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Eyes of a Cat Open Up

A tale of unexpected culture clash in Bolivia

By Tressa Versteeg '11

Last spring semester, I lived in Cochabamba, Bolivia through School of International Training (SIT)'s experiential learning program, "Multiculturalism, Globalization, and Social Change." I spent the last four weeks of independent research in a rural indigenous Aymara community named Llojjllata—about two hours by bus from the capital city La Paz, and an hour by foot from Lake Titicaca. My project was to create a children's book about the "Formation and Creative Expression of Identity of Aymaran Children" by having the kids create their own stories and drawings that I would collage into one large narrative that would reflect their identities through their creativity. Here is one very

small, portion of what I learned.

"Calixto, they know I'm coming, right?" I asked my project advisor, just to be sure his brother



The potato fields in Llojjllata, Bolivia

Gregorio Quispe knew I would be staying with him and his family for three weeks.

"Ooohhhh noooo, Terreeesssa," he said calmly, drawing out every

sound of every word. "You are going to be a surprise!" I wanted to scream, punch Calixto, cry, and curl up into a ball in the back seat, but I just sat there, all too aware of the tightening knot in my stomach.

We arrived in Llojjllata—a stretch of clay-brick homes and potato fields along a dirt road (population: "Eehhhh, more or less, not very much" according to everyone who lived there)—dropped my stuff off at the house, and then we visited Calixto's uncle down the road. Then Calixto asked me if I knew the way back. I didn't really, but he pointed north and told me 20 minutes. I made it back, after being stopped by many suspicious

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The Thrill of New Directions

A Brand-New Alum Reflects on Life After Mac

By Anna Joranger '10

I used to be the type of person with a "plan." I remember standing on the stage at our senior class awards ceremony in high school and listening to the Vice Principal read this prepared

statement about me: "Anna will be attending Macalester College in the fall, where she will major in International Studies. After her Macalester Career has ended, she plans to get a Masters degree in International Relations and possibly work for the Foreign Service." Or something like that.

Now, of course, I wonder where I got off writing that kind of statement about myself when I was eighteen years old.

Needless to say, none of those

Cont. on p. 3

New Assistant Professor



Assistant Professor
Nathan Hensley

The English Department is thrilled to welcome the newest addition to our full-time faculty family:

Nathan Hensley, who was hired at the conclusion of last year's search for a specialist in literary theory, comes to us from Duke University.

He will be teaching two courses this fall—ENGL 136 Introduction to Drama: Modern Tragedy and ENGL 205 Literary/Cultural Theory: The Problem of Art.

You can read more about Professor Hensley on his faculty web page at www.macalester.edu/english/hensley.html as well as in last May's issue of *The Waverley*, available in our online newsletter archives at www.macalester.edu/english/MayWaverley.pdf.

We also celebrate the arrival of future English major June Cornelia Hensley, class of 2031, born June 29, 2010.

Congratulations!



Change
is in
the air

New Department Chair

As of academic year 2010-11, the new English Department chair will be Professor James Dawes, who is also the Director of the Program in Human Rights and Humanitarianism.

If you plan to declare an English major or minor this year, please bring your declaration form to Professor Dawes for his signature. Office hours will be posted in the English De-

partment during the first week of class.

We hope you'll join us in expressing our gratitude to outgoing chair Daylanne English for her dedicated service to the department in the last two and a half years.



New Fall Visitors

Please welcome Visiting Assistant Professor Scott Selisker, who is replacing Assistant Professor Casey Jarrin during her sabbatical year. Professor Selisker is teaching Intro to the Novel and Global Fictions of WWII this fall.

Visiting Instructor Ethan Ruthford, who was slated to teach another Intro to Creative Writing course this fall, has taken a full-time editorial position at Milkweed Editions. Congratulations, Ethan—but we're sorry to see you go!

Visiting Instructor Jon Lurie returns to Macalester to take

over Ethan's section of Intro to Creative Writing—a course he also taught here last fall.

Welcome back, Jon.

For more information on Scott Selisker and Jon Lurie, please visit our faculty web page at www.macalester.edu/english/faculty.html.



Visiting
Assistant
Professor
Scott
Selisker

Life After Mac: Anna Joranger



plans materialized. Sometime during my years at Macalester I gave up on things that sounded prestigious but that really didn't represent me at all, and I devoted myself to what I really loved (and what I really still love): Creative writing. It isn't the kind of degree that gets you five breathtaking job offers before you've even graduated, but it made me incredibly happy.

It also left me without a clue as to what to do after graduation. I plan to get an MFA eventually, but for a while my "gap years" seemed like cavernous empty spaces. I toyed

with the idea of moving to Los Angeles, then I thought about Lutheran Volunteer Corps, and what I finally settled on was an opportunity that came to me entirely by chance and connections: Moving to Quito, Ecuador for a year

to teach English.

