Letters From Abroad

introduction

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THERE AND ALMOST BACK AGAIN

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LIVING IN THE WORLD

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   Matt Gladden

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   Robert L. Hampel

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   Linda C. Powell

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   Sharon Feiman-Nemser

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   Tom Roderick
   "Noise Level Zero" and Other Tales from the Bronx
   John Wolfe
   with an Introduction by Frank Pignatelli

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   Ellen Condliffe Lagemann
   with an Introduction by Jonathan G. Silin

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INTRODUCTION

linda levine

What counts as knowledge and whose knowledge counts? When does going away help shape a clearer sense of home, and when does it not? How does living abroad change our perspectives as teachers and learners?

In his classic short story, "The Country of the Blind," H.G. Wells's hapless narrator stumbles into a foreign land where his deep-rooted assumptions are challenged and there is no foreseeable exit. Bewildered and frightened by what he cannot understand, Nunez rushes "to make the strange familiar," instead of taking time to appreciate the unfamiliar on its own terms. This leads him through a series of blunders and misjudgments into real danger. Unprepared to imagine perspectives and choices other than his own, this first-time explorer cannot make the accommodations required—even for love—and barely evades disaster.

Far more fortunate, the educators who have contributed to this Occasional Paper share a formidable combination of purpose, curiosity, courage, and self-awareness. Reflecting on their choices to live and work in other parts of the world, they offer a provocative range of personal and professional explanations for seeking our the strange and unknown. Their letters from abroad reveal a genuine interest in what matters to others, a capacity to describe people and environments with intriguing detail, and a willingness to reveal themselves as inexpert newcomers. As these essays make clear, no preparation is ever sufficient because what happens always diverges from and exceeds our expectations. Risk-taking and error are inevitable, as integral to each story as the exhilarating discoveries that travel affords.

Most important, we learn how these educators came to value the experience of "otherness" in themselves as well as in those they met. They recognize how living through the displacements and disorientation afforded by travel enabled them to become more effective teachers in our own increasingly diverse society. Without denying their contributions to the communities they entered, the writers are thoughtful about having been outsiders—speaking with an accent, failing

to understand local references or jokes, learning how odd and unknowing they appeared to others who had very different premises and practices. All of these essays offer such sobering and indelible moments.

Today, we are more mindful than ever of the need for global awareness, understanding, and engagement. *Letters from Abroad* is designed to highlight what some Bank Street colleagues have sought, found, and questioned while working far from home. The editors of the Occasional Papers Series hope these missives from foreign shores will inspire others to set out on explorations of their own, explorations in which they resist the temptation to make the strange familiar and enjoy, if only for a short while, the way that the familiar itself may become strange.

WHAT WE BRING WITH US AND WHAT WE LEAVE BEHIND: SIX MONTHS IN POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA

virginia casper
donna futterman & evan casper-futterman

VIRGINIA CASPER has been a member of the Graduate School faculty at Bank Street College for the past fifteen years. She previously directed the Infant and Parent Development and Early Intervention Program, and in September 2002, assumed the position of the Associate Dean for Academic Affairs. Virginia is a developmental psychologist and teacher /educator. Her work focuses on early care and education, as well as issues of equity. She is the co-author of *Gay Parents/Straight Schools: Building Communication and Trust*.

DONNA FUTTERMAN is a professor of clinical pediatrics at the Albert Einstein College of Medicine and the Director of the Adolescent AIDS Program (AAP) of Children's Hospital at Montefiore in the Bronx, New York. The AAP was the first program in the nation to offer comprehensive care to youth with, and at risk for, HIV infection, and continues to provide leadership, combining care, research, outreach, and training. Donna has published widely on the care of these youths, and is the co-author of *Lesbian and Gay Youth: Care and Counseling*.

EVAN CASPER-FUTTERMAN is a senior at Fieldston High School in the Bronx, New York. His current passions are history, international relations, and ultimate frisbee.

Imagine if there had been television when the U.S. separated from England in the eighteenth century. The news would have been filled with stories about the new developing nation. In a sense, that's what it's like here. I hear the intricate details of what it takes to create a complex democratic republic after fifty years of apartheid and struggle, and can even be found watching "Parliament Live!" on TV when I get home from school at 15:00.

– Evan: Family Letter #3

As South Africa completes the first decade of democracy, an ongoing dilemma boils down to this recurrent theme of massive change: What does a society bring forward as it moves from the past into the future (Swartz, 2001)? During the six months we lived in South Africa, we found ourselves faced with parallel questions: What do we bring with us, what do we leave behind? Who are we while we are there, and with what do we return?

Besides two duffel bags each, here are some other things we brought with us: Donna and Virginia had histories of supportive work for South Africa during the struggle years, and Donna had family ties in Cape Town. We both had skills to contribute. Donna is a physician specializing in HIV-AIDS and was able to join a team of the Provincial Health Department in the rollout of a program to prevent maternal-to-child HIV transmission. Virginia's expertise is in early care and education. She worked with a small NGO (non-governmental organization) writing a course for infant and toddler care practitioners while spending time in childminding programs. She also joined a team at a weekly infant mental health clinic in Khayaletisha, a large township on the outskirts of Cape Town.

Why did our family, two mothers and a teenage son, choose to spend our academic sabbaticals living, volunteering, and going to high school in Cape Town, South Africa? It's true, the grown-ups wanted to get away. Evan, having just adjusted to high school in New York City, did not. Nor was he particularly keen on attending a Jewish day school, even if it was at the tip of Africa. The notion of wearing a school uniform didn't sweeten the deal in any way.

One of the experiences we sought was to live in a society in which white people were not the majority. In fact, there were many other places we might have gone, or stayed for such a challenge: like Detroit, or even closer to home, the Bronx. But for ourselves, and for our son, we wanted to experience the transformation of

the new South Africa, not as tourists, but as participants, if for just six months. Perhaps most of all, we wanted to provide our son with a message that can be difficult to hold on to: New York City, U.S.A., is not the center of the world.

NO LONGER TOURISTS

It took almost a month to make the transition from being tourists to becoming residents. People categorized us in unfamiliar ways, ways with which we were not always comfortable. Although envied, while at the same time slightly resented, we were Americans and knew we always would be. But for those few short months we were differently American—we were the outsiders. Once we began work and school, the seemingly small customs, phrases, and units of measure that we thought "interesting" or "funny" quickly became part of our daily landscape. In the first few weeks, we wrote the following to describe our new lives:

> *The biggest change for us has been a wonderful one—the physical environment. The staggering beauty of Cape Town is immediately apparent and continues to fill us with joy and renewal. For the first month of our stay, we have had one car, one cell phone, and one set of house keys. This has made for a closely knit family! We are ready for some individuation, which is starting as we write. Just today, we joined a "lift-scheme" (car pool, not pickpocket ring) for Evan's transportation to school and back. The three tenth-grade girls in the scheme are great interpreters of the culture, including preparing us for the summer weather: gale force summer wind storms that last a few days, followed by hot, dry African heat. Fires on the mountains that surround the city round out this provocative season.*
>
> *Another huge difference in our lives is that our family has dinner together every night, and it now feels like the normal thing to do. The result is that we have grown together in some new and wonderful ways. We have helped each other on a few rather trying days when we needed counsel to make sense of our experiences.*
>
> – Donna & Virginia: Family Letter #1

