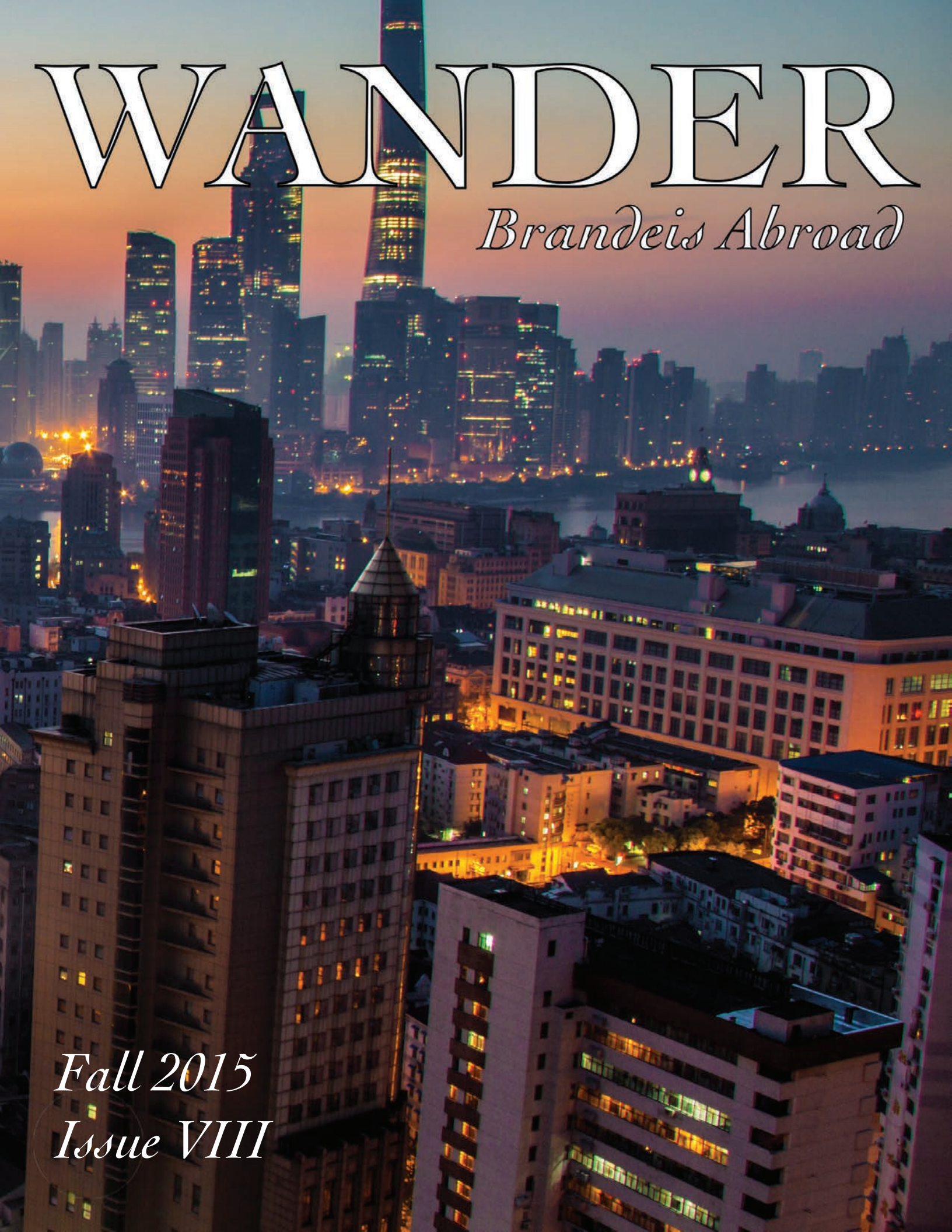

WANDER

Brandeis Abroad

Fall 2015
Issue VIII

Wander: Brandeis Abroad

Letter from the Editors

Dear Wanderer,

Transition is often a word used to describe the experience of being abroad. For some, the transition is natural and almost invisible, and for others, the experience is a great shaking of beliefs and perceptions of the world. Being abroad is a transition not only physically, but mentally. It is during times of transition that growth happens at a faster pace and we become more developed people.

This is what we see for Wander in the upcoming year: transition and growth. Wander may change in look, style, and flow, but the goals of the magazine remain the same: to tell and show the Brandeis University student abroad experience.

