

stories beyond the classroom

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EXPERIENCE



EXPERIENCE: STORIES BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

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ENGAGING
WITH THE
WORLD
OUTSIDE OF
CAMPUS



PUBLISHER'S MESSAGE

BY CHRISTOPHER OSCARSON, DEAN

Several years ago, I took a field botany class during a spring term. Most of the class sessions were spent outside the classroom in different parts of campus learning to identify plants. The experience taught me to see the astonishing diversity hidden in plain sight that I had never noticed before. Before the class, I could not see the wild diversity in the “green” that surrounded me. Seeing is far more than the physics of light hitting the retina. When you don’t know what to look for, one tree looks a lot like the next. I had to learn to slow down, notice difference, and create new mental categories to see with new eyes. The experience and effort it required had a transformative effect on me.

This experience in learning to parse undifferentiated green might be a metaphor for how studying abroad can teach us to see. So much of what we see depends on our ability and willingness to perceive it. Quotidian habits can dull our perception if we allow routine to completely govern our daily lives. Travel productively disrupts routine and defamiliarizes our surroundings thus opening our eyes to the details of difference. It shakes up the habits of the everyday in ways that can teach us to be more attentive to what is actually there. When everything is unfamiliar, we are forced to observe with renewed intensity in order to make sense of what we are experiencing.

Studying abroad (as opposed to just *traveling* abroad) takes this to another level. Studying requires the effort to learn and reflect on new frameworks of thought, and it often takes the form of metaphorically (and literally) learning a new language. Every language encodes within it a culture’s unique lived experience and ways of categorizing the world. Inhabiting another language is like putting on lenses that organize and sort the world in unique ways. Anyone who has learned another language can provide examples of grammatical structures, ideas, or vocabulary that have no easy translation into English. The Swedish word *lagom*, for example, means something like “not too much nor too little—just the right amount” and speaks to important cultural norms about moderation and equality. *Komorebi* (木漏れ日) in Japanese refers to the dappled interplay of light and shadow created when sunlight filters through the leaves of trees. To grasp



Photo by BYU Photo

its significance, you need to understand how Shintoism celebrates the beauty of fleeting, impermanent natural phenomena. In French, the word *dépaysement* (literally, the condition of being un-countried or removed from one’s native soil) refers to the disorientation or the out-of-element feeling experienced when removed from one’s familiar surroundings or culture. It is part of the French language’s rich vocabulary for emotion, and unlike the English *homesickness* or *culture shock*, it usually has a positive connotation of renewal.

Of course, being mobile or even learning new vocabulary still falls short of an experience that transforms us and our ability to see. The effort required by study and paying attention both demands and cultivates humility, curiosity, courage, and compassion. These virtues enlarge our capacity, vision, gratitude, and ability to love. The more we try to see in these ways, the easier it becomes and the more we grow and change. And once we return home with eyes opened by this new capacity to see, we can never see our home in the same way again. ☰

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Experience: Stories Beyond the Classroom, a College of Humanities student journal, publishes essays that capture learning through experience. Through a single story, students show how they integrated their studies with an experiential learning opportunity, most often a study abroad or internship. Experience is about engaging with the world outside of campus.

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STUDY ABROAD: HARRY POTTER'S ROOTS: BRITISH YA FANTASY

Gillian Garmon

In the Quire at Westminster

Photos courtesy of Gillian Garmon

“Save me, O God: for the waters are come in, even unto my soul. I stick fast in the deep mire, where no ground is: I am come into deep waters, so that the floods run over me. I am weary of crying; my throat is dry: my sight faileth me for waiting so long upon my God.”¹



Kneeling amongst the ornate hand-carved pews at Westminster Abbey, I let my tears flow freely. The words I heard were being sung in the high, lilt-ing voices of the choir. Old men with gently curling beards, young boys with freshly scrubbed faces, and middle-aged women with soft, tired eyes joined their voices together in an aching, heartfelt harmony repeated verbatim from the Bible.

That day they sang from Psalm 69. The white-haired woman on my left clutched her husband’s hand while we listened. The gentleman dressed in tweed to my right hummed quietly along under his breath, his eyes closed. Two rows ahead, a young boy gazed upward at the glorious, vaulted ceiling, his mouth hanging slightly open in awe. Though we were all of us strangers, in that moment we were bound together in sacred wonder. For those of us grounded in religious belief, the music felt like the closest we might come in mortality to hearing the voices of angels. For others, it was simply a rare chance to feel at home in a place dedicated to empathy and love.

Centuries have passed since Westminster was first constructed, and in that time, it has weathered the turmoil of the Reformation that reshaped the faith of a nation, the horrific bombing of the Blitz during WWII, royal funerals and coronations, national mourning and celebration, and the earnest, unrecorded prayers and sorrows of millions who entered its doors in search of peace. Still, it has remained unaltered, indomitable. It has remained a place of refuge.

Founded around 960 AD by Benedictine monks, Westminster Abbey has sheltered worshippers for more than a millennium. In 1065 it was consecrated by Edward the Confessor, acting as a place of spiritual refuge in its role as part of a pilgrimage—the sick and the weary gathering in hopes of healing at Edward’s shrine. In some cases, the cathedral became a site of physical refuge, like when Elizabeth Woodville fled to Westminster during the Wars of the Roses and claimed sanctuary while pregnant, later giving birth to the future king Edward V within its protective walls. In other moments it has acted as a source of intellectual refuge, memorializing great thinkers such as Isaac Newton and Charles Dickens, and therefore providing a space where ideas are allowed to endure beyond the limits of a single lifetime.

When I arrived in England for my study abroad, I never expected to join the ranks of the many worshippers seeking spiritual, physical, and intellectual refuge. Only a few years previous, as a teenager, I had made a habit of telling myself that my inability to accept help was a symptom of my unique self-possession, my laudable desire to remain autonomous and independent. Now, as a college student, the truth was dawning painfully: I was a self-isolating young adult far from home, forced by the sudden shock of international travel to come face-to-face with my own spiritual inadequacies, my emotional anxieties, and my intellectual deficiencies. Though I had imagined that the muse-

ums, tube stations, lectures, and weekend train rides would define my time abroad, my desperate longing for direction and comfort within the first weeks had me seeking out sacred spaces almost instinctively. Westminster was the first, followed by Canterbury with its intricately carved masonry, golden-hued Caen stone, and sprawling corridors; and then Ely Cathedral in Cambridgeshire, which projected glowing, multi-colored refractions of light from the stained glass windows onto the floor. Each cathedral was an almost incomprehensible feat of human devotion and artistry, but somehow each one was distinct, teaching me completely new and precious truths. In each holy edifice, epiphanies flowed through me like water.