For two weeks during our stay, we actually were tourists—visiting Soweto, going on safari, and staying in a rural Zambian village. A city girl at heart, I (Virginia) found myself paralyzed by rural African poverty in a way that even extreme urban settings could not begin to approximate. Whatever deeply submerged

romantic notions of Africa may have engaged us evaporated in the heat of the day and the pace of our visit to an 800-year-old Makuni village. Here's how we described it at that time:

> *The village is one of the "richest" in Zambia. Water pumps have recently been installed, providing improved sanitation and saving hours of work for the women. Yet even here, rural poverty is astounding and the HIV medicines in the local clinic, which also serves as a hospital, consist of a mostly empty bottle of Bactrim. In Zambia, we stayed in an inn modeled after a traditional village and learned more of the local history. Evan ate with the men, sitting on stools, while Donna and Virginia sat on the floor with the women. We had a delicious African meal with our hands, scooping up the mealie and stews.*
>
> – Donna: Family Letter #3

As tourists in Zambia, we encountered specific facts and stories designed to teach us about the culture. Eco-tourism at best, "designer tribalism" at worst (Sandall, 2001), these explicit lessons about the power of Victoria Falls and the roles of men, women, and tribal leadership were clear and poignant. We all appreciated the direct experiences of ancient practices. However, I kept feeling like a spectator—one consumed by the ever-present threat of malaria. By contrast, in the peri-urban Western Cape, there were fewer cultural brokers to answer our questions. We found ourselves scratching our heads more in our everyday life there than in rural Zambia. Yet there was something about the process of groping our way through work and school, making contributions as well as mistakes, that allowed us to feel a part of the society as we "learned about" it.

THE TOWNSHIPS/CAMPS BAY

Even before we began our work in the townships, we spent some time there as a family, and accompanied Evan to his community service work with Habitat for Humanity. In the predominantly white parts of Cape Town, mostly English is spoken. In the flats or the townships, English falls by the wayside, replaced by Xhosa, Afrikaans, and nine other official languages. Under the new government, homes are being built at a tremendous rate, but the ANC (African National Congress) cannot keep up with the overwhelming needs. Evan was struck by the way life in

the informal settlements felt like another era:

> *The township of Khayelitsha is a microcosm of this country because of its relative newness and the many challenges it faces. Khayelitsha literally means "new home." Most of the older townships have a more settled feel than Khayelitsha, which seems the most alienated and desolate, from what I have seen so far. In Khayelitsha, there is no real evidence that the modern world exists except for the cars and the music that blares from a few stereos. Many people do not have electricity, and many who do, get it by running dangerous wires from the power lines into their shacks. There are only a few trees, and children walk around barefoot in the unpaved streets or to the outhouse or water tap. Outdoor butchers (where people buy their meat because the nearest supermarket is at least fifteen kilometers away) grill whole sides of sheep and cow in a metal drum. There are also cows, dogs, and goats on the side of the road that don't appear to belong to anyone. People walk everywhere and women carry bundles on their heads, although not every woman, as is the African stereotype.*
>
> – Evan: Family Letter #1

The disparity between the poverty of the townships and the wealth and majestic beauty of Cape Town makes for stark daily contrasts. The economic and racial gaps remain huge in what is still, in terms of housing, an almost completely segregated city. We lived, for example, in Camps Bay where the mountains—a stately dozen of them called The Twelve Apostles—come right to the edge of the sea. We could hear the ocean at night and in the morning. European tourists frequent the oceanside cafes, and in summer you can almost forget that this neighborhood is in Africa. To work in the townships and return to Camps Bay for supper is one of the strangest sociopolitical acrobatic tricks imaginable. As we came to understand, the best way to move through these immense contradictions is to forge connections with people who live in the townships. We didn't ever get used to this bizarre commute, but the many contradictions eventually become integrated into a way of life. Midway through our stay we wrote:

> *In South Africa, the slang for the state of the economy is 7/11—seven rand to the dollar and eleven to the pound. Or, as the South African Airline steward said to us before we deplaned in December, "The dollar rocks." Unemployment*

in the townships is about forty percent. When we work at the computer by the window, men and women often catch our eye, and within seconds are at the door asking for food, money, or work. Even among the middle class, the poor economy is felt daily. We have joined the economic zeitgeist, despite our favorable currency, and find ourselves practicing small habits that are not our custom, such as washing plastic lunch bags and reusing them. Phone time, petrol, air travel, and anything imported are extremely expensive, yet anything related to labor is so cheap it makes us uncomfortable. What is valuable and what is not continues to grab our attention.

– Virginia: Family Letter #2

"NO SUCH THING AS A [XHOSA] BABY"

Given that we were in the midst of so many groups with varying linguistic and ethnic origins, it makes sense to talk about our appreciation of the *cultures*, not the culture of South Africa. My (Virginia) immersion in the Xhosa-speaking and the Afrikaans-speaking communities was through the lens of the infant/toddler childminding world and through an infant mental health clinic. I certainly never expected to find a "Xhosa baby" (Tomlinson, 2001); that is, that babies raised by Xhosa-speaking families would behave a certain way. Like Donna and Evan, I tried to observe differences that would help me to better participate in a world that has some similar, yet so many different challenges from our own. We lived with this healthy tension—wanting to stay open to variation and difference without getting stuck in objectifying generalizations.

Both Donna and I had noticed that you could literally hear a pin drop in the pediatric clinics and birthing centers. Young children sat quietly with their mothers, who were also still, for hours at a time. How should we interpret such a powerful silence that so contradicts our experience in pediatric clinics in America? Initially, it felt to me like a combination of stoic endurance, with more than a hint of depression and resignation. At such moments, it seemed as though apartheid was still in full force. Over time, I became used to the quiet, but I didn't really understand it. The stereotyped image of the strong, silent African woman was never far from my mind. I also knew that self-restraint and obedience were important goals that South African parents identified as crucial for their children's development (Barbarin &

Richter, 2001). Then, one day, after the clinic had been closed for a two-day holiday, it was so packed that one could barely move. The waiting room became as loud and noisy as any in the States. Throughout our six-month stay, this seemed to be the case: Just as we came close to naming what appeared to be a significant cultural difference, something else came along that proved to be the exception.

Paralleling the enigma of silence were my ongoing conversations with staff at this clinic about ways to engage the youngest children while they waited to be seen. "Queue education" was something the early childhood world there had already identified as a need. These toddlers would, after all, be attending school one day, and preschool experiences were only for the lucky few. Ultimately, however, what staff and mothers decided they wanted most was a way for those in an HIV-positive group to make money. We initiated a doll-making workshop so they could learn a skill. The months of conversations were not lost time. We learned what we each thought was important and found a way into each other's hearts.

