. I thought of the many years of weathering and erosion that must have taken place to make every passerby's commute a scenic adventure.

While working in the obstetrics hospital often left me emotionally burnt out, I forgot about these struggles on the weekends, when my grandparents and relatives would act as tour guides as I attempted to reconstruct ownership of my birthplace.



On those weekends, I forgot about being a 19 year old pre-med from Brandeis on an obstetrics internship, and I focused on being the estranged citizen, the granddaughter whose long awaited return finally had arrived. I focused on how it felt to walk, sometimes barefoot, on the soil that I had once called home.



With every road-trip, I felt more and more estranged. Memories came undone. Memories felt cheated as I built new ones from the ground up. I felt ill at ease to realize just how different every couple kilometers of land were from one another.

At the hospital while bonding with babies, a NICU nurse repeatedly asked me if I was ever going to return to Bulgaria. She pointedly asked me whether I suffered from nostalgia, and whether I would one day learn to love Bulgaria...

I had lost myself in the forests, mountaintops, waterfalls, and towns of Southwestern Bulgaria.



I had wandered around, holding the arms of the people that raised me as a child. I traveled to construct memories and feasted my eyes on my birthplace as it is now.

I had a swarm of butterflies welcome me home. At one point, I literally touched clouds with my grandfather.



As I caressed a newborn in the NICU, I gently smiled at the nurse that looked at me, awestruck that someone could spend such a long time away from Bulgaria. I told her, “I know what you mean. There’s too much to leave behind. I think I’ll come back again in fear that I might forget.” I had a feeling she knew exactly what I was afraid I’d forget and so she smiled at me, satisfied with my answer. In her mind, there was no chance I would forget. **W**





Rachel Benjamin *London, United Kingdom*



Sofia Retta *Edinburgh, United Kingdom*

White Nights in Saint Petersburg

By Patricia Amselem

*Class of 2014
Saint Petersburg, Russia*

It's summer in Saint Petersburg, Russia. One of the best seasons for this city, known for its grayish and cold weather throughout the year. Because of its northern location, during the month of June up to mid-July, Saint Petersburg becomes the stage to a festival of white nights. As its name implies, white nights are nights in which the sky does not grow dark but is instead bathed in an all night glow. On those nights, the sun does not completely descend below the horizon. Thus, it is the perfect time of the year to wander around the city all night long, get lost, and then find your way by following canals and people to the most refined corners of the city.

Saint Petersburg is Russia's cultural capital and one of the most beautiful cities in the world. It is sometimes called the "Venice of the North" because of the multiple canals that run through the town. The city center with its historic skyline is in fact a UNESCO World Heritage site. The city was founded in 1703 by Peter the Great as an "open window" to Western Europe, given its similarities to other European cities, its neoclassical and baroque architecture. Its beauties and mysteries have given inspiration to many writers and poets, such as Pushkin and Gogol, and continue to inspire many more. During those nights, the streets are always crowded with joyous people, couples in love, and friends on a night out.

While there, I liked taking advantage of the white nights by going out with friends to visit different landmarks of the city. Our impressions of the city always changed at night. It was not only the lighting that changed, it was also the people and their whereabouts. While

they rushed through the streets to get to work during the day, at night people took their time and enjoyed a peaceful walk around the city. Saint Petersburg offers many attractions in the summer, both for its inhabitants and for its tourists. One night, my friends and I experienced an open-air opera inside Peter and Paul's Fortress. The famous opera by Goethe, Faust, was played majestically. The music and songs filled the air with passion and you could feel yourself being taken away to a different era.

In mid-June Saint Petersburg celebrates a festival called "Алые Паруса" (*Alie Parusa*, literally Scarlet Sails) that was created for graduating high school students. On that night, which is usually on a Sunday, students get together and celebrate the end of the school year with spectacular fireworks, music concerts and a water show in which a red-sailed boat sets out to sea. The atmosphere is incredibly lively, people are very excited, and everyone is standing on the banks of the river impatiently awaiting the sailing of the scarlet-sailed ship on the Neva River.

The Neva is the largest river that flows through Saint Petersburg dividing the metropolis in two main parts that nonetheless remain connected by multiple bridges spread out around the city. When the river is not frozen, the navigation season begins, and every night, at around 1:30am, one by one the bridges start to open, letting big boats and cargos go through. In the summer, during the white nights, it is a common attraction to sit by the banks of the Neva with friends and experience the rising of the bridges. They rise slowly in a show of lights, and passersby stop for a mo-



Patricia Amselem *Saint Petersburg, Russia*

ment and admire the view. Once the bridge has gone up, you start to distinguish huge boats, cargos or cruises that sail to distant and unknown destinations. It is a sight that everyone enjoys.