On my first visit to Westminster, I sat near Gerard Manley Hopkins’s grave in Poet’s Corner and thought of his poem “Carri- on Comfort.” Under my breath I spoke a few of the lines:

*I’ll not, carrion comfort, Despair, not feast
on thee;
Not untwist—slack they may be—these last
strands of man
In me ór, most weary, cry I can no more.
I can;
Can something, hope, wish day come, not
choose not to be.²*

The words were heavy, especially as I knew they had been written by Hopkins—a devoted Jesuit priest—during a faith crisis he referred to as his “dark night of the soul.” All his life, Hopkins had struggled with what he viewed as the incompatibility of his poetic vocation and his religious duties; this tension eventually culminated in his fear that he had been utterly abandoned by God. Though separated from Hopkins by more than a century, many of us today wrestle with the same questions and fears Hopkins faced. Seeing him honored with a burial at Westminster filled me with joy and relief, as it taught me that doubt and devotion can coexist. Like me, Hopkins had experienced moments of both soaring faith and searing



Photo by Osviel Rodriguez Valdés / Pexels

uncertainty, and yet his questioning was not punished but rewarded, because his questioning was a crucible to pass through, resulting in a realization that “the world is charged with the grandeur of God / It will flame out, like shining from shook foil.”³ My love for cathedrals found root that day. I realized that so many of us enter these spaces burdened with seemingly unanswerable questions, but many of us, like Hopkins, leave rededicated to the decision to persevere, to endure, and to place our trust in God even when belief feels strained and hope fragile.

That insight was perfectly timed, for my arrival in England had not only inspired a deep, personal reevaluation of my being but had also taken place at a moment when the world itself felt unsteady. Every

time I perused *The New York Times*, I felt mired down with accounts full of conflict, political bitterness, rising violence, and a kind of collective exhaustion that seemed to seep into every conversation. I read David Brooks’s *The Road to Character* and T. M. Scanlon’s *What We Owe to Each Other* obsessively, trying to puzzle out how best to navigate a world that consistently disheartened me with how fractured people seem, how quick we all are to turn inward or lash out. And in my own small orbit, I felt equally adrift. I had been offered a prestigious, well-paying job as a weather and catastrophe claims insurance adjuster, but I felt agonizingly torn between my desire to become financially stable and my desire to pursue my dream of becoming an author. The decision pressed upon my mind and

“Each cathedral was an almost incomprehensible feat of human devotion and artistry, but somehow each one was distinct, teaching me completely new and precious truths.”

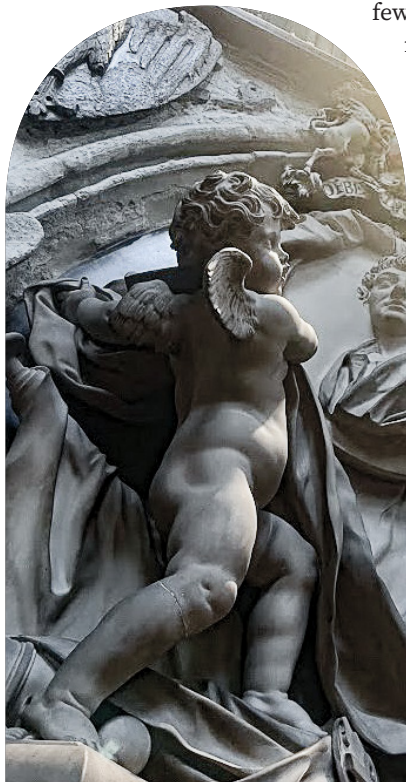




Photo by Nick / Pexels

spirit. Practicality or passion? What was I to choose? And would it even matter what path I took when the world seemed so extreme, so binary, so pulled apart? Even surrounded by classmates, I felt an undercurrent of loneliness, as though everyone else had found their footing in this new country while I remained spiritually jet-lagged, waiting for something familiar to hold on to.

It was in the cathedrals that something finally began to shift, though the path toward healing within these sacred spaces

was not always gentle or straightforward. At times, it demanded a kind of reckoning I had not anticipated. My visit to Canterbury Cathedral forced me to confront a difficult truth: Cathedrals may stand as monuments to humanity’s longing for transcendence, but they are also inseparable from humanity itself and therefore from its violence and suffering. I had come to these sacred places hoping they might shield me from the chaos of the modern world. Instead, Canterbury forced me to recognize that the struggles

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“...the value of a life is not determined by the absence of uncertainty or conflict but by the willingness to remain faithful to one’s convictions.”

that define our own age are not uniquely modern burdens but undeniably human ones, embedded even within spaces built for worship.

In 1170, four knights, believing they were carrying out King Henry II’s will, entered Canterbury Cathedral and murdered Archbishop Thomas Becket. Though he had once been a close friend of the king, Becket had opposed his attempts to limit the power and legal independence of the church. In defending what he believed was right, he lost his life.

I walked through the same hallways the knights would have stormed that night. I passed through the same doorway. I stood in the very place where Becket made his final stand. The current caretakers of the cathedral had placed a cross, hemmed in on both sides by two jagged swords, above the site of the attack. Red light streamed down from above, illuminating the composition. The juxtaposition of the cross and the swords, terribly illuminated by the crimson light, made the weight of history painfully



Photo by Greer Barker, "Santa Cruz del Valle de los Caidos"
Kennedy Center Photo Contest, Honorable Mention,
Spain Direct Enrollment

“True faith, he argued, does not timidly avoid questioning but whole-heartedly embraces it.”

tangible. Being in that space was a sorrowful experience, forcing me to reckon with the reality of a world in which power can be misused and justice distorted. However, it also gave me courage—courage to be more like Thomas Becket. His story taught me that the value of a life is not determined by the absence of uncertainty or conflict but by the willingness to remain faithful to one’s convictions. Becket could not control the political turmoil surrounding him, nor could he guarantee his own safety or future, but he could choose integrity.

I began to realize that the most important part of the difficult decision I had to make between a well-paying career and a well-loved vocation was not the act of decision-making itself but my determined refusal to allow that decision to be influenced by doubt or fear. This transformative experience taught me that integrity is not measured by the absence of fear but by the willingness to remain faithful to one’s convictions in spite of it.

The Church of Our Lady of the Assumption and the English Martyrs, by contrast, invited a different kind of reflection. The edifice is located at the very heart of the

Cambridge University campus (one of the most intellectually rigorous environments in the world), and I half-expected my visit to be characterized by a sense of tension between religious faith and academic learning, as it is often assumed that these two disciplines must stand in opposition. However, as we were punted across the River Cam, our tour guide took a moment to point to the church’s central position on the quad, explaining that intellectual inquiry is actually strengthened by religious presence. True faith, he argued, does not timidly avoid questioning but whole-heartedly embraces it. His words echoed those of C. S. Lewis, who held a professorship at Cambridge’s Magdalene College and taught, “I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun has risen: not only because I see it, but because by it I see everything else.”⁴ For Lewis, faith was not a constraint placed upon thought but a lens through which to view the world. Walking through Ely, I internalized this truth. I accepted that I did not have to choose between thinking deeply and believing fully.

This realization was one of many I experienced within the sacred spaces, each contributing to a gradual reframing of my personal uncertainties. My worries about the state of the world began to ease as I was reminded of how enduring human beings are; even in the face of hardship, they continue to create beauty that outlasts them. My fears about my own life choices softened as well and I came to recognize how long people have been turning to God for answers and how consistently they have found the guidance they needed to move forward.