COMMUNITY VIOLENCE AND THE MONDAY EFFECT

> "There is no safety." (James Baldwin)

It took the first few weeks of visiting early childhood programs in neighboring townships and in the wine country to even know what questions to ask. And some answers I (Virginia) thought I understood were challenged when the very same childminders we had visited came to a pilot of the course I had written for birth-to-three practitioners. In my early visits, I had repeatedly asked the same questions of caregivers as I prepared to write a course that would focus on early emotional development. To the question, "What is the most difficult part of your work?" a number of practitioners responded by talking about how hard it was to settle the babies and toddlers on Mondays, after the weekend away from the program. Initially, I took this information at face value (Mondays are surely a universal challenge) and did not at first comprehend the magnitude of the problem. They said it took most of the week for some of the toddlers to calm down. By the time we piloted the infancy course, I better understood how deeply violence permeates the society. With only one probe, a now obvious fact was opened up for discussion: toddlers, and especially babies, experience widespread chaos, neglect, and/or family

or neighborhood violence. Clearly, this occurs often enough for the widespread "Monday effect" referred to so often in my travels. Personal and public violence seem to merge into an ambiance of fear, giving the mental health diagnosis CTSS (Continuing Traumatic Stress Syndrome) that arose during the struggle years an enduring relevance.

Although I had a number of brushes with violence as an observer, my primary education about violence in Cape Town was firsthand. A pivotal experience of my stay lasted thirty seconds but is imprinted forever in my body and mind. The morning of the carjacking we were early for our weekly infant mental health rendezvous. Four of us, in two different cars, sat chatting while we waited for an African colleague at what turned out to be a flashpoint for armed robberies in Nyanga Township. Four armed gunmen, at each of our windows, forced us out of the car. Afterwards, pistol whipped and dazed, we wandered the streets of Nyanga until we were surrounded by a group of twenty locals, mostly women. They formed a protective circle around us as we searched for a telephone.

For our family, my experience of trauma and physical injury gave violence—one of South Africa's largest problems—greater emotional depth. I still see the attacker's face in my mind, perhaps because he was only a few years older than my son. His mother, too, is on my mind, as she has clearly lost him. I like to think of myself as a relatively secure adult who can rely on a substantial safety net. Knowing what I went through for months after the attack puts crime statistics about developing children into frightening perspective. In a survey of 540 children, ages five through fifteen, who were living in the township of Khayelitsha, *all* had experienced some kind of violence or trauma in their lives. There is nowhere near the level of police protection in South Africa that we have come to expect, if not at times feel ambivalent about, in the U.S. The lack of police protection leaves everyone feeling vulnerable. My South African colleague writes:

> As a new society, we require protection in the same way that an infant and young child need the presence of functioning parents in order to grow. . .we need outside, visible control, not to enforce inhuman legislation, as in the past, but in order to allow the people to develop their resources and gain skills in a protected environment. (Berg, 2001)

Not until I was back home for a full week did I begin to feel the safety mapped into my brain from a lifetime on the streets of New York City. At the same time, I recognized that the personal experience of violence helped me better understand the ultimate contradiction of the new South Africa. While democracy created a new political balance of power, the basic economic inequities remained essentially untouched. The effects of apartheid will last many generations.

"ISTIGMA," "IDISCRIMINATION"

The AIDS epidemic is yet another critical challenge faced by the South African people. Staggering numbers are already infected—in some Western Cape townships, twenty percent of the pregnant women are HIV positive. While we were there, a program to prevent mother-to-child transmission of HIV was begun. Although this program is a straightforward care and prevention effort, in working with the Provincial Health Department, I (Donna) was impressed with its complexity and the difficulty of deciphering which components of the Western approach to fighting AIDS would work and which were irrelevant.

> *The problem of mother-to-child transmission has so many layers. The simplest part is giving the medicine—Nevirapine. The two-dose regimen is perfect for a public health effort and can decrease transmission rates significantly, from twenty-five to forty percent to less than ten percent. The mother takes one dose when she begins labor, and the baby takes the other within hours of life. But before this can take place, a system must be developed to counsel and test thousands of pregnant women and to inform one in five that they are HIV positive. After the medications are given, the problem is not yet solved. The majority of women in Africa breastfeed—a practice that is known to transmit HIV, yet is a deeply important part of their motherhood. Clearly, to prevent HIV, the best alternative would be formula feeding. But formula feeding serves as an assumed marker of HIV infection and, because of stigmatization, AIDS remains a secretive and rarely disclosed disease. Dr. Glenda Gray, a South African pediatrician, called the breastfeeding challenge "a conundrum of complexities." In addition to helping each mother make a decision about her feeding choices, the government and clinics must create a system to distribute formula, as well as monitor the mothers' and babies' health. All of the babies must be retested at nine months to see which*

are infected and need ongoing care.

– Donna: Family Letter #2

Implementing just this one public health intervention requires massive amounts of work, resources, and training. As everywhere else, the fight against AIDS is not solely a medical one, but must be engaged at every level of society. I attended a candlelight service at the Guguleto Sports Centre. It was organized by Sister Mabel, a nurse who is working with her church to "break the silence" about HIV. A powerful choir led the audience in hymns between each of the speeches. I stood awkwardly swaying and clapping until someone handed me a hymnal. Then I sang along in Xhosa. The music is deep from the heart of humanity and, as gospel, felt intensely familiar. People spoke from both victimized and empowered perspectives. The Xhosa language is adopting many new English words and identifies them with the prefix "I." Thus the activist speeches, interspersed with words like "i-discrimination, i-stigma, and i-empowerment" were readily understandable to me, the only non-Xhosa person present.

We were drawn to South Africa because we anticipated that a country in the process of rebuilding itself would be a very engaged place. That expectation was continually fulfilled. It was powerful and sobering to participate in the fight against this epidemic in the country with the most cases of HIV of any in the world.

A PUPIL IN CAPE TOWN, A STUDENT IN NEW YORK

The effects of apartheid on the white population are starkly different from its effect on the black majority, but are significant nonetheless. An authoritarian educational system is hard to transform and its effects can be seen from preschool through post-graduate education—this, in spite of a countrywide attempt at a more process-oriented, outcomes-based educational model. For Evan, who attended what is viewed as a more educationally progressive school, the contrasts with his U.S. experiences were stark.

What is the difference between a pupil and a student? What I have discovered through my handy pocket dictionary is that a pupil is someone who is being taught, as opposed to a student, a person who studies, from the Latin root for zeal. The class periods here in my school are called Lessons,

which also emphasizes that the student is being taught, not just learning. On the other hand, one does not "study" for the many, many tests we have here—one "Learns." Preschoolers are called Learners and those at university are Students. Another interesting practice—compulsory standing up when the teacher enters the room. This is especially interesting for me, because in the States…respect for the teacher is voluntary, shown through enthusiasm, participation, and politeness. Here, standing is a mandatory sign of respect for the teacher.