My two months in Saint Petersburg were eye-opening. I did not only get to enjoy all the attractions the city had to offer in those months of Summer, but I also gained a deeper perspective on Russia and its culture. I learned to put aside the stereotypes that my friends from home or even the media put into my head, and decided to come to one of the greatest cities in Russia with a fresh and open mind. Walking on the street alone taught me a lot. I was at first intrigued by why so many Russian girls walked around holding hands, or surprised by how well they dressed on a daily basis, and was especially astounded by the quantity of women in high heels walking around Nevski Prospekt, one of the main boulevards, all day long. Russians do not seem to believe in customer service either. When you go to restaurants or cafés, be ready to sit there for at least two hours. They like to take their time. Nonetheless, they are also very

pleasant and are always curious to learn about your culture, which they often like to compare to theirs. One of my favorite pastimes while I was there was listening to Russian being spoken to on the streets. As a Linguistics major, I love languages and I enjoy taking notice of different accents and intonations. Learning a language in a classroom is never as good as immersing oneself in the culture of that language. Moreover, you learn a lot from listening to common expressions used around you all the time by native speakers.

My main goal on this trip was to improve my Russian language skills, and I came back not only with that gain, but also with a new perspective on the culture and its richness.

As they say in Russian: всего доброго (All the best)! **W**





Top: Hannah Diamond *Jamkhed, India (3rd Prize)*

Bottom: Hannah Diamond *Jamkhed, India*

Right: Marlee Rosenthal *Pune, India*



My First Time

By Andrea Verdeja (2nd Prize)

*Class of 2014
Bethlehem, West Bank*

The road extends ahead, like a black serpent sizzling its way up through the mountains. You can hear the engine roaring, as it vehemently struggles to carry the weight of an old, worn-out car over the steep highway. Curves. So many curves. And a sharp headache that is slowly growing with each one that we drive by. A line of cars starts forming as drivers reduce their speed, either out of caution and safety, or because their engines are beginning to overheat – like ours. To each side, a seemingly never-ending range of barren and arid mountains fully covered by nothing other than yellow rocks and millenary olive trees, showing off their deeply remarkable historical essence with occasional ruins of what clearly used to be magnificent buildings – who knows of what epoch – just laying there, as if nothing, at the side of the road.

Fifteen more minutes. Still more desert, more rocks, more olive trees. The struggling roar of the engine gradually calms down as the road finally becomes less and less steep. Have we gotten to the top of the mountain? We pull over in what seems to be a viewing-spot at the verge of the highway. My heart starts racing. In the impulse of a second, I automatically take off my seatbelt and extend my arm to open the door as quickly as I can. It is hot. Overwhelmingly hot. Forty-two degrees Celsius worth of dry, thickly-dense “hot” that make it surprisingly difficult to breathe. My body instantly wants to get back into the car, whose weak AC I had apparently taken for granted and now seems like paradise in contrast to the unforgiving and burning rays of the 2 o’clock-desert-sun shining effortlessly in a cloudless bright-blue sky.

“So this is it?” I ask, trying hard to control a bursting sense of euphoria that I am certain is showing in my voice. I do not want to embarrass myself but I fail, given away by my wide smile and sense of excitement. “Yes, this is it,” answers Yahav in his thick Israeli accent. I take in a deep breath of the heavy scorching air as I contemplate from the hilltop the scene that unravels before my eyes. Jerusalem. Oh, Jerusalem. So yellow. So dusty. So arid. So overcrowded. Exactly like in the photographs.

Sunrays beam over the immense golden dome of Mount Temple, whose dominating splendor has unsurprisingly made it the overarching signature of the Holy City. The intensely-glowing gold of its dome contrasts with the unmistakable aqua blue of its spectacularly designed mosaic-covered walls, still appreciable from afar. The astounding architectural beauty of the Dome of the Rock is even more heightened as it majestically rises above the rest of the otherwise uniformly-looking and densely crowded scenery of yellow-stone buildings that surround it. Made up of a compact mixture of ancient and more recently constructed buildings, Jerusalem requires the latter to be built in the exact same yellow stone as their neighboring forerunners, so as to respect the harmony of its visual aesthetics.