Walking through cathedrals was like walking through history; I felt I could sense the weight of the centuries pressing gently against my own anxieties. Before I had ever stepped onto English soil, hundreds of thousands of pilgrims had walked these church aisles with burdens far heavier than mine. They had fled from war, wrestled with grief, and confronted doubt, despair, heartbreak, and illness. And yet they kept

coming. They knelt. They prayed. They wept. Here, they had found enough peace to stand up and try again.

My time in England taught me that faith is far broader and more generous than I had previously imagined. I saw that the desire to understand the divine—to become more loving, more patient, more whole—is woven into the hearts of people everywhere. That realization brought me unending joy. It made me feel less alone. This understanding aligns deeply with what I value about BYU: the belief that we are part of a Christlike community, one that seeks truth wherever it can be found and welcomes all who are striving to become more like Him. ☸

Endnotes

1. Psalms 69, 1–3 (King James Version).
2. Gerard Manley Hopkins, “Carrion Comfort,” *Poems and Prose* (Penguin Classics, 1985).
3. Gerard Manley Hopkins, “God’s Grandeur,” *Poems and Prose* (Penguin Classics, 1985).
4. C. S. Lewis, “Is Theology Poetry,” in *They Asked for a Paper: Papers and Addresses* (Geoffrey Bles, 1962).





Photo by Jess Bailey Designs / Pexels



Photo by Anya Juárez Tenorio / Pexels

The Woman *in the* Kimono Shop

Photos courtesy of Bridget Eddy



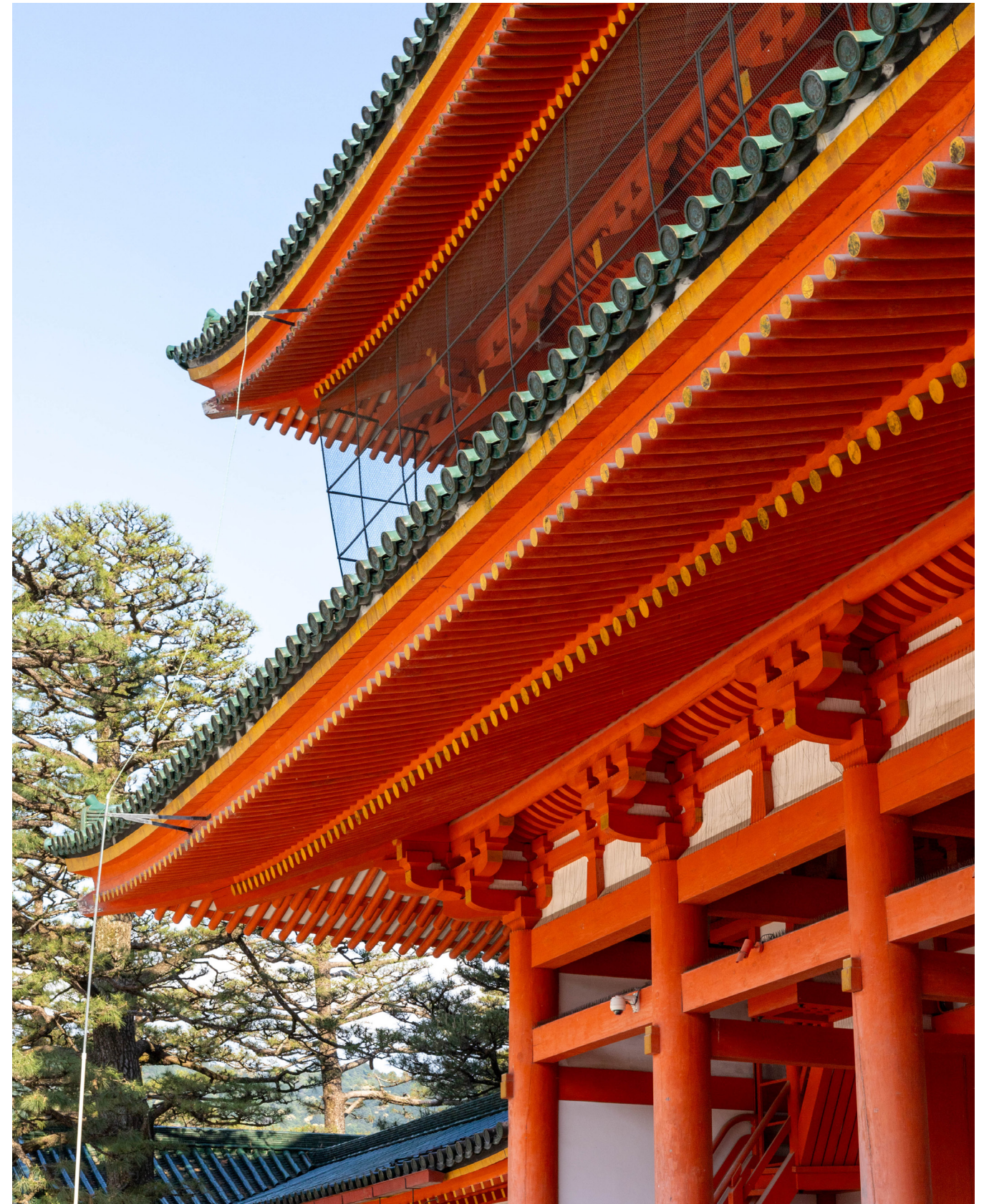
Tokyo, Kyoto, Osaka—cities full of bright lights, delicious food, and the best of Japanese pop culture. Finally! Being able to leave the classroom and use the language I had been studying for two years sounded like a dream come true. And it was—for a while.

Then came the language missions. These seemingly simple, innocuous tasks were designed to nudge us out of our comfort zones by practicing everyday Japanese with strangers. “Ask for a bag at a convenience store,” “Find a tour guide at the shrine,” “Strike up a conversation with someone at the train station.” Simple, straightforward tasks.

And we hated them.

Okay, maybe *hated* is too strong a word. We did, however, dread doing them. Each time I read over the daily challenge, my palms got sweaty and my heart rate went up. What if I said the wrong thing? What if I was accidentally rude? What if all I got were responses in English? Dangerous mentality.

For the first mission, a classmate and I were assigned to visit one of our neighbors and give a self-introduction—something I had been doing since day one of learning Japanese. I still freaked out. Fear had me memorizing sentences, vocabulary words, and gestures beforehand so I wouldn’t cause any embarrassment. When our kind, elderly neighbor answered the door, I didn’t speak unless spoken to; I didn’t ask a question I had not rehearsed; I didn’t do anything out of my comfort zone. To make things worse, as I listened to my classmate speak with confidence I started to wonder if this was all a big mistake. Maybe I should’ve waited another year to study abroad.





My fear brought along a friend: shame. These two followed me around on every single language mission I completed.

They followed me on a race to San-jūsangendō Temple. This language mission required us to get there quickly using only the directions from others. But my good old friend fear convinced me to let my partner do most of the talking. Any fun that I had felt was swallowed up by shame. Shame at my inability to be of help to my partner. Shame that I had wasted another

chance to improve my speaking ability.