– Evan: Family Letter #2

The Dutch called Cape Town "The Mother City." Now, centuries later, we found ourselves, two mothers and a son, living in the Mother City. And what's the first question Evan was repeatedly asked at school, "What does your father do?" We began to wonder about the popularity of this question and came up with a number of explanations. Because of the sanctions apartheid brought, South Africa was sequestered from much of the "progress" of the rest of the Western world. Television arrived in the seventies. Seat belts are considered a nuisance by most. Toys are displayed in the main drugstore chain in "Boys" and "Girls" sections. A "fifties" feeling is pervasive in the European and white sections of town. Yet, South Africa is the only nation in the world where gay rights are provided for in the constitution.

A white American high school student living in Cape Town was seen as a bit of an oddity. There certainly weren't many others. The traffic is largely in the other direction, as many white high school students concentrate on their math skills to enhance their possible acceptance to U.S. colleges. We stood out anyway, as just about every family we met—from the townships to the upper-middle-class suburbs—had at least three children. Evan deduced quickly that if being an American and being an only child was an oddity, having two mothers wasn't about to change that impression. He was challenged to decide if, when, and how he would come out about his family. The truth of his family composition proved to be less of an issue than anticipated when he finally did break the news. The experience of feeling held back by it, however, was new for Evan and for us (Virginia and Donna).

COMING HOME

I'm fascinated by the perspective gained from hearing about world news from the African point of view. There is more about global issues, along with local reports from South Africa and other parts of this continent. After watching news here, the U.S. now seems so much more self-involved; almost like the networks are in news cruise-control mode! As a result of our time abroad, we feel more connected to the rest of the world, especially Africa, and even Asia and Europe.

– Evan: Family Letter #3

Needless to say, leaving new friends and colleagues in South Africa and taking up our reconceptualized lives in the United States has been difficult. While away, we clearly lost the sense of what it means to assume a basic safety in our lives—a lesson, unfortunately, we have had to draw on many times since our return home. Despite all of the challenges, however, we felt vitally connected and engaged in South Africa. Our work was appreciated and seemed to make a difference. All this we are privileged to take back with us to the States.

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THERE AND ALMOST BACK AGAIN

holley adcock

HOLLEY ADCOCK'S teaching career spans over thirty years and four continents. Her early education took place in Ohio, and she received her B.Ed. from the University of Hawaii. She then spent twenty-three years teaching at the American School in London, interrupted by a one-year teaching exchange at Kamehameha School in Honolulu. In 1993, she moved to Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire, West Africa, to teach at the International Community School. In 1998, she arrived in Bogotá, Colombia, to take up a teaching position at Colegio Nueva Granada. In 2000, Holley returned to the U.S. and began teaching at the Bank Street School for Children. She lives with her husband and younger daughter in Suffern, New York.

When asked to assess my thirty years overseas, I was faced with a rather daunting task. Where to start to unravel the tangled skein of memories so rich and deeply embedded that a whiff of an odor or a faint sound will bring single images so sharply into focus that I am for a moment on that London street, in that West African market, or puffing my way up that Bogotano mountain. Then the ache and longing for that other life creeps in to replace the reality of the now.

The reality of the now has changed a great deal since I first attempted to organize my experiences last summer. Most people tend to look at the time prior to September 11th as an age of innocence, and I guess it was for America. The rest of the world has been living much closer to the threat of daily violence. The security measures adopted here after September 11th have long been in effect in many places. My husband, Doug, and I experienced the dangers of terrorism and hatred in each of the countries where we lived. We were much too close for comfort to an IRA bomb in London, caught up in an Ivoirian against Ghanaian riot in West Africa, and lived with the daily threat of kidnapping by guerrillas in Bogotá.

What we believe and what we do is inextricably linked with both individual and national identity. Examining our beliefs and actions helps us define ourselves. In what follows, I attempt to investigate the changes I experienced during the years of living and working abroad. There is a well-researched and documented phenomenon known as the "Third Culture Kid" (TCK) or "Global Nomad."* These are children who have spent at least part of their childhood or adolescence in a country other than their own. While the experiences of these children vary greatly, they nonetheless develop certain common patterns. Ruth Useem (1993) describes the reentry process of those who have lived abroad in the following way:

> The answer to the question of how long it takes them [TCKs] to adjust to American life is: they never adjust. They adapt, they find niches, they take risks, they fail and pick themselves up again. They succeed in jobs they have created

*This phenomenon was first noted by Ruth Hill Useem. In 1993, Useem, along with her husband, John Useem, Dr. Ann Baker-Cottrell, and Dr. Kathleen A. Finn Jordan, wrote a series of five articles about Third Culture Kids for *Newslinks*, the newspaper of International Schools Services.

> to fit their particular talents, they locate friends with whom they can share some of their interests, but they resist being encapsulated. Their camouflaged exteriors and understated ways of presenting themselves hide the rich inner lives, remarkable talents, and often strongly held contradictory opinions on the world at large and the world at hand.

Although most of Useem's research has been directed towards the effects of overseas living on children, I think much of the TCK research can be applied equally well to adults.

To know how my sense of self has changed in thirty years abroad, I need to look back at who I was when I boarded the ship *Nieuw Amsterdam* in August 1970 to sail from New York to Southampton. All of twenty-two years old, married for three years, I was clutching my newly acquired B.Ed. degree from the University of Hawaii. Needless to say, we were young and naive. Professionally, I knew only what I had experienced as a child in the Toledo, Ohio, school system and seen in the public schools of Honolulu. Doug was coming straight out of the very traditional Punahou School, which early missionaries had established to prepare their sons for Yale. It was the end of the sixties and it was impossible not to be ready for change and hopeful that change could happen. Doug and I were quite willing to cast aside the more limiting aspects of our Midwestern upbringing and open ourselves to new adventures in Europe. We have never really shed some of the more ingrained mores of our backgrounds, like the Puritan work ethic or the friendly outgoing manner of most Midwesterners. However, we were sure there were other ways to do things than the way they were done in Ohio, New England, or even in Hawaii.

Hawaii helped to open our eyes to cultural diversity and set us on the road to being Global Nomads. It is an incredible blend of Polynesian, Asian, and European culture. There are even language issues in Hawaii. The Hawaiian language is still used in some formal settings, and a blend of Hawaiian, Portuguese, Chinese, and English forms the pidgin that is spoken on the street to delineate the kama'ainas (old timers) from the tourists. Yet, in many ways, Hawaii is similar to the U.S. mainland. In 1970, we were ready to stretch our wings, both personally and professionally.

Professionally, it could not have been a more opportune time to arrive at the American School in London (ASL). September 1970 saw the opening of a

new school building, which combined the K-12 school in one building. This, plus the playgrounds and headmaster's home, took up an entire block in the posh St. John's Wood area of London. The school was designed by Southern California architects with few windows, and was not very well suited to the cold, overcast, dreary British climate.

The late sixties and early seventies were a period of innovation in education. Most of us who lived through it remember some sweeping changes in the air. Because ASL was built at this time, it was designed to accommodate a free-flowing approach to education. Remember, this was the era when Summerhill was considered the height of liberal educational practice. Although ASL never resembled Summerhill in either philosophy or methodology, there was an effort to try to push the boundaries of traditional education during our first years there.