In this journal, we've collected staggering views, colorful images, fanciful imaginings, and troubling realities. We have seen the cherry blossoms scatter in Kyoto, Japan (page 12); shared a mother's pain in Gaborone, Botswana (page 23); attended a graduation in Siena, Italy (page 24); and learned how to use the toilet for a second time in Alicante, Spain (page 9). We learned that, while borders may separate our world, human experiences and nature's vitality are less concerned with these arbitrary lines than one would expect.

This publication provides a forum wherein curiosity may be changed into ambition, and forgotten memories may become nostalgia. What is more, we have kept the crystallized form of treasured memories, which, otherwise, are fragile and quickly become fictitious, and will transition just as you do. Here contained is an inventory of alternative narratives as they were first remembered.

We hope the adventure and thrill of surprise is contagious, and that you carry it with you as you transition between both the monotone and the exceptional.

Wander well.

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The Scene

By Morgan Dashko (2nd Prize)
Class of 2015
Alicante, Spain

A 20-year-old American girl sits attentively on the edge of a tub in a tile-covered bathroom. Never has she seen so many tiles used in one room in her entire life: Floor? Tile. Walls? Tile. Ceiling? Sheet rock. The apartment in which it is located is considered slightly smaller than the average for the city, but the tile in every room is absolutely beautiful. Or at least to this girl, who never knew said material could look so good.

A 40-year-old man stands across from the girl, on the left side of the toilet, hands resting on thighs, knees slightly bent. He is looking at the buttons on the top of the white porcelain chair.

If a person were to watch this scene without any prior information, they might think that the two were trying to decide how to fix a clogged john. In reality, however, the man is explaining to the girl how to use said machinery.

Yes, something as simple as a device that I have used my entire life suddenly became cause for panic on the second day of living with my host family. The weight of embarrassment and ignorance that manifested as I searched for my host brother in order to explain to him that I was confused by the toilet broke any and all possible ice.

It was then that I realized that not only was this family very experienced at hosting foreigners, but also that I was going to have to get comfortable with them quicker than I had imagined. During the first hours of life with my host mom, sister, and brother, I was embraced with the kind of warmth and kindness theretofore unimagined. Where was the subtle caution, mistrust, wariness, that so largely occupied my biological mother's thoughts upon sending me out with new friends or strangers? Due

to their genuine and expansive generosity and trust, my family was keen to skip over the uncomfortable and awkward beginnings that all too often define novice relationships. Instead, I was met with three new partnerships that felt completely new and yet comfortable, as if they had known me all along.

Either way, I expected at least a modest set of rules by which to live, some boundaries at least between house and student. Alas, I was quickly surprised by the dearth of rules thus encountered; indeed, my new mama met me with nothing but glorious affirmations: yes, you can walk in at 5 a.m. after going out with friends all night; yes, you can study wherever you want; and best of all, yes, you can eat whatever is in the fridge.

Prior to sending myself to Alicante for the semester, I was aware that "meals" would be provided. I did not, however, spend much time thinking about who would be cooking those meals, or whether I would feel guilty not cooking for myself. After all, it had been a very long time since a parent cooked any—let alone all—of my meals and for the first month, at least, I felt uncomfortable as Mama would place dinner on the table. Guilt, however, rapidly transformed into selfish pleasure as my love for food and a brilliant constellation of unfamiliar recipes to add to my collection began to increase.

The most distressing news, though, manifested itself in the knowledge that my host mom would also be doing my laundry. On one typical, warm September day, I returned home from school only to look out the bedroom window and see my newly laundered clothes hanging on the line. Pleased to perform the work myself, which I had been doing for years on end, was out of the question. My dirty laundry, socks, underwear, smelly shirts, and all, were now in the hands of someone who barely knew me. It was soon made known that the laundry machine was not to be touched by anyone else than Mother-Dearest, and very quickly (as well as unsurprisingly) the relinquishment of my once customary activity was not missed.

Needless to say, moving to a new place and living with new people will always be a challenge. In the midst of strange people and places, figuring out what experiences were meant to teach me was sometimes equally challenging. I learned (as was the plan) an immense amount of Spanish while studying in Alicante, but I absorbed the most important knowledge from my family. Embracing the humility to accept challenges with open arms and a smile was, and continues to be, essential. The greatest asset to surviving, it seems, was not how much Spanish I could summon up at a moment's notice, but rather how willingly I was able to welcome humility and forego control in the presence of strangers as they taught new things; especially, when sitting face to face with a toilet and a middle-aged man, wide-eyed like a child, you are potty-trained for the second time.