They followed me to a ramen restaurant, where we had to create a short video on our findings—bonus points if we could interview someone. A classmate and I recorded a few planned-out scenes but dreaded the idea of intruding on the workers in order to interview them. I made fear sit outside and asked if we could interview one of the cooks. He was super kind and tried to ensure I understood what he was saying. But with

“I made fear sit outside and asked if we could interview one of the cooks.”

my heightened nerves, I couldn’t understand. I would ask a question, get an answer, give a nod pretending I understood, repeat. Shame returned and filled me with self-hatred and regret. Were all the language missions going to be like this? Was this vicious cycle of doubt, panic, and dissatisfaction inevitable? The terrible thought, “Am I ever going to be fluent?” was growing louder every day.

Until one evening when I decided to go to a kimono shop.

One of the things I’ve loved most about Japanese culture—ever since I was a little girl—is the kimonos. A few years ago, my father went to Japan for business and asked my siblings and me what we wanted him to bring back. I asked for a kimono.

He brought me a light pink kimono with sakura flowers. It was more stunning in person than I had ever imagined. The fabric was gorgeous and the stitching was clean. I was thrilled and overjoyed every time I looked at it. I hadn’t asked



for the obi belt or the garments you wore underneath—only the kimono. And so, when I was accepted to study abroad, I was determined to complete the outfit. What better place than Kyoto to do so?

I found a highly rated place and, one night, split off from my group, letting them know I would meet up with them later. On the way to the kimono shop, I once again rehearsed what to ask, especially すみません、着物を買ってもいいですか。(Sumimasen, kimono wo kaite mo ii desu ka?)—“Excuse me, is it okay if I buy a kimono?” Simple enough on paper.

I entered the shop just before it closed and was amazed at the stock it had: kimonos ranging from short to tall sizes, obiage (sashes) and obijime (decorative cords) of various colors, and other accessories I had never seen before. The shopkeeper heard me enter and welcomed me in standard Japanese fashion: いらっしゃいませ!(irasshaimase!)—“Welcome in!” She appeared to be in her late 30s, and I imagine that she was used to foreigners and tourists coming in and purchasing items. But I didn’t just want a kimono—I wanted to speak to this woman only in Japanese. I had been practicing, researching, and studying for this moment.

However, when she started to inquire about why I was there, my confidence completely evaporated. When I spoke, I blurted out the words. My pitch went up, and I incorrectly conjugated 買って (katte, “buy”) and stumbled over

ですか (desu ka, “is it”). The shopkeeper raised an eyebrow.

It’s funny how much the brain can process in a second. Those scenes in movies where time slows down while a character debates a decision always seemed unrealistic to me, especially when they hold a five-minute discussion with themselves while no time passes at all. But that’s exactly what this moment felt like. In the split second between the question leaving my mouth and the shopkeeper’s reaction, I had already convinced myself that I had ruined my only chance at redemption. Here I was, in a shop dedicated to something I was passionate about, trying to speak a language that I loved, and I couldn’t even do that. I felt like a total and utter failure.

Then, the shopkeeper replied slowly in Japanese: “Yes, is there anything else you would like to buy?”

“...learning doesn’t end when the textbook closes; it continues in embarrassed laughter, in broken sentences, and in the kind patience of strangers willing to meet me at a half-conjugated verb and gently guide me toward understanding.”

Something shifted in me at that moment. The classroom drills—those endless roleplays asking for directions, ordering at restaurants, or practicing keigo (polite) forms—suddenly clicked into place. I felt a strange sense of elation, a combination of partial success and confidence to keep attempting imperfect interactions. I communicated with her. And wasn’t that the whole point of verbal interaction?

My favorite author once wrote, “Mine has been a life of much shame.”¹ And while it may seem like an exaggeration, that’s what studying abroad, up to that point, had felt like to me. For every language mission, I

had studied, rehearsed, and practiced relentlessly. In a sense, it felt like I was in a stage play. In trying to be perfect, I became robotic. Emotionless. Focused entirely on receiving a good grade rather than on whether I was actually improving.

Up to that point, I had been performing.

But eventually, I wasn’t. I was communicating. And that was the only goal I had. This shopkeeper acknowledged me as someone trying to communicate with her and graciously let me struggle so that I could learn.

I felt seen. I felt acknowledged. She aided me in the rest of the purchase and even gave me a gentle correction on my apology for keeping her store open late. “You want to use 遅く(osoku, “late”) not 遅れる(okureru, “to be late”),” she said in a warm tone. Her willingness to meet me halfway, slowing her speech and gesturing as she explained, showed me that communication isn’t about flawless execution; it’s about effort, respect, and persistence.

When I checked out, the shopkeeper gave me a business card inviting me to leave a review. I wrote what I hoped was a heartfelt message that was also beneficial to potential visitors. A few days later, I got a response to my review:

Dear Bridget,
Thank you for visiting us yesterday. And thank you for listening carefully to my poor English! You told me that you’ve loved kimonos since you were a child. I was so happy. Please come visit us wearing a kimono next time!

I felt nothing but happiness.

From then on, I approached the language missions differently. I stopped trying to perform Japanese perfectly and instead tried to connect with those around me. My grammar wasn’t perfect, but it was always enough to bridge the gap. I still froze sometimes, but I began to see the value of those awkward pauses and fumbled sentences. It was an essential part of learning to communicate with others in a language that is different from mine. Learning to speak Japanese became fun again.

Looking back, I have realized that night at that shop was the turning point. The classroom had given me the tools, but the shopkeeper gave me the courage to actually use them. And when I look at my kimonos or read her response to my review, I remember that learning doesn’t end when the textbook closes; it continues in embarrassed laughter, in broken sentences, and in the kind patience of strangers willing to meet me at a half-conjugated verb and gently guide me toward understanding.

When I think about studying abroad now, I don’t just remember the bright lights of Osaka or the calm beauty of Kyoto’s temples. I remember the fear of stumbling through a sentence and the small victory of being understood. And I carry that lesson with me: learning a language—and connecting across cultures—isn’t about avoiding mistakes.

It’s about daring to make them. ☰

Endnotes

1. Osamu Dazai, *No Longer Human* (Chikuma Shobō, 1948).







INTERNSHIP: UNITED KINGDOM

Aubrie Larkin

Reaching the *Pinnacle Crest*

Photos courtesy of Aubrie Larkin



With a click, the door closed behind me, and I was left standing in a little whitewashed room with wooden furniture and dusty bedding. After the winding drive from Edinburgh and a sleepless night crammed on an airplane, I was alone with the uncertainty that had been pulling me through the last two days. Everything had happened so fast.

Had I really jumped on a plane and flown all the way to Scotland? It felt like the first real step in achieving my dream of becoming an archaeologist and museum curator. After all, I was finally among the Scottish history that I loved so much. But what if I had made a mistake?

The voices of well-meaning warnings filled my head. Everyone I knew back home laughed whenever I told them I was going to major in archeology with a focus on museum studies. They would ask, “What was I going to do with that degree?” or make some terrible pun about the job market for archeologists being as dead as the bones we dig up. Family friends thought I would grow out of my love for Scottish history and archeology. Years of hearing that I was going to waste my education weighed me down.



“My lofty career still seemed far away, but the hills in front of me were real and my dreams were real.”

Curation requires a lot of schooling and highly specialized job experiences. The very real risk is potentially backing yourself into a corner by preparing for only a small pool of positions. Now, I had spent my entire savings on flying to Scotland for this internship—every last penny—with no idea if it was going to pay off. Was I making the wrong choice going into museum studies? What if I got to the museum and it was not everything I had hoped? Was I boxing myself into a career I had barely tried and a life that would not be fulfilling? Were the naysayers *right*?