In the beginning, the school had an open-plan building. The areas were called pods, and these pods contained a whole age group of about 100 students. The pod was roughly divided into five classroom spaces with no walls in between. These spaces were called bays. There was a minimum of furniture and both teachers and students sat on the carpeted floor for much of the day.

During my first year as a sixth-grade teacher, we attempted to teach through learning centers. These were elaborate learning packages prepared by the teachers and placed at strategic points around the classroom. The students were to move through the learning tasks, seeking teacher help when needed. At least that was the theory. Students received weekly assignment sheets in each of the four major subjects. They left the pod for foreign language and other "special subjects." The students were to plan their own time and move from one subject to another as they wished. What actually happened was a little different. Some students were required to spend part of a day in, for example, the math bay of the pod, because they were behind in this work. A fair amount of direct teaching took place, especially at the beginning of the week. Otherwise, the students had no clue how to start on the weekly work. When teachers got fed up with the behavior of a student or group of students, they would throw them out of that bay. I remember a girl named Jane who regularly got herself thrown out of all four subject-area bays by lunch, and would start the rounds again in the afternoon. One day, as I recall, she managed

to get thrown out of each class three times. Since the teachers were fairly tolerant, this was quite a feat. She certainly was a student who would have pushed the boundaries in any school.

By winter break, many teachers were crying for walls. However, there were worthwhile aspects of this open system of education that some of us fought to preserve. I realize that they still affect the way I teach today.

First, it was clear from observing students, long before "learning styles" were even a twinkle in anyone's eye, that some students learned best in one way and some in another. I started offering choices of assignments and assessments back then and have continued to do so. Without the freedom to observe students in an unstructured environment for long periods of time, I do not think I would have come to that conclusion so quickly.

Second, the wall-free curriculum also required a great deal of flexibility on the part of both teachers and students. You had to be quick and think on your feet when one plan did not work because your students did not have the background you thought, or because the neighboring class was showing a film. Our students came from all over the United States, Canada, and many other countries, as well. In the early years, we had a large number of families from Oklahoma and Texas who were involved in developing the oil fields in the North Sea. After the oil fields were up and running, bankers and other businessmen from the U.S. replaced the oil men and women. There were always diplomats' and business executives' children from all over the world. There was even a smattering of Brits who, for a variety of reasons, preferred ASL to local options. Although the students were all reasonably bright and economically upwardly mobile, their educational backgrounds were diverse. Flexibility and multilevel planning, teaching, and assessing were needed. The staff was seventy percent American and thirty percent British. My British colleagues had a great deal to offer in terms of flexible teaching styles and methods. British primary schools at that time had the reputation for being more innovative than U.S. elementary schools. The British educators were also used to dealing with a multiethnic immigrant student body.

Third, the lack of walls and limited structure made me a team player. Although I tended to avoid conflict as a young adult, I soon learned to stand up for

aspects of the curriculum and schedule that I felt were important without stomping on the ideas of others. I learned to compromise to achieve the greatest student learning. I learned that sharing problems about curriculum or students really did help me reach a better solution. Although I have worked on teams for most of my career, it was that first team that taught me that the whole really is greater than the sum of its parts.

My early days at ASL were before any of the Third Culture Kid research was widely known. We just viewed the students as foreign nationals living abroad. Some of them loved the experience and some hated it. At times, students would act out at school to "get even" with their parents for making them leave their home environment. Usually this phase did not last long, and oddly enough it was often those same students who cried the hardest when it was time to go "home." Students do not really recognize the TCK identity until they return "home" and realize that neither they nor their home are the same as when they left. Certainly adjusting to a new culture, even a once-familiar one, poses considerable challenges, whether you are a child or an adult.

On a personal level, my first year in London was a great challenge. Everyone had said, "Oh, it is easy to go to England. They speak the same language." Wrong! Even without certain dialectical differences — which made my Midwestern, nasal-tuned ears wonder if the Cockney publican really was speaking the same language — the vocabulary and phrasing were greatly different. After being looked at askance the first time I asked at the greengrocer's, "Do ya hav any tomaytoes?" I learned to say, "Have you any tomahtoes?" with the proper light inflection. Every aspect of life brought new vocabulary. First, you had to figure out which shop to go to for which item. This was before the days of supermarkets in the U.K. You went to the greengrocer's for vegetables, the butcher's for meat, the bakery for bread, the grocer's for nonperishables, and the ironmonger's for tools or nails. Shopping was done on a daily basis, since British refrigerators were mostly of the minute, under-the-counter variety. On the bright side, milk (butter, cheese, and orange juice, too, if you wanted) was delivered to your doorstep. In the area where we first lived, this was accomplished by a horse-drawn cart, and even when we left England in 1993, milk still came in bottles and was not homogenized, so the cream would

settle to the top.

Each task that Doug and I attempted that first year brought new terms and vocabulary, often accompanied by frustration. Figuring out how to set up utilities accounts for our new flat (apartment) was a process requiring us to visit several offices, pay huge deposits, and sign documents in which we promised a pound of flesh to the company if we missed our payments. Imagine our surprise when we learned that our new car came with a boot and a bonnet. When the plumber came to fix a leak, we were asked for our spanner and looked at each other blankly. Even school was not free of language stress. My mouth fell open the first time a British colleague asked me for a rubber.

Having Doug to share all this helped a great deal. We survived and gradually settled into a comfortable way of life. In the early years, we worked hard teaching and directing student plays during term time, and then scampered off to the Continent to play hard during the holidays. In 1975 our first daughter, Gwendolyn, was born. Just as happens to families in all cultures, the new baby made us decide to buy a house. We settled into our community. Although we were often referred to as "those Yanks on Gratton Terrace," we actually got to know our neighbors quite well. We gardened, gossiped over the back fence, and threw an annual Christmas Eve party to which neighbors and school friends alike flocked. Gwen played with the neighborhood children and later babysat for them. Although Doug and I were never fully British, we were no longer completely American, either. We used to refer to ourselves jokingly as citizens of the mid-Atlantic.

Ambiguity about nationality was less the case for our daughter Gwen. She went to private British schools from age three to age thirteen. She did everything possible to deny her American background. When in primary school, she would not allow us to speak to her within two blocks of the school gate, lest our American accents give her away. Although her friends knew she was American, she herself rarely referred to it. In her early years, Gwen was really British. Oh, she had American parents and visited the States once a year, but her English nanny and her school equipped her with all the correct cultural baggage to blend in perfectly with her classmates. This was brought home to us when Gwen was about six and we were dining out. My husband wondered why waiters often asked him if he was finished

before clearing his plate, even when it was entirely empty. Gwen promptly told him that it was because he did not place his knife and fork together at the correct angle to the plate to let the waiter know he was finished eating. So, throughout childhood, Gwen was more a British child than a Third Culture Kid.

The complexity of her cultural identity increased when at age thirteen Gwen asked to attend the American School in London. High on her list of reasons was that it was coeducational. She was tired of being in a single-sex school. She was also frightened by the daunting exam system in British schools. At that time, Britain was changing from O levels to GCSE exams. At age sixteen, she would have taken at least eight GCSEs. Then she would have faced two years of study for her A levels, specializing in only three subjects. Gwen was a somewhat rebellious teen and probably would have been so in any school system. She never felt entirely a part of the American School and questioned the validity of any formal education for a while. She maintained a base of British friends and tended to opt for non-American friends within ASL.