Among Sycamores

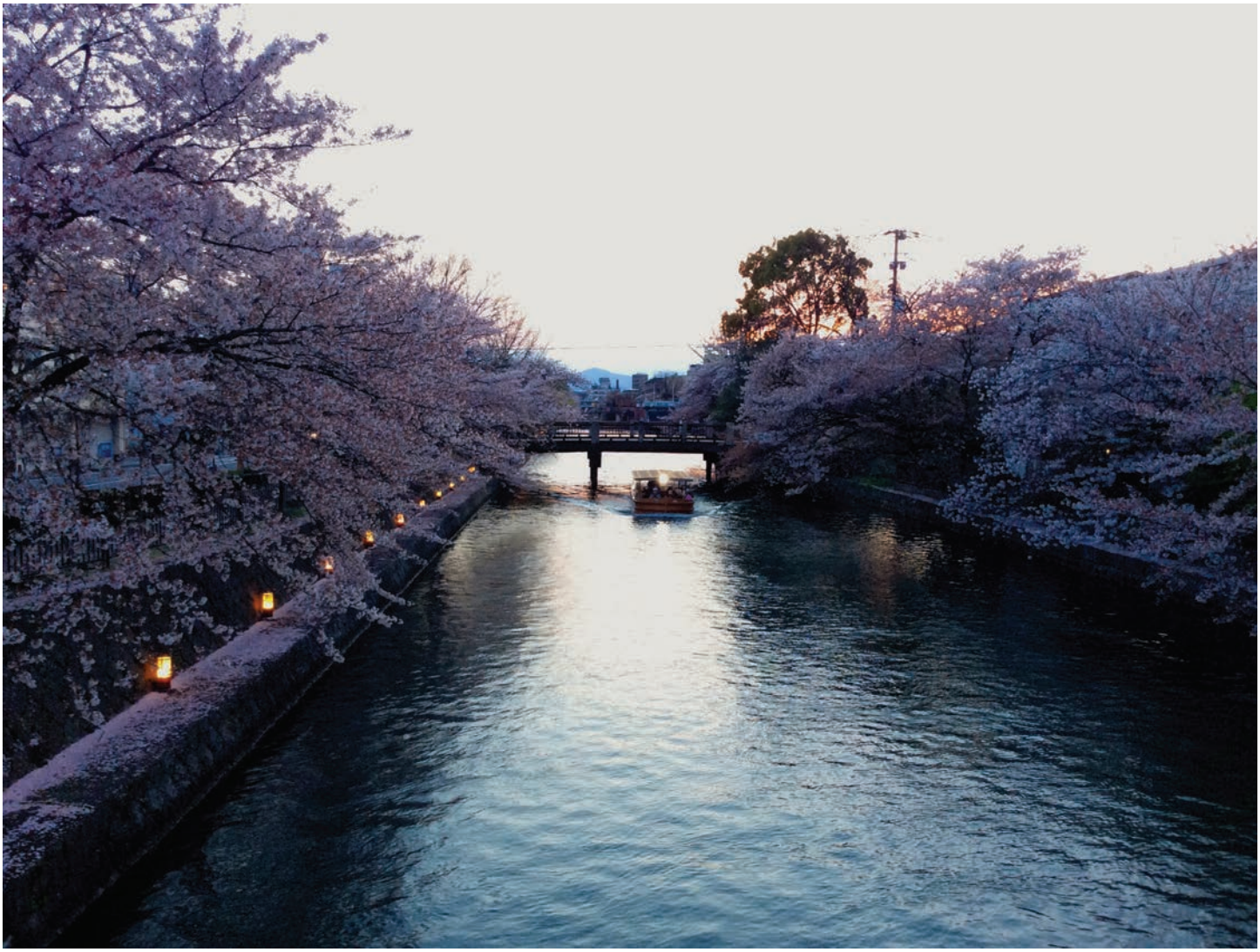
By Katherine Lawrence
Class of 2016
Belfast, Ireland

It is that time of day, where I have scurried away
Intent on escaping what gives me dismay.
The children are messy, the parents too loud,
No wonder I cannot stand it amongst large crowds.
So I go down to the river, right next to our house,
And I like it because I don't even see a mouse,
But for some reason, in some way, I don't know why,
I am joined by one who descends from the sky.

His wingspan is massive, his legs quite tall,
I am simply in awe as he lands amongst the thrall.
He spies me across the way, his head twisting and turning,
His wings certainly give me an age-old yearning,
But he blasts off and lands on my river side,
Stepping even closer than I let others abide.
'What's with you,' I say, to no one in particular,
'That is my question to you,' he responds in the vernacular.