As the panic continued to rise, I tried to catch my breath by staring out the bedroom window. And there they were! The Eildon Hills, painted purple by lavender and heather and crested with thick, silvery fog. The Eildons, comprised of three hills, were once home to the Celtic-speaking Selgovae. The tallest peak has the remnants of a once-impressive hillfort, where over two hundred Selgovae buildings tower over Melrose, Scotland. At its base, in Newstead, rested the Roman fort Trimontium, now buried beneath farmland, its covered walls and amphitheater poking through the soil.

I had spent months studying this history and tracing these places on maps during my education in museum studies, and now I was facing the three hills I had heard so

much about. In that moment, everything I heard in the classroom became real for me. My worries continued to nag me, but they were quieter. My lofty career still seemed far away, but the hills in front of me were real and my dreams were real. I decided that I would make the most of this precious opportunity and hope for the best.

THE VIEW FROM THE VALLEY

When I started university, I made a plan for how I would achieve my dreams, despite the pessimistic views of others. I knew that I had a long hike ahead of me. First, I would set out for a bachelor's degree in archeology at BYU, knowing that in a few years I would pursue a master's degree in museum studies and finally a doctorate, which would open the doors to the world of museum management, archiving, and curation.

However, my ambitions were not satisfied with a museum-oriented career in the United States—I had my sights set on Scotland. Even my enrollment at BYU had ulterior motives. I hoped the international programs would help me get there. After all, the Institute of International Education ranked BYU as “number 1 in the nation for number of students studying abroad.”

Despite my passion for Scottish archeology, the years of schooling, internships, and research ahead of me made me feel like I was standing at the bottom of a mountain, staring up at the looming summit and having no idea how to scale it. I was worried I was entering a rigorous passion project and that I would trap myself in a job that could be unfulfilling. In fact, I often thought of my dream career as the In Pinn, the peak of Sgùrr Dearg Mountain in the Scottish Black Cuillins, which is notoriously difficult to ascend.

The In Pinn's proper name is the “Inaccessible Pinnacle,” and it is considered the most dangerous mountaineering site in the region. You cannot reach the top by hiking; it must be *climbed*. Even the Coire na Banachdich, a rugged mountain route with bridges, screes—an area of incline before reaching

a cliff face, covered in debris—and crests leading to the In Pinn is challenging enough to make most hikers stop short of the vertical rock climb. Both the climb of the In Pinn and the climb of my career were not only alluring in their potential glory but also difficult, a little risky, and hard to reach.

Then, like a climber receiving a rope and a carabiner from above, I was offered the opportunity and resources I needed to begin my professional ascent. Four months before I arrived in Scotland, I had been sitting in an office stuffed with books. I was meeting with my Professor of Russian Tony Brown. He explained that he was the head of study abroad programs in the United Kingdom and that he wanted to send me to the British Isles for an archeology internship. He told me he was impressed by my passion for museum studies and that he thought, “Here was the ideal candidate for an archeology internship in Scotland!” It was something I had never dreamed of hearing but had always secretly wanted someone to say. Finally, someone else believed in my dreams and was encouraging me to pursue the career I had set my heart on years ago.

Only four days after I was given the offer, I was back in the office, this time with the in-country internships ambassador based in Scotland. Scrawling in a little leather notebook, he asked me where I would want to work if I could work anywhere. I did not have to think—I knew what I wanted. I proudly told him that I wanted to work in the Scottish Borders.

“You're sure?” the in-country ambassador chuckled as he scribbled something down.

Most students would have asked to indulge in the tourist-popular Highlands, the urban sprawls of Stirling and Edinburgh, or the excavations of the Orkney Islands.



Instead, I had requested to work at a little local museum in Melrose: Trimontium Museum and Trust.

WALKING THE RIDGE AND DISCOVERING THE PINNACLE CREST

When I arrived, I was eager to get right to work, but, as in navigating the In Pinn, I found I had to start at the lowest point before I could tackle the climb. After settling in, the easy path gave way to its own kind of scree—still relatively flat, but more difficult to walk. Within the first three days, I was trained to give virtual reality tours before moving on to making educational posts for social media. It was stressful, often frustrating. By the next week, my primary project was to assist with the museum’s archiving system, including finding artifacts accessioned by both the Trimontium Museum and National Museums of Scotland, and to update the archives to reflect the available information.

Eventually, after I became more comfortable with my projects, I took on a role in the museum’s daily functions: leading tours, managing reception, and working on holiday activities. It was in the museum loft, climbing through catalogues behind piles of books and spreadsheets, where I was reassured that I had picked the right path—museum studies was the career for me. While the work I was doing might be boring or even menial to most, as I did them I felt the fuzzy warmth of comfort and familiarity fill me. Everything from sweeping the museum floor to updating artifact databases sparked my curiosity and broadened my experience. Each day was a new opportunity to learn how to clean and label newly acquired artefacts or how to engage visitors during a tour—steps that brought me closer to the pinnacle I was seeking. I felt like I was home.

“This trial was just part of the journey, one of the strong winds that buffet you on steep hills before a worthy view.”



There were days I felt defeated. One such day found me sick and exhausted from work and travel. A visit to the hospital told me I had a ruptured eardrum and infection, and I was given a day off to recover. Even still, I knew that work still awaited me on the other side of this illness, looming like a smaller mountain peak, and I wanted to cry. But I remembered how far I had already come. I thought back to where I started, a young student reading about places far away. Now here I was, on the climb that some had said I would never make it to. This trial was just part of the journey, one of the strong winds that buffet you on steep hills before a worthy view. I could push myself forward, I could make it to the next viewpoint, step after arduous step. Later that week, I did: I led several museum tours not as an uncertain guide but as a confident one.

While I filled my life in Scotland with work, adventure, and learning, I realized that I was no longer looking up from the foot of the mountain or teasing the ridge—I was climbing. Like the hikers climbing Sgùrr Dearg, I was pushed forward by a nervous excitement eating me alive and the prospect of a view that I had not even pictured in my dreams.

NOT QUITE THE IN PINN

The months passed too quickly, and suddenly, I found myself with only three days left in Scotland. After spending the day in Saint Andrews, touring the ruined castle and cathedral, I sat in the grass patch beneath the Walter Scott Monument. I watched the sky fade from a silvery shroud of fog into a dark, cobalt blanket scattered with stars. I thought back to my little fantasy of the In Pinn, knowing that I was still far from its peak, but that I was closer. I knew the career I had chosen was not just possible, but within reach. The story of my internship never had a single moment of realization.



Like the climb, my experience was made of small steps and challenges that molded and changed me.

The Coire na Banachdich is extremely difficult but offers beautiful views on the way to the In Pinn. My journey in curation felt similar: Even as I overcame challenges of museum work, more were always in store. I did not reach the Pinnacle on my internship. It was only a small part of my academic and career journey, not the end; I am still climbing, even now. But that day, sitting alone in the dark and cold, for the first time, I could see the top of the pinnacle, and I knew I could get there. ■

Endnotes

1. "BYU Ranked #1 for Number of Students Studying Abroad," David M. Kennedy Center for International Studies Newsroom, November 30, 2023.