By the time Gwen graduated from ASL, she had had her fill of American education and wanted to go to a British university. The University of Sussex accepted her on the strength of her APs. After a break year spent working at various odd jobs in London, she went unenthusiastically to "read" sociology at the University of Sussex. Three years later, she gained a B.A., and is now a paramedic in Detroit completing prerequisites for a nursing degree. Because she took only sociology courses at university, as is the system in Britain, she had none of the survey courses that most American colleges require.

Gwen's education was a combination of British and American. From her British primary school, she gained a strong ability to write. It was standard for her to turn out a thorough and proofread essay in thirty minutes. It had to be legibly handwritten, since there were no classroom computers in those days. From her courses at the American School, she learned to question what she read and to keenly watch world events with an analytical eye. She is entirely bidialectical. The nationality of her telephone callers is always immediately apparent by the dialect she unconsciously adopts. Her heart and soul are British, but she is physically present in the U.S. Although she would certainly meet the criteria of a Third Culture

Kid, her dominant national identity is British, and she has had to deal only with two cultures that claim to share a language.

Our younger daughter, Elizabeth, more closely meets the criteria of a TCK. After attending an English preschool, she started prekindergarten at age four at ASL. With a determination to see more of the world than Europe and North America, we moved to the Côte d'Ivoire in West Africa at the end of Elizabeth's first grade year. She experienced grades two through six at the International Community School in Abidjan. When asked where "home" is, she always responds, "Abidjan."

Both Doug and I taught in this school, which was a tightly knit community of students, teachers, and parents from more than fifty different countries. The students were diverse in experiences, cultures, and values, yet they were united by tolerance and a desire to participate actively in the life of the school. Creating and sustaining this community was the clearly defined goal of faculty, administration, and parents. Although this ideal was not always reached, it was never ignored. International schools such as this often serve as a social center for the community as a whole. Afterschool and evening activities were numerous and well attended.

In Abidjan, we lived in an apartment complex with other teachers, and in many ways Elizabeth had a very secure world. Everyone knew her within our immediate community. Her French gradually improved, and she often was the one to do the bargaining at the marché. She could always get the better price, because she was the cute little girl who would keep at it until she got the price she wanted. We would even lend her out to friends on occasion. She assumed the role of best linguist in the family, and this gave her the confidence to use her language in a wider context.

After five years of what was an idyllic experience in many ways for all of us, we moved to Bogotá, Colombia. This move happened to coincide with Elizabeth's serious entry into adolescence. We arrived in Bogotá speaking little or no Spanish. The school where we taught, Colegio Nueva Granada, was a bilingual Colombian school. The student body was ninety percent Colombian and ten percent other nationalities. Except for Spanish and Colombian social studies, classes were taught in English. Nonetheless, Spanish was the language of the students in all nonclassroom

settings. Fortunately, Elizabeth was a quick language learner. However, even being able to speak fluent Spanish by her second year in Colombia could not make her a Colombian. Her friends were mainly "gringos," and she often felt only a peripheral part of the school community.

Doug and I settled in more easily. This was partially because Doug was a principal and therefore a boss, or "jefe." Everyone went out of the way to make us feel comfortable. Elizabeth's dad's being a principal only added to her discomfort and difficulty in adjusting to the new environment, however. Although Elizabeth ended up having some regrets about leaving Colombia after two years, she was a big part of our decision to go. She could never fully be part of the school community. Even her course requirements as a non-Colombian were different. Elizabeth's sojourn in Colombia gave her fluency in her third language, for which she is now very thankful. However, her seventh-and eighth-grade years were otherwise a painful period of trying to adjust to a school culture where the students had entered as a group at age four and would graduate together from the school. They all spoke another language, went to the same country clubs, and often were children of parents who had attended the school. It was like trying to swim upstream in a river full of rapids.

Both Gwen and Elizabeth faced the difficult years of adolescence, when one is searching for an identity and trying on different roles, in the midst of cultural confusion. It certainly added many facets to the search for self that adolescents face. I'm not sure that either of them appreciated the added complications at the time, but neither of them would have wanted to sacrifice their international experience for a totally American experience. After all, growing up in one place is no guarantee of protection from the slings and arrows of puberty.

Although all of us would have preferred to stay overseas, a new grandson and an aging mother-in-law tipped the balance in favor of returning to the States. We came "home" with a rich bag of experiences and memories. We came with a family language that is a mélange of American and British English, French, Spanish, and a few Hawaiian words thrown in for good measure. Our family culture is equally mixed. Elizabeth came with a fluency in French and Spanish that her parents never quite achieved, and an international identity. She is a true Global

Nomad or Third Culture Kid. Gwen, who came to the U.S. three years before we did, came as a transplanted Brit.

Doug and I came home as "Rip Van Winkles," waking up after thirty years abroad. We found the United States a very different place from the one we had left in 1970. Our frequent visits and short stays had not prepared us for just how different life would be. It was not immediately obvious that we were foreigners in need of help. The fact that we were Third Culture Adults who had spent almost all of our adult lives living outside our own culture was not something we carried in our looks or in our accents. We wore the "camouflaged exteriors" of the Third Culture Adult.

We foolishly thought it would be easy to do things like get a driver's license and open accounts with utility companies. After all, we had done so on three continents. We were wrong again! Adjusting to life in the States has been the most difficult adjustment of all. After a year and a half, I feel that I am acculturated. However, my patient colleagues will tell you that I don't quite have all the pieces of the American puzzle in place. The thirty years spent exploring other cultures have made me a stranger in my own country. I think my friends have just decided that it is easier to learn what I mean with my British phrases and vocabulary than to totally Americanize me. They sigh and direct me to the loo or hand me a torch when I ask for it. So perhaps the specialists are right — Third Culture Kids and Adults never really adjust. We just "adapt, find niches, take risks, fail, and pick ourselves up again."

LIVING IN THE WORLD

david penberg

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> There is a little of everything in this world. There are people born to stay and others born to go away. There are some who leave because they have a far away love, or because they like a street, a library. . . in some other part of the world. (Pablo Neruda, *Passions and Impressions*, 1978. p.331)

I am a hybrid of both—a person born to stay and a person born to go away. Travel is an opportunity to experience "a little of everything in this world" — my reason for leaving home and my purpose for returning. Through travel, I learn to respect the variety of human associations and multiple forms of intelligence. Travel has been an inextricable part of my education. It has enriched my teaching and contributed to my personal development. Travel continues to expand my curiosity about other cultures—words, movies, books, music, people. I have taken to heart Lucy Sprague Mitchell's [1991] words for teachers:

> Be geographers . . . experimenters . . . hunt for sources . . . study relationships; explore the environment . . . analyze the culture of which . . . [you] are a part . . . above all, live in the world.