I jump out of my skin, my heart taken by surprise,
'My word,' I gasp, 'are you really alive?'
'I am, dear child, but have no fear,
Soon I will make my reason for approaching you clear.
I see you are saddened, lost among your kind,
But this is not true, for you have a sharp mind.
Your future is not set, but it is quite bright,
So be careful you do not suffer your own nasty blight.'

'How do you know this,' I ask, 'please, do pray tell,'
'Faith,' he chimes in, as clear as a bell.
'I have flown far and wide, even across seas,
But I have never doubted the strength of the breeze.'
'You have traveled farther than I, surely you must know,
Why such great winds never do fail.'
'Dear child, you pose the wrong queries entirely,
How can you question faith so mildly?'



'I am sorry, kind bird, but it is all that I know,
I ask too many questions to my own mother's woe.'
'You are learning, sweet child, have no shame,
To ask questions, in fact, is a wise man's game.
But open your mind, look beyond the horizon,
The world is much bigger than those who dizen.
Believe in yourself, that is all I will ask,
But don't hurry to complete this wondrous task.
Your journey will be long, the road more than bumpy,
But the heart itself is already quite jumpy.'

I smile at his pun, wondering if it's true,
If I genuinely could sail across the ocean blue.
He tilts his head to the side before flapping his wings,
'I must go, dear child, but please keep your dreams.'
With that, he took off, a gallant sight,
And I stood up as I watched him leave, mid-flight.
Now by myself, but not alone in thought,
I start to jot down what my mind had wrought.
Next to my words, I sketch out this great bird,
And behind him stands a sycamore tree, noticeably unperturbed.

Why I Wanted to Visit Auschwitz

By Sophie Brickman (1st Prize)
Class of 2016
Copenhagen, Denmark

While the majority of my friends were venturing to Paris, Barcelona, or Athens over our third travel week, it was not uncommon to be asked, "Why do you want to spend your travel break visiting Auschwitz?" Auschwitz itself is one of the most prominent representations of pure human cruelty and suffering. It is a symbol of the most evil of all evils. And it is part of my family's history. I learned about the Holocaust repeatedly growing up, and my mom holds a degree in Holocaust Studies from Hebrew University. Auschwitz is a significant part of both my cultural and religious history. In addition to serving as a memorial and representation of specific historical events, for me, as a Jew, Auschwitz also symbolizes the most brutal attack on the Jewish people and the strength the Jewish people have retained in the face of numerous acts of anti-Semitism. My reasons for visiting Auschwitz were selfishly personal: I wanted to see and bear witness to the site in which members of my family were killed.

Reflecting on the reasons why I wanted to visit Auschwitz gives rise to another important question: What makes a young American of my generation choose to visit Auschwitz? While many people I met on my visit were personally connected to the site, a number of individuals had no cultural or religious connection to Auschwitz. A simple answer is that nearly all young Americans have learned about World War II growing up, and Auschwitz is taught to be one of the most symbolic sites from the war. This is what it is: a former concentration and extermination camp. In the same way that we are inclined to visit other historical sites like Ellis Island or Checkpoint Charlie, Auschwitz holds a historical significance that is a draw for many visitors.

As so many museums and memorials are, Auschwitz is a place of both learning and mourning.

But visiting Auschwitz does not feel like "just another trip to a museum". It feels different from a visit to other important sites of mourning, and the reasons for this is are puzzling. Perhaps Auschwitz feels different because we know the sheer torture and number of deaths that occurred at both Auschwitz and Birkenau. It is uncommon, thankfully, to hear of a group of people being treated as cruelly and barbarically as the Jews were treated in these concentration camps. Perhaps Auschwitz feels different because it reminds us of how many people were bystanders to such torture and cruelty; how many individuals had an idea of what was happening behind the barbed wire fences of Auschwitz and Birkenau but chose to look the other way. Perhaps it also demonstrates to us the power of human potential—while we are repulsed by the capabilities of a group of individuals, we are also curious.

Maybe Auschwitz feels different because, while Auschwitz 1 has been both memorialized and museum-ized, Birkenau—the extermination site—has been relatively untouched and remains nearly in its original condition. It is more haunting this way, more repulsive, and more emotional. As a young Jew, my perspective may be biased because I have heard Holocaust survivors describe the ordeals they went through and I have two family members who were killed in Auschwitz. However, in today's day and age, I think many individuals (Jewish or not) have at some point heard a speech from a Holocaust survivor.