Standing over the hilltop contemplating the grandness of the city, I suddenly feel a sense of insignificance. Not necessarily of my own life, but rather of human life in general. All of it is somehow thrust into perspective – it suddenly seems ridiculously trivial, almost negligible. There she is, spreading in front of me, the Mother of the three great Abrahamic



Andrea Verdeja *Bethlehem, West Bank*

religions that have so significantly molded human history in the past millennia. The timeless epicenter of infinite prayer. The millenary witness of so many invasions and conquests, of countless wars, of dozens of societies throughout the centuries that have once called this place home. The eclectic host of some of the most sacred places on Earth, burdened with such incredible historic, human, and spiritual significance – objects of innumerable and profound yearning still claimed by hundreds of millions. Its agelessness makes it simply imposing, impressive, deeply conscious of the inevitable impermanence of human life. Humbling. And certainly inspiring.

“Ya'allah I'll drop you off at the Old City. Which gate was it?” Yahav asks. “Damasus Gate, the entrance to the Muslim quarter,” I reply, coming back from my brief-state of contemplation. “You mean Sha'ar Shkhem – that's the proper name in Hebrew.”

We get back into the car. Long live AC. The air is breathable once again. Slowly but distinctively, as we make our way down from Mount Scopus, Hebrew signs give away to Arabic ones. Predominantly fair-skinned pedestrian men with kippahs and women with long skirts or tank-tops suddenly give way to darker-skinned men with thick, abundant black hair and women with thobs and hijabs. The architectural design of the buildings also change; they are significantly older and worn-out and the style becomes less “westernized” as the characteristic middle-eastern spherical shapes – be them columns, domes, or arches – turn into rule. Cars and buses also become worn-out and the atmosphere in the street is suddenly chaotic, vivid, and sizzling with action. Pedestrians no longer wait on the sidewalks for a green light to cross through the designated crosswalk – there are people crossing everywhere and at any time. Street-vendors,

busy markets on the road-side, taxi-drivers, minarets extending over the skyline, at times even two or three in the same block. Wait, is this still Israel...?

As we turn a corner, the great walls of the Old City suddenly unfold before us. Yahav pulls over right in front of an enormous entrance in the legendary stone-wall. I recognize it by the pictures I had seen in the past. I cannot believe I am finally here...

Yahav gets out of the car, and helps me get my heavy 30-liter backpack from the trunk. "Thank you so much for the ride," I say, as I hug him tightly and give him a grateful smile. I stand in the side-walk resting the backpack on the floor and holding it between my legs, and wave goodbye as he drives off in the same direction from which we had come. With my full-fledged 5-foot 4-inches and 125 pounds, I try to pick up my grossly over-weight 45-pound backpack and somehow manage to put it on my shoulders. I tighten all the straps I can find, so as to help me carry the weight by distributing it between my shoulders, hips, and chest. This is like carrying a child... I think to myself.

I turn around and make my way down the large yellow-stone-stairway that leads to the Gate, completely unaware of, and unprepared for the seemingly dreamlike and parallel world that I was about to witness inside the Old City. Haredi Jews, all dressed in black cloaks and brown curls hanging from the side of their hats; Muslim men with long white robes and women fully dressed with burkas; Caucasian Christian-Orthodox nuns huddled in groups and making their way through the crowd with wooden rosaries in hand; Fair-skinned European and American tourists in tank-tops with their tawdry looking flowered shirts and painfully looking bright-red burnt shoulders looking down at their guidebooks; Ethiopian Muslims impeccably dressed in white clothing that beautifully contrasts with their dark skin; young-looking soldiers standing in the crossways with colored bonnets and huge M-

16s on their shoulders; enormous Korean and Chinese group-tours wearing bright-colored matching hats or T-shirts; children running all around next to chickens, cats, and dogs; merchants selling everything from food, clothes, and electrical appliances, to bibles, infinite sorts of souvenirs and kitchen utensils. All this human complexity blends together in overly crowded and narrow, labyrinth-like corridors that extend themselves in a spectacular maze of colors, smells, and sounds. The atmosphere is vibrant, agitated, chaotic, blissfully mystical, overwhelming, inspiring. Unlike anything I have ever witnessed before.

I walk down a narrow pathway and hear a beautiful, melodic voice passionately singing in Arabic, coming from a loudspeaker nearby. Almost simultaneously, at least three more loudspeakers that are apparently farther away join the first one, each with a distinct voice and melody. I look at my watch. 4:20pm. It is Salat al-Asr, the third call for Muslim prayer.

I stand there, immobilized, overwhelmed by its breathtaking beauty; listening as the different melodies merge, their notes so strong, so splendid, as they powerfully bounce off the stone walls and fill up every inch of air around me. I am bewildered, astonished by the power of human voice, the inexplicably deep moving capacity of its tune. The notes somehow make their way under my skin, and I am no longer listening to them, but rather feeling them in my flesh as their vibration touches every nerve inside of me. Each touches my soul. My face burns as tears fill up my eyes. I do not understand. I do not know why. I decide to let them be.