Teaching is a choice of living in the world and travel a metaphor for my dialogue with it.

* * *

Going away has never been incidental or spur-of-the-moment. I have actively sought new perspectives through living and teaching away from home. My life abroad became an unfolding narrative full of the contingent and the contradictory. It has consistently been a source of challenge and renewal, of comedy and error. From the demands of a new language and culture, to conditions that ranged from the uncomfortable to the incomprehensible, travel has been an ongoing preparation for teaching in New York City, and a way of continuously growing.

In my early adult years, reading Ovid, Virgil, and Dante helped determine my sense of geography. They stirred my appetite for journeys and quests, and fortified my desire to analyze the culture of which I was a part. So I left New York periodically to discover what was outside of it, and to enlarge my appreciation of the city. My relationship to home was a kind of love affair defined by arrivals and departures, enriched by feelings of longing and belonging.

Living abroad marks the meaning of home. Being away, one memorizes the details of home. The sense of absence is challenged by the sense of rootedness. This has nothing to do with homesickness. Being away from home is not the same as being cut off from one's place of origin. Foreignness is a test of fortitude and imagination. Living under a state of siege in one country and a gerontocracy in another, I interrogated everything about my cultural identity and came to cherish the privileges of democratic life. I learned this cross-cultural lesson: You never fully appreciate what you have until it is not there.

I am a city dweller with a Bronx birthright. The urban has been in my blood through a line of peddlers who came to New York from Warsaw at the beginning of the twentieth century. It's a tributary that runs through my life — subways, schoolyards, delis, barbershops, the scent of talcum and aftershave, candy stores, streets with names like Bruckner Boulevard, the Grand Concourse, Tremont Avenue.

My Bronx origins have always been a source of fascination for others. Like having small children or a dog, it can lead to conversations and interactions with strangers. In Colombia, my multinational, middle-management students wanted to know why I didn't sound like all the other people from the Bronx who resembled Marlon Brando in *On the Waterfront*. In China, my graduate students wanted to know if it was true that all the blacks in America carried guns. In the world of the cross-cultural, I learned to take teaching opportunities as they came; to capitalize on moments for understanding, clarity, disagreement, and persuasion. I learned more about my identity as an American through my students' misconceptions and our subsequent discussions than through all the tests, lectures, and textbooks I ingested in my formal education.

Emerson refers to being a teacher as going "to the circumference of things." Living abroad gives me a stage on which to craft an identity as a teacher, and enables me to appreciate the beauty of different cultures: The Chinese do not ask questions because it is a sign of disrespect towards a teacher, and good manners require that a guest leave some food on her plate; the Colombians never arrive anywhere on time because their notion of punctuality is approximate. The unfamiliar has taught me the value of students' and teachers' learning to communicate across culture, language, class, age, gender, and all the other walls that inhibit the development

of intelligence and sensitivity.

If teaching is a discipline of hope, as Herb Kohl says, then I am one of its practitioners. Teaching in foreign places opens a window on the infinitely complex and wondrous things about being a citizen of the world. It feeds hope by thwarting the myopic. It tells us how dependent learning is upon context. This means always asking: Who are the students? What's happening in their lives that can be connected to the subject being taught? How can this class develop their minds and imaginations as well as hone skills?

BOGOTÁ, COLOMBIA

I fell in love with Bogotá, where I lived and taught English from the summer of 1978 until December 1981. My relationship with the city began and ended in a neighborhood called La Candelaria, an historic neighborhood that rises precipitously into the green hills leading to the Cordillera Mountains. Like Harlem, its reputation for crime and intrigue is more apocryphal than true. Cabbies try to charge double after sunset. They claim it's because of the "peligro" (danger) and the bad streets. La Candelaria is a neighborhood defined as much by the street names as by the people who inhabit it: Calle de la Pena (street of grief), Calle de Toma de Agua (street for drinking water), Calle de la Paloma (street of doves), and Calle de la Paz (street of peace). During the day, the narrow passageways brim over with actors, teachers, students, writers, bakers, government officials, thieves, and military police. When the sun shimmers on the red tiled roofs after a morning rain, one can see why the Spanish became enamored of this accursed and bewitching city.

What brought me to Colombia was not a love for danger, but for literature. Full of Vallejo and Lorca, I came to South America fresh out of college to discover Latin American writers, to teach, and to translate. I loved language and writing, and this was an opportunity to develop both. In less than a month after securing my first teaching job at one of Bogotá's many language institutes, I was fired. This confirmed that I had my pedagogy right. They wanted me to talk as though I came from Ohio (Fri-dee, Mun-dee) and follow a script of "repeat after me" to overcrowded classes full of accountants, bank managers, and secretaries. What I was not prepared for was the danger and the volatile nature of a country with a

history of civil war.

Bogotá, like Colombia itself, was a city under siege. The M19, a guerrilla insurgency group, was wreaking havoc on the military and the government. Political graffiti were boldly plastered on billboards and streets. One evening, at a politically charged musical concert, police with billy clubs and plastic shields emerged in great numbers from the shadows of the balcony, the back of the theater, and surrounded the audience. We were asked to file out. With the suspension of civil rights (*a toque de queda*), assemblages like this were considered illegal. I learned never to leave home without my ID card and to be prepared for the unexpected: a car bomb, mass demonstrations, tear gas, and military police roaming the streets with MK 47s. What was once the "Athens of Latin America" felt like Rome after the fall. The graft of the military and the government was as thick as the oil Exxon was drilling from the Atlantic coast. I went to teach English and found myself asking why only some of the world was developed and the rest so disparate in its underdevelopment. I experienced the other history of America, the censured history that I had never been formally taught.

Through everyday experiences—waiting in line to pay taxes, navigating the circuitry of Colombian communication—I acquired the patience and understanding needed to teach. I learned about the absolute necessity of suspending judgment and expectations in order to move between cultures. I was a privileged gringo in a developing world metropolis coming to terms with the long legacy of colonialism—military regimes, multinationals, and a thriving drug trade with the United States. Given the violent and exploitative nature of the political and social climate, I was ambivalent about teaching middle-management executives from Exxon and B.F. Goodrich. Most of that was tempered as I came to know my students: charming men (never women), gracious, hard-working, fun-loving, and patriotic to a fault. I learned to shelve my politics, since mastery of English was key to their mobility in the corporate culture. My ambivalence became curiosity, a desire to comprehend multinational corporate culture. I wanted to know what it was like to work for Americans, how business was conducted, and how communication proceeded. My curiosity became the basis of our classes.

In Bogotá, I abandoned the official textbooks that were both insulting and

inaccurate. They featured television sitcom-style stories employing humor based on caricatures rather than accurate depictions of how people communicate in real social settings. Structured like basal readers, the texts were full of fill-in-the-blank and multiple-choice exercises. The managers needed situational uses of language that would serve them well professionally. I assembled articles, photographs, postcards, posters, and advertisements to create an array of language-rich resources. I learned to fine-tune my own listening skills (since I was both a teacher and a learner of a second language), in order to judge when to correct my students. The work with multinational corporate managers, tire executives, and bank administrators was to talk oil, rubber, finances, and all the other things that were important to them, including their identities as Colombians and Bogotanos. I was always looking to find a way for life and learning to converge.