Auschwitz is unique in that it is a meeting place between the past and the present. Yes, it is a piece of 70-year-old history, but for survivors and family members of survivors and victims, it is in some ways very much a part of the present. It reminds me of the past, but also of the anti-Semitism I have been close to in both Copenhagen and Israel, and therefore the potential for history to repeat itself. During one of my most memorable moments at Auschwitz, I felt I was at the epicenter of the conflicting past and present. I stepped onto a beautiful field, covered in green grass and tiny flowers, with the sun streaming down on my face. It

was the largest mass grave in Europe. The eerie peace left me as I was taught how to identify pieces of bones and of skulls in the dirt below my feet. But it would return as I sat in silence surrounded by the echo of death in competition with the beauty of nature.

Could Auschwitz be a place of healing? In memorializing suffering and serving as a place of mourning, can Auschwitz also represent overcoming loss—can it symbolize survival? While I am still wrestling with the answers to these questions, I do believe this is what makes Auschwitz different. We remember, at Auschwitz, and we also confront evil. At times, these questions make me feel selfish—thinking about what Auschwitz does for me and what it makes me feel, when it is most important to remember the million innocent people who were killed there. In Judaism we say "Never Again". It is a commitment to remembering the Holocaust, and I can justify my seemingly selfish thoughts with the understanding that exploring my own feelings relative to Auschwitz allows me to remember and connect with the history.

This is not the only ethical dilemma I contemplated at Auschwitz. Over the past 70 years, Auschwitz has become a tourist site. The city of Krakow depends on Auschwitz tourism for revenue. Outside the entrance to Auschwitz 1, there are kiosks selling drinks and snacks. Such touristy components might feel normal at other sites, but the air of tourism feels different in Auschwitz. I questioned when it was ethical to take a picture, and the thought of checking time or looking at a text message never even crossed my mind. On the one hand, it is good that so many individuals from all around the world understand the importance of visiting Auschwitz. On the other hand, turning Auschwitz into a pure tourist site with guided tours and souvenirs and snack shops takes away from its authenticity and makes it more difficult for visitors to understand what kind of a place Auschwitz used to be. Imagine an Auschwitz survivor returning to the site in which his/her family members were brutally murdered and seeing tourists purchasing candy bars. Birkenau is much less touristy, and groups can walk through without a guided tour without being surrounded by other individuals and competing tour guides. For this reason, many visitors feel that Birkenau is more impactful and emotional. In many ways, the tourism at Auschwitz robs visitors of the ability to take in the site, and to contemplate and process their experience.

I'm not sure if I'll ever completely understand what makes Auschwitz different. But perhaps this lack of clarity is important. There is so much about Auschwitz itself that I know I will never truly understand. I will never understand how a group of individuals can inflict such harm on other humans, and I will never understand how the term "human extermination" could have been used colloquially. I did not choose to visit Auschwitz to understand. I wanted to see and bear witness to the site in which members of my family, and so many other individuals, were murdered. This I accomplished. I still can't help thinking, What was I looking for in my visit, and did I find it when I came? Something I do know is that Auschwitz and Birkenau may not be around forever. Some of the structures at Birkenau have already collapsed. The images I saw and the stories I heard continued to haunt me after I left Auschwitz and even after I left Krakow. The feelings of immense sorrow and anger, but also hope, continued to haunt me as I returned to Copenhagen and cried at my kitchen table. I can't conceptualize exactly what I was looking for in my visit to Auschwitz, but my heart tells me I found what I was looking for. It's not about me, though…or is it?

Craving Chaos

By Katherine Lehmann (3rd Prize)
Class of 2016
Copenhagen, Denmark

I spent my childhood roaming the untouched backwoods of the Alleghany Mountains, enchanted by the trees and cliffs and freedom. When I moved to Houston at the beginning of eighth grade, the adjustment was smooth but I felt like the city was engulfing me and swallowing me up. The feeling reminded me that humans didn't evolve for the world we built.

I was used to towns surrounded by the disorganization of back roads and white-tailed deer and preserved lands. In Houston there was almost no nature left, nothing had been spared the city sprawl that defines the southern oil boom. Driving through Houston was a dull pattern of strip malls, neighborhoods, manicured sports fields, flood plains, and more strips malls. It made me feel trapped, like the city was pressing in on me and stealing my ability to relax. After spending almost two months in Denmark, that same sort of feeling was creeping up on me again.

One of the side effects of being on a continent as old as Europe, where there have been human civilizations for thousands of years, is that every bit of usable land is used. On a class trip to the "countryside" in western Denmark there was farm field after farm field with towns and villages cropping up every 40 kilometers or so. Even the countryside was manmade.

I was hoping that a week-long study trip that would take my medical class to Vienna and Budapest would allow me time to go on a hike or at least a walk through forgotten parts of Europe. I knew that I wouldn't have time to get to a far-flung trail in the Alps, but I was hoping there was some area that was reasonably accessible and had escaped the inhabitation of Europe.