I realize that I had never heard Adhan before, the call for prayer. And there, standing in the middle of a narrow corridor in the Muslim quarter of the Old City, I am listening to it for the first time. I smile and think, what a beautiful blessing. **W**





Andrea Verdeja *Jericho, West Bank*



Ben Udo *Yangon, Myanmar: On a Train Outside of Yangon*

Air is Water in Balinese

By Hannah King (1st Prize)

*Class of 2015
Bali, Indonesia*

“**T**ransport?” a man asks, and then, under his breath, “Marijuana?” We giggle and keep walking.

Kuta, Bali is a loud and congested little city, as suffocating as it is entertaining. Every three seconds you will be asked by a Balinese about some service: “Massage?” “Taxi” or even the occasional and intriguing, “Something?” The sidewalks are narrow and eternally disintegrating. There are expensive Western shops with expensive Western brands. There are a thousand shops selling you a thousand imported trinkets to take home and forget. There are scooters – everywhere there are scooters – some burdening families of four or entire food kiosks. Magic Mushroom shops are legal here, despite that drug trafficking is reportedly “punishable by death”, and if you are twenty-something, or look a little loose, you’ll have a barefooted sketcher asking you if you want to trip. Aussies treat Kuta as their cheap playground and come here on holidays to booze and tan. The vast majority of visitors in Kuta, it seems, are here for this purpose. It is strange. The composition of the city is strange; the contrast between the locals and the blubbery tourists is strange; the way in which the sparkly Kuta mall sits next to a string of “warungs” on a dirtied beach is strange. Kuta seems to resist poverty at the same time that it is begging its visitors to spend more, indulge bigger.

Even amid the compact chaos of Kuta there are temples. So many temples. They exist amid the storefronts and hotels as dank, quiet stone refuges. They are often moss-ridden, crumbling like the sidewalks, but this only adds to their mystique. We are not allowed inside

these temples. Hindu locals form a throng of white lace and dark olive skin as they parade solemnly to the time of clanging symbols in and out of the temples, bearing incense and other offerings. We take videos and mumble observations to one another, say how much we’d like to go in a temple or two, just like all the other tourists. Sometimes I’d think about how it looked, all of it – them and us – and I’d think we spoiled this scene, tainting it by merely contemplating it up close, and I’d wonder if any of them thought the same. Bali is known as the island of a thousand temples, with over 6,000 temples total. There are reportedly more temples than houses. I believe it.

My travel-partner Ben and I spent three nights in Kuta before traveling an hour or so to Ubud. We were taxied down a narrow dirt road through rice paddies to get to our hotel. Rice-paddies-and-dirt-roads, thank god, because Kuta had done us in. See, you can breathe in Ubud. In Ubud, you will not be asked about mushrooms or girls, and though there still exist deep and gapping holes in the sidewalks, here they are somehow less ominous. Ubud is the “cultural center” of Bali. There is a surplus of native woodcarving artists here, and most of the work is stunning. There are wooden Hindu gods the size of David and just as meticulous. Aging, greens-eating, yogi-peace-loving expats come to Ubud to live beautifully and reasonably. They seem to like the woodcarvings, and not just the Bintang. Ubud is lovely and dignified, and there are crickets and salamanders and locals who smile but don’t seem to care much about you one way or the other. We stayed here for over a week and didn’t grow the least bit weary of it.



Ben Udo *Inle, Myanmar*

One night in Ubud, Ben and I slipped from our room to take a midnight swim. The temples were partaking in some sort of celebration and their songs came prowling across the rice paddies, the distance and humidity and the low hum of crickets softening them until they met our ears as a damp and purring echo. We stopped to listen, letting them flood around our ankles. We slipped into the pool, drank a Bintang in the deep end, watched, submerged in chlorine, the strange world from a salamander's-eye view, watched the songs thud against the locked doors of sleeping tourists like a shallow tide. It was late, and I wonder if any of the remnants of songs seeped from beneath their doors to lap at their bed sheets. I wonder if they heard at all.

I felt apart, profoundly. I felt odd, a spectator, unseen, sure, but also without eyes. It is the traveler's and the seeker's strife; no matter how hard you strain to understand someone else's home, you will only truly know your own. So far away and always from afar, you will stand

apart. Your body is what keeps you from anything more (strangely, the same thing that got you halfway across the globe in the first place) and even if you drown everything but your ears and eyes in a hotel pool, you will only ever feel ankle-deep. **W**





Hannah King *Kathmandu, Nepal*



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