Photo by Kevin Ray, "Ko Yao District (Thailand) Island Drone Shot"
2024-2025 Kennedy Center Photo Contest, Honorable Mention,
Asia Business Study Abroad



Timothy Spiesman

Through a Glass, Darkly:

Reflections from Iguazu Falls

Photos courtesy of Timothy Spiesman



“**C**onozcan a mi país!” my manager Maximiliano Moras insisted, just shy of halfway through my time in Argentina.

Get to know my country.

For the last month, I had been an intern for the Welfare and Self-Reliance Department of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, working closely with people navigating different financial challenges. My fellow intern Devan and I listened to their stories and then directed them to our organization’s most relevant resources,

such as zero-interest educational loans or subsidized vocational training. Helping connect people with these resources, we sought to empower them to invest effectively in their future.

We enjoyed our work, yet the routine was intense. This invitation to get to know Argentina was a welcome opportunity for us both—we wanted to travel.

Devan and I set our sights on the great Iguazu Falls, an extensive, multi-tiered waterfall system located 826 miles north of Buenos Aires and situated between Argentina, Paraguay, and Brazil. Two days before seeing the falls, we flew in a medium-sized plane, arriving three and a half hours later at our hotel on Saturday evening.

That night I sat at a colorfully painted concrete table beneath a cluster of palm trees, quietly scrolling through posts from an Argentine news account on Instagram. At the time, I was also enrolled in an online Hispanic culture class





“Worse still was the anger in her voice—that’s never something you want to hear when you’re a visitor in another country.”

through BYU that required us to follow current events through local news. This moment of quiet offered an opportunity to do just that.

One political post caught my eye. It centered on a controversy involving the Argentine president. The comment section hummed with activity. Thousands of reactions crowded the comments: some praising him enthusiastically, others attacking him with open hostility.

As a visitor with little at stake in the political fight unfolding before me, I was surprised by how quickly the controversy drew me in. Something about watching people argue so passionately was intriguing. I began reading the Spanish comments aloud for Devan, occasionally dropping in my reactions in English. “Listen to this—people are eating this up!” I called out before reading one satirical jab. I picked up the pace and read through another series of comments, interjecting in English as I went.

I had been almost completely unaware of a woman sitting a few paces away. As I finished the last comment, she stood up and cut through the night with biting Argentine Spanish.

“Acaso sos vos Argentino?” *You don’t happen to be Argentine, are you?*

Caught off guard, I said I wasn’t, to which she fired back, “Entonces por qué opinás de las cosas de Argentina?” *So then why do you have an opinion about Argentine issues?*

I froze. Until that moment, I had had almost no idea she was

there, let alone that she could hear me. Worse still was the anger in her voice—that’s never something you want to hear when you’re a visitor in another country.

Shock turned to confusion. I had never said anything about what I thought of Argentina—certainly not to her. Then it dawned on me. She had overheard me reading both the comments that praised the president and the ones attacking him, but she could not understand the English reactions I was offering in between. I scrambled to explain, apologizing and telling her that I was a student studying Argentine culture through local news and public discourse.

The explanation came too late. Already offended and hurt, she walked back into the hotel. The last words I heard from her were shouted over her shoulder. “Chorizo! Salami!”

Literally, the words mean “sausage” and “salami.” But when someone in Argentina hurls them at you in anger, they mean something far worse: *Idiot. Fool.*

The quiet calm of the evening was shattered. My confusion turned to anger. Those opinions weren’t mine! And who was she to say who could have opinions about what anyway? If I’d asked her, after all, she probably would have had opinions about my country’s president, too.

Soon after, my anger distilled into hurt. I felt wrongly judged: I knew I didn’t know

much about Argentina yet, but I was trying to get to know this place. If the woman had only stayed a moment longer, we could have chatted and that would have become apparent.

After a quiet Sunday, we bussed through the jungle and made it to Iguazu Falls on an overcast Monday morning that smelled of rain. The greenery was imposing, but more impressive was the expansive river—wide as lake—that fell apart through different points along a long rocky edge. I saw that the blue-green water at the top of the waterfall was perfectly calm before plunging violently over the edge. The scene reminded me of the hotel scene two nights before: what had begun as a calm evening turned into a chaotic and painful encounter.

I thought about the woman that night. Was she offended by how carelessly I had read through those emotionally charged comments? Did she think I was making fun of her country? Hearing me read both sides aloud while interjecting my own reactions in English may have made me sound like an arrogant American tourist passing judgment on her politics and society. If so, it is tragic to think my actions communicated contempt when they truly sprung from curiosity and fascination.

We spent hours walking through the jungle to different views of the falls. Now in front of the largest section of the waterfall





system, my mind was still turning over my encounter with the woman at the hotel. I noticed that the clear, calm water above the falls was actually moving quite quickly. The difference between it and the turbulent torrents at the fall’s edge was not so much a matter of speed as of support and restraint. Before the drop, the riverbed guided and supported the thousands of gallons of rushing water, allowing it to remain clear despite the force. I wished my earlier conversation had been more like that steady, controlled flow than like the chaotic plunge of the falls themselves. I took some comfort in seeing that, beyond the torrent of the falls, the waters again resumed their peaceful trajectory.

Now a year removed from my visit to Iguazu, my mind has returned several times to that night at the hotel. A close friend of mine recently became the target of local social media attention, and I found myself angered by the way people mischaracterized and judged him with only pieces of the full story. While

“I wished my earlier conversation had been more like that steady, controlled flow than like the chaotic plunge of the falls themselves.”

reflecting on my anger, I’ve wondered if the woman at the hotel felt similarly outraged by my actions. By casually elevating the exaggerated and caricatured portrayals of her country’s politics in those comments, perhaps it seemed that I equated those skewed depictions with the lived reality of people like her. It would have been easy for her to think, just as I have thought recently, *You don’t know what you’re talking about.*

The apostle Paul wrote: “For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.” (1 Corinthians 13:12). I sometimes wish I could go back to that evening and try to get to know that woman, what she really thinks, and what her own story is. I could have gained a friend.

On an earlier occasion in Argentina, I had just such an opportunity. Devan and I, both Latter-day Saints, shared lunch with a Catholic priest whom I met at a symposium prior to visiting

Argentina. Our earlier encounter fostered a spirit of mutual respect and a shared effort to understand one another, especially while approaching topics where our beliefs notably diverged. Like the water before the falls, our conversation was beautiful, clear, and productive. We gave each other grace and time to explain ourselves rather than falling to quick judgments or harsh assessments. In that moment, we perceived each other not as caricatures of some group or class but as individuals. We saw eye to eye.

We all see the world through a kind of glass, and it is our choice how carefully we keep it polished, how clearly we see, and

how clearly we let others be seen. In that moment, we all felt the blessing of having polished our glasses thoroughly.