On Google Maps, both Budapest and Vienna are surrounded by a dotting of green swaths that indicate protected areas and parks. So, although I knew that the cities themselves were very developed, I was hoping that those green patches weren't terribly inaccessible.

On the flight to Vienna, we flew over part of the Alps and once we landed in the city, we could see high, rolling hills on the horizon. All of this was a good sign. As soon as we got into the city center my hopes sank—Vienna is breathtakingly beautiful. Every corner has a palace with immaculate gardens and landscaping. The "coffee shop" culture spurs cafés and bakeries with perfectly matched furniture, elegant upholstery, and severely intellectual-looking people. The streets were clean, the public transportation organized with German precision. I started to suspect that if I were to find wildness, it wouldn't be here.

I also started to suspect that escaping the group might be harder than we planned. No one really wants to be on their own in a European city when their friends are around, so there was a natural tendency to stick together.

My roommate for the trip, Meg, felt the same way. She is a strange concoction of Catholic schoolgirl and hippie. When we went into the soaring catholic cathedrals in Vienna she dutifully crossed herself with holy water (12 years of catholic school had taught her well) but as soon as we were out of the cathedral she was off on some tangent about organic farming and gender inequality. She also hates being part of a large group.

In Meg's words "I want to be with other people but I want to do what I want to do and not what everyone else wants to do."

And what we wanted to do was find a place to hike or explore. So the next morning we got up at 6am for a run to a promising looking uninhabited hill we saw from our hotel room. We started to work our way through the outskirts of Vienna. After twenty minutes, it seemed that Vienna might be giving way, the buildings seemed to be spaced farther apart and the trees looked older. But we never managed to shake the developed city and eventually we turned back, defeated.

By now, we had less than 24 hours left in Vienna and I had given up on the city. Civilization had sufficiently overtaken wilderness here. So I surrendered myself to the splendor. Vienna still had much to offer, even if it was order and beauty instead of the ruggedness I so desperately needed.

After a pristine and art-filled 24 hours, we boarded the train and it pulled away from the former capital of one of the world's great empires. The train set off towards, I hoped, a more promising destination. Vienna is a city known for wealth, Budapest, at least since the fall of the Soviet Union, is not.

My first glimpse of the Budapest train station dashed my hopes. The inside of the station had arching ironwork and soaring marble pillars resembling those we had just left in Vienna. The station's main entrance and exit could have been taken straight from a Greek architectural book, the pillars, the marble, and the intricately carved statues of mythical gods. I was afraid we had arrived in another Vienna.

But we crossed the threshold of the station and a totally different world greeted us. The magnificent

interior of the station was in stark contrast to the crumbling exterior. The paint was peeling off the front of the building, parts of the roof looked like they were a few good rains from sinking in under the weight of neglect. The darkness of night couldn't hide the mark the Soviet Era and subsequent years of economic instability had had on the city.

I was immediately intrigued. From our bus I watched as the buildings flew past. They were a strange mix of soviet style block apartment buildings and once grandiose but now decaying buildings. This is a place where outward appearances took a backseat to mere survival.

After a brief stop at our hotel to drop off our backpacks and suitcases, we boarded the subway to go to dinner. The train cars were old; there were no automatically opening doors or electronic turnstiles here. Our tickets were checked by hulking Hungarian men with grim faces and uninterested eyes.

After dinner, people headed back to the hotel but a group, including Meg and I, managed to break off and set out to explore the city. We walked for miles that night. I felt myself relaxing as we zigzagged past crumbling buildings and slightly haggard looking people. After more than an hour of walking, we landed at a ruin bar.

A ruin bar is a bar that crops up out of a ruin, an old apartment building for instance. Some have been gentrified or turned into modern clubs. Others work themselves into the existing ruins. The one we found was the latter type.

The place was two floors, with probably ten different rooms that were, at some point, apartments. Christmas lights that had been haphazardly strewn between opposing balconies on the second floor gave the impression of a colorful faux ceiling. We wandered into a quieter side room where a bar occupied the back wall. The further into the room we walked, the stranger the scene became. We walked past two business men in suits sitting on the floor smoking hookah, a boy—probably about 16—asleep in a bathtub-turned-couch, and then all of a sudden the roof was gone and we were outside in a courtyard. There was no warning that we were about to walk outside, no door, the roof just disappeared. In the courtyard a silent movie was projected onto a half intact brick wall, people gathered around small, mismatched tables, and a couple made out in a gutted Soviet era car with no wheels.