Now I've been living in Quito for a month and a half, and I'm still not entirely sure what I'm doing here, but that seems to matter less and less. I have an apartment that I share with one of my best friends (Sara Graybeal '10, who is also teaching here for the year), I have a teaching job that I don't feel one hundred percent apt to perform but that I'm managing to perform anyway, and I have a steadily growing understanding of a place I knew next to nothing about six months ago.

Teaching has been a challenge so far. I teach from 2:00 to 8:00 pm every day, three two-hour classes, two of which are occupied entirely by teenagers. I tend to fall asleep by 10:00 Sunday through Thursday nights, and I wake up every day at 7:00 because the ridiculously bright sun is glaring through my papery curtains. Then every morning at 7:30 I go out onto my terrace with a cup of instant coffee (the only kind of coffee anyone drinks here) and look out at the mountains and try to ground myself, and each morning, I'm happy to say, it feels a little more like home.

I guess my story doesn't have much of a lesson or theme or anything central at all. It's too early to tell. All I can really state is that I've accepted how directionless my life feels sometimes, and I've learned that while that can be terrifying, it can also be thrilling.

"I have a steadily growing understanding of a place I knew next to nothing about six months ago."

Save the Date

THE FALL MAJORS LUNCH
WILL TAKE PLACE ON
THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 16
FROM 11:30 TO 1:00
IN THE SMALL GALLERY
(OLIN RICE)



Tressa in Bolivia, cont.



The author, Tressa Versteeg '11

No one would tell me their own name, but they were more than happy to tell me the names of their friends

and concerned neighbors. A short man in a red baseball cap was covering piles of potatoes with straw.

"Hello sister," he said.

"Good evening. You are Gregorio?"

"Yes! Good evening! Did Calixto leave?"

"Yes. He will bring my friend, another student, to her community now, but I think he will come back here tonight. I think he will sleep here."

"Will he be back in time for supper?"

"I don't know," I said.

"Well sister," Gregorio continued, "My brother Calixto brought you here to us. We are living in deep crisis but since God has brought you here, we are so happy to have you." And the knot loosened ever so slightly.

I was a surprise at Unidad Educativa de Antofagasto, the elementary school next door, as well, but the professors, Moises and Catalina Cuter agreed to help me for the next three weeks. There were 24 students from around age five to twelve, divided into "the

older ones" with Profesor Moises and "the little ones" with Profesora Catalina. I spent a few days as the strange white, blonde gringita who played soccer at recess but eventually was given 45 minutes with each class a day. All I wanted to do the first day in class was learn their names.

I first asked a young boy in jeans and a sky blue WWF t-shirt over a once-white long sleeve jersey. He said nothing. I asked the next boy. Nothing. Then I tried to ask one of the girls. Nothing. I went one by one around the classroom. Only small quiet giggles and large looming silences. I didn't know if they didn't understand Spanish, didn't understand *my* Spanish, were shy, or were being purposely defiant.

At one of the last students, I heard a voice behind me. "His name," the WWF t-shirt boy said, pointing to another boy across the room, "is Franz. And his name is Wilmer." And this is how I learned all their names. No one would tell me their own name, but they were more than happy to tell me the names of their friends. We then went on to draw "what you can see in Llojjllata and at your house." I helped them write their names on their papers and after 30 minutes, I had my first stack of rainbow houses with ducks in the yard: drawings for my project. The bell rang for recess, but instead of the usual rush for the door, they sat at their desks and whispered. Then Mario, WWF t-shirt, spoke up again. "Why do you look so different

than us?"

I spent the long weekend with my host family in the potato fields and knew all my students had done just the same. On Monday, I came to play soccer and Profesor Moises asked me to turn my hands over to prove it. Seeing the blisters where fingers meet palm, he smiled in satisfaction and told me to take the older ones first.

They were bouncing off the walls and were never shy again. Teodora and Julia, the sixth graders, asked anything and everything about food in the United States. The fifth graders, Mario and Luis, tried to teach me Aymara by talking to me in only Aymara, but the third graders Franz and Wilmer would count to 10 slowly for me. I still had trouble with names, because they used different names outside than in the classroom. I never quite understood why there were "soccer names" and "real names" but I didn't really care.

The little ones mostly had crayon fights, tried to eat the paper, or just wrestled. They also began trying to change their names. "When you asked us our names last week," said a second grader named Marisol, with two dark braids and wide set eyes, "we didn't know them, but we asked our moms and my name is Lucina."

"And my name," said her friend Rosi, "is Savia." They could never pronounce their "real names" the same more than once, but they were adamant and I wasn't there to tell them what their "real names" were.



Kids in the class making drawings

Bolivia, cont.



Marisol/Lucina and Rosi/Savia turned out to be a pair of whippersnappers. The next day when I was trying to teach a game called “Frogger” they giggled and whispered until I asked, “What is so funny?” Marisol/Lucina looked me straight in the eyes. “You have the eyes of a cat,” she said.