I don’t know how often I experience that type of conversation. It is certainly not every day, and it definitely didn’t happen when I was called a sausage at Iguazu (which I probably deserved). What strikes me now is that in traveling to the falls to get to know Argentina, I ended up learning something far more expansive: how we come to understand anything, or anyone, better. Just as it took us an 826-mile journey to see the falls, it takes intentional effort to truly know the people, cultures, and places around us. ☰



Photo by Grayson Hardman, "Reflecting Pool"
2024-2025 Kennedy Center Photo Contest, Honorable Mention,
BYU Internship



Bella Dushku

Because We *Love*

Photos courtesy of Bella Dushku



“JESUS BEHOLDING HIM LOVED HIM”
In Mark 10, a wealthy man comes running to ask the Savior, “Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?” The Savior asks if he keeps the commandments. The young man says he has done so since his youth. Mark then writes, “Jesus beholding him loved him” (Mark 10:21). Christ asks the man to sell all he has and follow Him. But it’s too much, and the man departs sorrowing.
For years, this story confused me. Christ must have known the young ruler’s circumstances. He must have known how unlikely it was that the man would forsake his possessions. Why did Jesus even try? I came to read the account as a story about failure—a cautionary tale about human weakness.

But when I began preparing to be a teacher, I found a deeper meaning. Christ looked at the young man, beheld him—strengths, weaknesses, and all—and *loved him*. He loved him enough to try. As the Good Teacher, Christ teaches a profound truth: Divine love is not conditional upon whether that love is accepted. It does not depend on outward success or any outcome. Rather, love precedes and informs divine teaching. There is power in that kind of love.
This story helps answer a question at the heart of being a teacher: Why do we try when some of our students face seemingly insurmountable odds? Why do we try when we know we may fail?



READING WITH ANGEL

I first faced a version of these questions when my youngest sister Angelina was diagnosed with dyslexia. I was 11 years old and it became my job to read with her every day after school.

We both hated it.

Angel literally tore out chunks of her hair and, between gritted teeth, told me she was stupid and that it was no use trying. Every day I would ask myself, “What are we accomplishing? She’s miserable, I’m exhausted, and it isn’t doing her any good.”

Still, we kept at it. Without any visible improvements, I kept trying to teach my bright, frustrated little sister, and she kept trying to learn under my inadequate tutelage. Even as a little girl, I felt deep in my bones the injustice of Angel’s situation. She worked three times harder than anyone else in her class but could never catch up. I felt fierce pride in her refusal to give up, even though she felt inferior to her classmates.

My sister’s insistence that she was stupid lit a fire within me. I wanted to become the kind of teacher that believes in students, helps them recognize their potential, and supports them to succeed.

ENGLISH 276: EXPLORATION OF TEACHING

Years later, I was reminded of these questions in English 276: Exploration of Teaching. The course is designed to give prospective English teachers a glimpse into the realities of teaching secondary English Language Arts. As a part of it, I spent three to four hours each morning observing classes in a local high school and junior high.

What I saw there both amazed and terrified me. Day after day, these teachers entered their classroom with enthusiasm, grit, and patience. They navigated seemingly impossible situations

and treated struggling students with love and compassion.

Yet I also watched some of their efforts fail again and again. Despite their effort, skill, and passion, there were always students who remained untouched. Suddenly, my grandiose vision of helping hundreds of adoring students achieve untold success began to falter. In its place arose a fear I dared not name.

LIAM: PART ONE

Soon it was my turn to grapple with these questions firsthand. I began assisting in a seventh-grade reading intervention class at a local junior high. Each Friday, several BYU students in the English teaching program helped facilitate reading stations for struggling readers.

There I met a young boy (we’ll call him Liam) who faced significant learning and emotional challenges. For him, the world was often confusing and overwhelming. One Friday, after several reprimands, he arrived at my station in a fragile state.

That week, I was leading a vocabulary bingo game reviewing words the students had learned throughout the semester. I explained the rules of the game and gave everyone an opportunity to fill out their cards. Liam, distracted by another boy in class, thought we had started without him and panicked.

“Wait! She didn’t say go!” he shouted, looking frantically from side to side and reaching out to stop anyone from writing. “Everyone needs to stop! I’m not ready.”

No one listened; his voice rose to a wail. He turned pleading, accusatory eyes toward me. “How can it be fair if I didn’t know I was supposed to go?”

I moved toward him to explain, keenly aware that I was struggling in front of fellow BYU students and a respected teacher. Maybe if I succeeded in calming him down quickly, I’d feel less embarrassed.



A classroom aide noticed the commotion first: “Liam, this is unacceptable. Come here now!” After a day filled with similar outbursts, we were all exhausted and at a loss. She scolded him loudly for disrupting the lesson.

I watched helplessly as his confusion dissolved into frustrated tears. My heart ached. He had been in my care and I failed him.

Eventually, the aide sent Liam back to the table. Hurt and angry, he looked at me and asked, “Why would you have us play a game that isn’t fair for everyone?”

Heart pounding, palms damp, painfully aware of everyone watching me, I looked into his tear-streaked face. He looked defeated—which was about how I felt.

“Why would you have us play a game that isn’t fair for everyone?”

What a question.

It was precisely what I was wondering at that very moment. But more significantly it was the same question I had been asking for years. I had asked it when I tried to help Angel learn to read. It had haunted my thoughts when I shadowed teachers fighting an often-fruitless battle to reach defiant or disadvantaged students. It was the very conundrum that had troubled me so deeply when I first encountered Mark 10 as a little girl.

WHY DO WE TRY?

If we’re honest, we all know it isn’t a fair game. Every week in English 276 we discussed the many burdens students carry with them into the classroom. So many come to us with trauma, with physical, mental, and emotional struggles, with defiance and distrust. So often the task feels hopeless, but we do it anyway. Why did I keep trying with Angel? Why did the Savior try with the rich young ruler? How could we expect everyone to win this unfair game?

Fortunately, English 276 did more than expose me to the realities of teaching—it also taught me to hope.

One article we studied helped put things into perspective. While it is true that “what students bring to the table [. . .] predicts achievement more than any other variable,”¹ as teachers we are not powerless. According to John Hattie, the second most important influence on student achievement is not policy, class size, or curriculum. Rather, “the answer [. . .] lies in the person who gently closes the classroom door and performs the teaching act.”

It lies in the teachers who tenaciously give their all when success seems elusive and who choose to care even when the work is thankless.

“Rather, love precedes and informs divine teaching. There is power in that kind of love.”





“Looking into his eyes, my heart flooded with compassion. I knew all I could do was try.”

I kept trying with Angel because I love her, just as the teachers I observed loved their students, and just as the Savior loved the young ruler. There is *power* in a teacher who loves enough to try.

LIAM: PART TWO

I knew that whatever I did or said next would not fix the challenges Liam faced. I couldn’t level the uneven playing field of school or life, nor could I miraculously solve his struggles. Looking into his eyes, my heart flooded with compassion. I knew all I could do was try.

Nervously stepping around students and chairs, I knelt beside Liam and said quietly, “I’m sorry. I didn’t do a very good job of explaining what we’re doing, did I?”

Almost desperately, he said, “You didn’t even do any job at explaining!”

I suppressed a smile at his impertinence. “The good news is we haven’t started the game. You don’t need to worry about losing just yet! Do you think we could walk through the instructions again together?”