It was chaos and I was hooked. I had been looking for old forests and point mountain peaks and pristine land to quench my wanderlust. Budapest had none of those. But it had the disorganization, the wildness, the freedom I needed to relieve my feeling of entrapment in Europe. Wilderness, it turns out, can be found in an old Soviet apartment block.

I lost myself in the noise and color and dozens of accents. I subsequently lost Meg; she had discovered the Hungarian liquor called palinka. When I finally met up with her, she was accosting passersby and insisting that they help her analyze a piece of abstract art hanging on the wall.

It took some time for us to convince ourselves it was time to go back to the hotel, and by the time we ricocheted out of the bar, public transportation had long ceased. It was a half hour trek back to our beds. As we walked I reflected on the night. In that space of elation that occurs somewhere between drunk and sober, I realized I had found what I was looking for, even if it wasn't in the place I thought it ought to be.

People to People

By Alisa Feinswong
Class of 2016
Ketura, Israel

They raise their hands
Two opinions per person
Shooting fiery blind stories shaped by years of same-sided propaganda
Which has seeped and is
Beyond scrubbing,
Beyond soda water,
Beyond acid

Only the help of a will wiser than blood
And tougher to penetrate than an old widow's heart
Who has been nourished on hatred and contempt of her own years of experiencing
Pain, sadness, and seeing nobody to crucify
But the unkempt other
Who can see no evil in his ways but to her is a force too scary to confront
But approachable only by rumored mistrust

Peace is not about practice,
It is not about respect.
It is about finding the basic needs of people
And navigating through the cultural differences
Until you reach a mutual awareness
Then, you have a platform, a portal, a pathway to connection

My hand remains aside the carved wooden armchair, silent
Because if I speak up, my own inconsistencies create a world of contradictions
And how can I live in a world where the sharp teeth that tell me lies are the same teeth that keep a people alive with seeds of fortitude for future light
In a circle broken only by mirrors
We fight

The Depth of a Name's Meaning

By Emily Greenwald
Class of 2016
Gaborone, Botswana

I received my Setswana name in the sonography room. The sonographer was imaging a woman's uterus, and told her: "There is residue in your uterus; you need to get it cleaned out." The woman asked if her baby was okay, and the sonographer answered that she needed to see the doctor. She asked once more, and the sonographer answered in the same way. She then took my hand and asked if her baby was okay. I had to tell her that we did not see her baby in the image. Her response was "Oh, that means I have lost my baby." A busy Gaborone public clinic is not the place for emotions or expressing sadness. She then looked at me to ask: "Mma [Miss], do you have a Setswana name yet?" I answered no, and she named me Laone (pronounced Lah-oh-nay), which means comes from G-d, for her lost baby and to represent her strong religious faith. "You will be Laone, because you come from G-d. That was going to be my baby's name because I have strong faith in G-d."

I carried this name through the rest of my time studying abroad and working in Botswana's public clinics, and also through my adventures in Southern Africa. I now carry this name and experience in my work, studies, and travels. In Deadvlei, Namibia, beauty comes from the effects of such an extreme climate that decomposers cannot survive and dead trees stand tall, petrified for thousands of years. Laone and her mother's story stay with me, enduring like the fossilized tree.