And a wave of snickers passed over the circle. Then Rosi/Savia added, “And the nose of a pig.” And the snickers became enormous laughter and we never learned the game.

I shared this story with my host family, the Quispes, over hot bowls of potato and edamame bean soup.

“The eyes of a cat, sister?” my sister Adelia asked.

“Yes, the eyes of a cat, and the nose of a pig,” I said.

“But sister, the nose of a pig?” my brother Alfredo asked.

“Yes, the nose of a pig,” I said. The enormous laughter of the little ones seemed to have traveled to our kitchen as well. Once they had stopped laughing, Adelia told my mother Justicia the story in Aymara, and Justicia’s soft laughter erupted into a joyful cackle: “The Ey-hehaha-es of a ca-ha-ha-hat!” When my other brother Edward ducked into the kitchen, they asked

me to retell it for him.

“The eyes of a cat, sister, are you sure?” he asked.

“Yes, and the nose of a—”

“Pig!” yelled Adelia. And the same thing happened when my father Gregorio walked in, and again when my brother Jorge David visiting from La Paz, walked in. When I asked them if it was true— if I indeed did have the eyes of a cat and the nose of a pig—they shouted a chorus of no’s and the enormous laughter echoed in the kitchen for days.

Before I left for Llojjllata, I met with a woman named Teresa who had been working to transform rural education for 20 years. “The classroom is a colonial space,” she said. “What they learn and how they learn is rigid and strict. It will be a challenge to break that rigidity. They have learned that there is only one way to do things and one way to learn.” I still felt fairly confident in my project. Even though I was an outsider, a westerner at that, what better way to break colonial rigidity than creative expression, I thought, where there are no wrong ways to do anything?

The next couple of weeks at school, I kept on with the drawing

activities because many of them couldn’t write in Spanish very well yet.

“Today, let’s draw the perfect day!” I said.

“What do you mean?” Mario said quickly.

“The perfect day! If you could do anything, or go anywhere, or eat anything. What would it be like?” I think I have gotten the point across until I walk around to each student, and each one asks me what they are supposed to draw. “So can I draw a house?” Juana asks me.

“Sure!” I said, “Whatever you want.” And at the end of the hour, I had another stack of rainbow houses with ducks in the yard. We had a hard time getting past “what you see in Llojjllata.” Any prompt I gave them like “the perfect day,” “if you could have three wishes,” or “what are you afraid of” resulted in the same blank stares and question: “What do you mean?”

I knew our cultures were completely different, but I thought that them being kids meant that they were just like me when I was a kid. It seems obvious, but at the time, I didn’t realize that our childhoods weren’t the same. I didn’t realize that what I meant was for them to draw something crazy and out of this world. I couldn’t tell them they weren’t being creative enough or that they weren’t drawing the right thing because that would be continuing the same colonial

“You have the eyes of a cat,” she said. And added, “And the nose of a pig.”



Collage image from the cover of the book project

Bolivia, cont.

Profesora Catolina flipped through the drawings and said: “Not one of these names is real.”

oppression that I was so confident I would break with “creative expression.” I didn’t realize that their imaginations don’t take them there, because there are other wonderful things to think about—like a beautiful day in the sun playing soccer and eating soup with the family. Their perfect days were everyday.

They like to play and imagine and so did I, but I learned from those kids that creativity and imagining aren’t necessarily idealizing reality, which is what I grew up doing and still do. Out of fear that I was continuing colonialism in the classroom with western ideas of “creative activities,” I changed my strategy to letting them

draw whatever they wanted, while we just chatted about whatever they wanted.

One of my last days in Llojjllata, I asked them what their last names were, so I could accredit the illustrations in

my children’s book to all of them. Many of them told me they didn’t know their last names, and though Mario and Luis were quick to help me, I was still missing a few. After class, I timidly approached Profesor Moises to help me. “They know their names,” he told me, and I said that I would ask the kids again the next day.

The last day came. I was switching from the older kids

to the little ones and Profesora Catolina stopped me and asked to see the drawings. I handed them to her, she flipped through them and said simply: “Not one of these names is real.” My brain and heart froze with the realization that my project was about the expression of identity and I didn’t even know their names, not to mention that I thought we were friends.

I kept trying to say good bye during the last block of the day on Wednesday, sewing, but the kids didn’t understand. Mario/William was busy not doing his sewing project but kicking a soccer ball against the wall in the same sky blue WWF t-shirt he had worn every day. “So you are coming tomorrow?” he asked.

“No,” I said.

“What about Monday?,” asked Julia/Gimena.

“No, I’m sorry.”

“Ever?” asked Luis/Alex.

“Maybe one day, but not soon.”