Later, in my first academic position teaching American literature at La Universidad de La Salle, I was expected to deliver lectures from an elevated wooden podium. I arrived at this conservative Jesuit college having recently discovered the work of Paolo Freire and Ira Shor. I was enamored with liberatory pedagogy. I had grandiose plans for my students to assume responsibility for their learning, grade themselves, assess their peers, work in teams, pose active questions, and freely discuss their interpretations of everyone from Mark Twain to Joan Didion. My misguided intentions were met with a pre-Marconian silence and an air of discomfort. I had violated the students' more traditional expectations of the teacher. They wanted lectures, book reports, and tests. They did not wish to take risks or to be subject to someone who would challenge the authority of the conventional classroom. They wanted to know how many quizzes they would have during the term and on what their final grade would be based. It was a sobering experience that taught me the hubris of radical pedagogy.

GUANGZHOU, CHINA

A guide in an old white van met us at the airport. Some hours later, my family and I arrived at a college where we spent the night before departing for Guangzhou. It was August 1988. The heat was as insufferable as Canal Street can be on a July afternoon in New York, only worse because it was 9:00 p.m. Thousands of cots

lined the entrances to cinder block apartment buildings draped with wash. People slept outside everywhere. At the university, they served us scrambled eggs over white rice, warm beer, and coca cola. The feeling of the surreal was as palpable as the subtropical heat. Both the exotic and the unfamiliar characterized life in China: snake blood in the market, spittoons outside of each classroom. What had brought me there was a desire to examine the socialist life from the inside—again, the drive to explore and expand my boundaries. But what stands out was the students' depth of humanity in the face of repression, and how the teaching of English was politicized in the charged atmosphere of change.

I was a foreign expert at Sun Yat Sen University. We lived in a Russian-built apartment complex, The Foreign Guesthouse, with other teachers and students from abroad. Visitors had to sign in at the front desk. We were told this was a security precaution. The log was sent to the local authorities. The Chinese are not xenophobic; they just like keeping foreigners together in one place. Our accommodations, compared to those of the Chinese faculty, were luxurious—two bedrooms, an electrically heated shower, a color television, an air conditioner, a refrigerator, gas burners, and mosquito nets. We were given two large thermoses to fill with hot water from a spigot four flights down. On Sundays, we were driven in a white van to a supermarket for foreigners. People from the Foreign Affairs office were our guides, liaisons, supervisors, and big brothers. Unidentified "monitors" were placed in every class to ensure that our needs were met and that we followed the textbooks. The Chinese paid us, accommodated us and, like consummate hosts, entertained us.

My students were medical doctors, molecular and genetic biologists, immunologists, neurophysicists, and chemical and biological engineers. All were under thirty and knew the ancient history of their town or city as we might know the batting stats of Mike Piazza. They were part of a World Bank scholars program, which sent China's brightest abroad to pursue graduate and post-graduate work. They were fluent in English and could speak about their specialization with confidence. They were at Sun Yet Sen to refine their language skills before departing in the fall for the United States. Their eagerness to learn was unlike any I had ever experienced. To teach them was a privilege because of their unadulterated desire

to communicate proficiently in a second language, and to comprehend the culture that they were about to encounter. Unlike their parents, who had spent time in labor camps because of the Cultural Revolution's campaign to "reeducate" Western-influenced intellectuals, they belonged to the generation of "the opening door." For them, the future was something more than Mao jackets and the Chairman's quotations. The idea of the democratic was neither satanic nor imperial. They felt it was their civic obligation to give back by venturing abroad.

I never used the podium to address my students. Instead I sat on desks, moved around, and tried to put them at ease through the universal currency of humor. Put people at ease and they are more willing to learn and more capable of doing so. This was in stark contrast to the sternness and expert pose of Chinese university professors who discouraged questions or free-flowing conversation. There is a fine line between being friendly and being a friend. I was careful not to blur the two. I took great liberties with the textbook by inserting contemporary content. I introduced free writing at the outset of every class by playing American folk music and jazz. They heard more Charley Parker and Phil Ochs than did most Americans their age. I used music as a device for inspiring imagination, expanding language, and examining American culture.

When teaching in extreme times, nothing stays the same. There is no business as usual since there is nothing usual about the threat of terror and violence. In China, as an English teacher, I experienced the Orwellian drama of civil upheaval. Along with students from all over the country, teachers, artists, and workers gathered for close to three weeks to publicly denounce political corruption and assert the need for human rights. A Statue of Liberty was constructed in the middle of the square as an emblem of the struggle, and students marched peacefully and patriotically through the streets. In Guangzhou, I was witness to an historic moment generated by the young, and I wanted to find a way to allow this event to enter the life of our classroom. I put down the textbook and never returned to it.

When the army is rumored to be encircling the city where you live, preparing to storm the gates of the University, and your daughter is worried about what to do if this happens when she is at school, the teaching of English takes on another dimension. As a teacher, I was challenged by the urgency of events. All

the Freire, Horton, and Goodman I had read told me that this was a moment for which my practice had been a preparation. I organized my classes to allow life to define what we would think, write, read, and communicate about. We watched Chaplin's *Modern Times*, the Beatles' *Yellow Submarine*, and Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane* as imaginative frameworks, metaphors for the issues that were so politically charged. The students talked and wrote and read each other's writings.

The massacre at Tiannanmnen Square cast a shadow over my experience in China. On the night of June 2, nearly 10,000 students, including mine, left the University fearing for their safety. Only the foreign teachers and a small contingency of foreign students stayed behind. Never again was I to feel the sense of respect I was accorded during those torridly hot and damply cold days in Guangzhou. Being a teacher mattered, and for a moment I felt that I had lived the ancient Chinese epigram: "First the emperor and then the teachers." It was my privilege to enter an historic moment and share a pedagogical space with students who were able to communicate through a second language their exhilaration and pride at changing the world. I never did get a chance to say goodbye to them. After the tanks rolled in, most left and never returned. Some departures are meant to be that way—final and covered with clouds.

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In an essay, "The Poet Is Not a Rolling Stone," in his book, *Passions and Impressions,* the poet Pable Neruda writes:

> The poet has two sacred obligations: to leave and to return. The poet who leaves and doesn't return becomes a cosmopolite. As for the other, the first phase of his life must be devoted to absorbing the essences of his native land [place] and later must return them. He must restore and repay them. His poetry and his actions must contribute to the growth and maturity of. . . people. (p. 331)

Every time I have left New York, I have returned replenished and eager to teach. With each sojourn abroad, I have learned more about who I am and what it means to live mindfully and wide-awake. I have learned as much from the places I have been as from the students I have taught. The cross-cultural life is circular and reciprocal, composed of relationships forged between people and places. Much

of my knowledge and all of my theory is situated in these relationships and in my personal attempt to go to the circumference of things. What else do we bring to the children in our classrooms but our biographies, either full or empty, of what we have seen and recorded, the evidence of our having lived in the world.

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