Enrico's Graduation

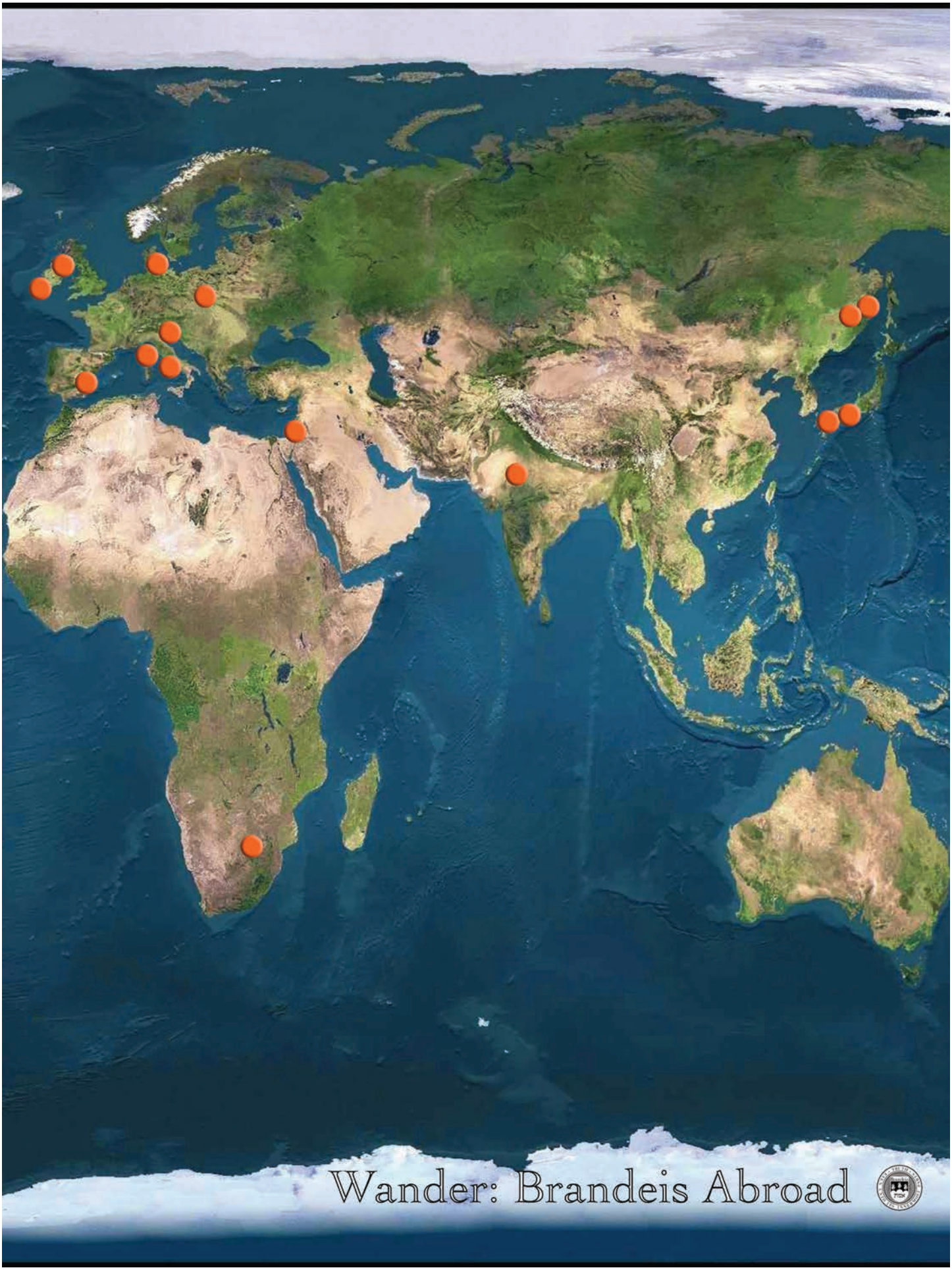
By Eve Litvak
Class of 2016
Siena, Italy

"Who are these people?" Geanluca asked me. I glanced over thinking there might be some cause for alarm, only to see him eyeing a group of Americans. After growing up together in Lecce and spending countless summers chasing girls down the coast of Puglia, I knew this face—he was picking a girl to zero in on, based on cost-benefit calculations.

I felt my face stretching as my cracked lips tightened, "Don't worry about it" I couldn't, in good faith, encourage the Casanova of Siena to pursue my new friends. "I'm thirsty," I exclaimed. His steady gaze snapped as he reverted his attention back to me. Enthusiastically bouncing up and down, he practically hopped to the table of champagne.

"IT'S TIME!" announced Geanluca over the blaring music as he handed me a bottle. I stood atop the steps and, through a haze, regarded all my friends crowded in the dimly lit bar looking up at me. They were cheering in anticipation. In anticipation of what? Of my successful graduation? Of my future prospective ventures? I figured it was more likely to be the champagne in my hands. With the snug laurel wreath worn like a grounded halo, secured by my ears, I focused on balancing myself. A path was quickly cleared before me (the supreme ruler)—I was the king, but liquid gold is the greedy soul's desire. Having studied economics, I was well aware of the real human psychology and sufficiently honest with myself not to begrudge anyone else their wants.

OK. Deep breath. I zeroed in on the obstacle between satisfaction and us. Time to deliver. 1… 2… 3… PUUSHHHH. POP! Relief didn't stand a chance in the tsunami of sheer excitement. I felt it swelling inside me; I was a powerful wave generating my own current amidst the tide of parched friends. Finding myself in a sea of plastic, I began fairly distributing the champagne as a ruler might throw gold coins out of his carriage during a parade, amidst singing and cheering. After that, nothing is certain. The celebration lasted through the night. I know because that swelling never left me. I'm no longer wearing a crown, the cheers have long drowned in champagne showers, but I go with the wind, victoriously onward.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