And eventually I stopped lingering, and waved goodbye and left. It was not dramatic. It was strangely unemotional and fairly awkward.

My project ended with the book *The Brother, The Sister, and The Cow*. The story is a journey that represents bits and pieces of rural daily life, Aymara spirituality and Andean cosmivision, and the influences of globalization—all of which shape and form the lives of the kids and families in Llojjllata. All the illustrations in the book were collaged

from the drawings of the students.

Maybe the names I remember when I look at pictures are not the school kids’ real names but I know the stories they shared, the soccer we played, and the things we taught each other were very real. I first thought of their drawings as redundant and struggled to find creativity in them. But now, in retrospect, it is quite easy to remember how incredibly creative those kids really were, to make up entirely new names on the spot, and pull it off for three weeks. It is hard to get more creative than that.

By the end of my time in Llojjllata I could keep up with the kids counting to 20 in Aymara, and could also ask them how they were and tell them I was good. I knew when my mother Justicia said “mank’sinyani” it was time to eat, and that when she said “mus maow” it meant we loved each other.

[note: *The Brother, the Sister and the Cow* is being published through Kids’ Books Bolivia, an organization committed to making reading and books accessible to kids in Bolivia. It will be in English, Spanish, and Aymara and hopefully published by late December. You can visit kidsbooksbolivia.org for more information about the project.]



New Meeting Space for English Students



Old Main 220).

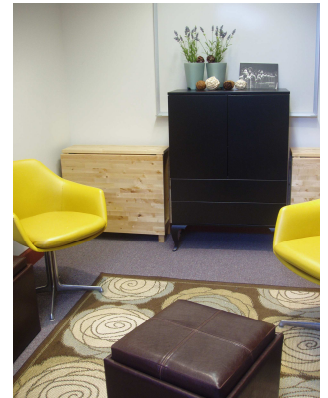
The brand new English Department Reading Room features a small library of English and Anglophone literature and criticism, hand-picked by our faculty; a cozy bench by the window for lounging with a good book; fold-out tables to accommodate lap-tops, or small discussion groups of up to 10 people; and a large-screen Apple computer for multi-media presentations.

With generous funding from the Critchett Fund, we have turned our bland and underused conference room into a fabulous multi-purpose retreat. (If you didn't know we had a conference room, that's not surprising. It's the little room inside the department lounge, located in

We encourage all our students to make use of this new space for quiet study time, reading, and meeting with friends and classmates.

SAVE THE DATE

Watch for announcements of the Reading Room Grand Opening Event on Wednesday, September 22, from 5 to 7 pm (our usual Treat Day), featuring a webcast of Iraqi poet Dunya Mikhail reading at the 92nd Street Y in New York City last April.



Exploring the divergence and reconvergence of traditional and scientific methods of healing, Vance Gellert's photography examines the conditions under which we believe healing is possible. Dr. Gellert reprises some of his work with shamans and curanderos of South America and juxtaposes it with imagery from MRI assisted brain surgery, MSI magnetoencephalography and DaVinci robotic surgery. The images reference the relationships across global healing practices and the healing belief in high tech Western biomedicine.

**The Crossroads of Healing
a presentation
by Vance Gellert
Thursday, Sept. 23 at noon
in the Harmon Room
of the Library
Pizza will be served**

Sponsored by the English Department and the Psychology Department

ENGLISH

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The English Department weekly Treat Days will start the second week of term. Join your friends for food, games, and company in the Literary Lounge (OM 220) every Wednesday from 5 to 7 pm.

Please watch this space for information on upcoming department events, such as our info panels about internships, study abroad, and grad school.

Stop by the department (OM 210) any time you like for coffee, healthy snacks, and unsolicited advice from your department coordinator.



We're on Facebook: "like" our page
by visiting www.macalester.edu/english

Mac Slams Brings Nat'l Champs to Campus



Thanks to the organizational efforts of English majors Neil Hilborn '11 and Dylan Garity '12, Mac Slams is proud to present a performance by the National Poetry Slam's 2010 and 2009 champions, the St. Paul Soap Boxing Slam Team, featuring Shane Hawley, Khary J., Kyle "Guante" Myhre, Sam Cooke, and Sierra DeMulder, who coached the Macalester slam team to its 3rd place victory in the 2010 national College Union Poetry Slam Invitational last spring.

Saint Paul Poetry Slam Team Showcase

Friday, September 10 at 8:30 pm in the Wallace Concert Hall (Music Building)

(sponsored in part by the English Department)

This issue of *The Waverley* was produced entirely by Department Coordinator Anna Brailovsky.

Look for the return of your student editors and Cruise Directors, Marissa, Maddie, Jamie, and Graham after the start of term.

WRITERS WANTED: Tell us about your internships, projects, study abroad, favorite reading, etc.

Contact Anna, x6783 or abrailov@macalester.edu to contribute a story to *The Waverley*