Liam nodded begrudgingly. I did my best to clearly explain that we were still prepping



the bingo cards before playing. I sat with him and helped him write vocabulary words in the little blanks until I was certain he understood what to do.

We played bingo. Everyone won at least one round, and Liam beamed when he got two bingos in a row. He left the table happy, and I slumped in relief.

The next week, Liam had another meltdown. And another the week after that. I didn’t succeed with Liam in the way I used to understand success. Nothing really changed for him, but everything changed for me.

BECAUSE WE LOVE

Eventually, thanks to her own hard work and the help of a few inspired teachers, Angel did learn how to read. She’s now serving a mission and spends an hour studying dense scriptures every morning. The 11- and 8-year-old girls we once were wouldn’t have believed it possible.

Angel’s is the success story every teacher hopes for, but we had no guarantee it would turn out that way.

The end of Liam’s story is still being written.

At its heart, teaching—and loving—means pouring yourself into another person without knowing if your efforts will bear fruit.

“Jesus beholding him loved him.”

It was wealth that blinded the rich young ruler, but we all have things that keep us from the help and truth we need. Christ chooses to love us anyway.

Some students will reject my efforts. Others, because of the brokenness of this world, will be *unable* to receive the help I would give. Some I will influence for good. Many will simply walk away unchanged. Whatever the outcome, it matters that I try.

Perhaps that is the true definition of success—trying when success seems uncertain, or even unlikely. We try because we love. ■

Endnotes

1. John Hattie, “Teachers Make a Difference: What is the research evidence?” Paper presented at the Building Teacher Quality, Melbourne, Australia (October 2003).



Photo by Bentley Redden, "Flying Fijians"
2024-2025 Kennedy Center Photo Contest, Best in Show,
Information Systems, 4th Industrial Revolution



INTERNSHIP: FRANCE, LES PETITS FRÈRES DES PAUVRES

Jarrood Taylor

The Beautiful Inefficiency of Love

Photos courtesy of Jarrod Taylor



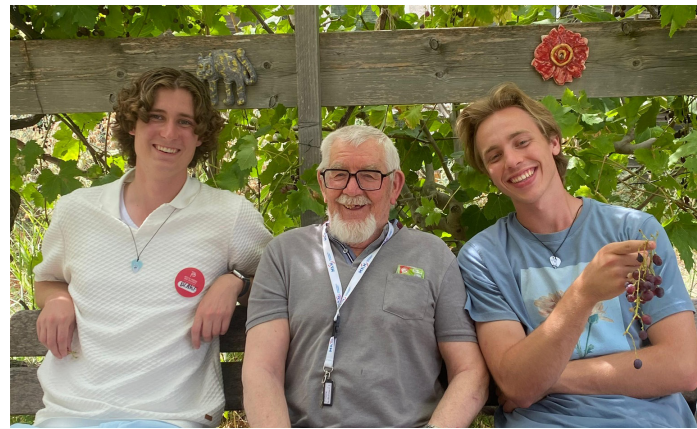
This is the story of how spending a summer befriend- ing a 100-year-old woman in Marseille changed me and my perspective on life forever.

But first, some context. For as long as I can remember, I have wanted to be a doctor. And as a very goal-oriented person, I turned everything in life into a frenzy of lists and checkboxes. I signed up for dual enrolment, filled my schedule with AP courses, joined the National Honor Society, and pursued every

other résumé-builder you could think of.

Yet the more that I stacked on my plate, the more obsessed I became with efficiency, efficiency, *efficiency*. This mentality became even more extreme after serving a two-year mission in France. I began treating nearly every single thing I did in life as a line for an ever-growing résumé. Even my religion classes at BYU started to feel like hurdles to jump rather than opportunities to cultivate my relationship with Christ. I was beginning to feel burned out. Assignments and tests felt like immense burdens, and other important areas of my life were beginning to slip through the cracks.

This is when a friend reached out about an internship opportunity with Les Petits Frères Des Pauvres, a nonprofit organization that seeks to provide relationships and genuine human connection with isolated elderly people across the globe. They had recently reopened their application portal and were looking for one more male volunteer for the summer.



But normally students wait until later in their education to pursue experiences like this. Not to mention that I would need to work countless hours and secure financial aid to even afford it. A myriad of reasons pushed me to chalk it up as an irrational, impulsive decision. Yet the thought continued to nag at me.

I finally decided to take a leap of faith. I applied for the program and was accepted. I got another job and began to save, all the while exercising trust in professors who told me how great the organization was and in students who had loved their experience. I began to believe that this would be a pivotal moment of my education.

Months later, when I first sat in my tiny, sweltering room in Marseille, doubts crept into my mind. What was I doing? I had spent so much of my life doing everything as productively and efficiently as possible, and now here I was, setting myself back thousands of dollars, sitting thousands of miles away from family and friends, all because I had a hunch that it could be good for me. What had I been thinking?

As part of the internship, Les Petits Frères Des Pauvres provides interns with a list of people in the area to visit. After a couple weeks of visits and service, a peer—Blake—and I met with a volunteer who guided us to an unfamiliar care facility. We crossed through the peaceful backroads of East Marseille to a residential care home. Our destination that day was room 312—so we made our way up to the *fourth* floor. (Europeans and Americans, it turns out, have very different opinions on how to count floors.)

By no means do I have a photographic memory, but when I think back on that day, I can picture it as if I were standing in the hallway right now:

We knock softly on the door. A voice from inside calls for us to enter. It is a quiet voice, though clearly attempting to shout. We open the door and find Madame Sanchi: a small elderly woman in a pink tank top, resting peacefully in her nursing bed. She turns toward us, invites

us in, and asks who we are. We explain that we are interns for Les Petits Frères Des Pauvres, and she asks us to sit down. There is only one small chair alongside her bed and a small oscillating fan. She sits up and pats the mattress beside her, motioning for me to sit as well.

She asks more questions: what are we studying, where are we from, why come to Marseille of all places. When Blake and I say that we are both going into medicine, she beams; as a young woman she worked as a nurse. She is so hospitable to us, despite never having met us before. I can truly see how great of a nurse she must have been.

She tells us about her life. How she came from the French colony of Algiers; how she went through all sorts of schooling; how she had worked in multiple professions. She says that she is no longer close with much of her family, but that she has two furry friends that she cares deeply about: a small dog and a cat at home. She laughs when she explains how they never get along and how her cat always keeps her little pup in line.

She explains in detail the stunning views that she once enjoyed from her apartment, located not far from the care center. Her stay here, she explains, is only temporary. The summer heat has become too dangerous, but she expects to return home soon. She says we should still come next week on the chance that she is still there.

So that's exactly what we did. And once more, I remember the conversation as if I were sitting next to her on that small bed right now.

We knock again on door 312 and hear a voice from inside: “*Entrez!*” (Enter).

When we enter, Madame Sanchi stares at us: “Who are you?”

“It’s Jarrod and Blake.”

She looks at us as if she had never seen us. “Who?”

“She is so hospitable to us, despite never having met us before.”

We tell her that we are interns for Les Petits Frères Des Pauvres. She invites us to sit.

She begins to introduce herself again, walking us through her life: her childhood, her education, her careers. She tells us about her dog and her cat who do not get

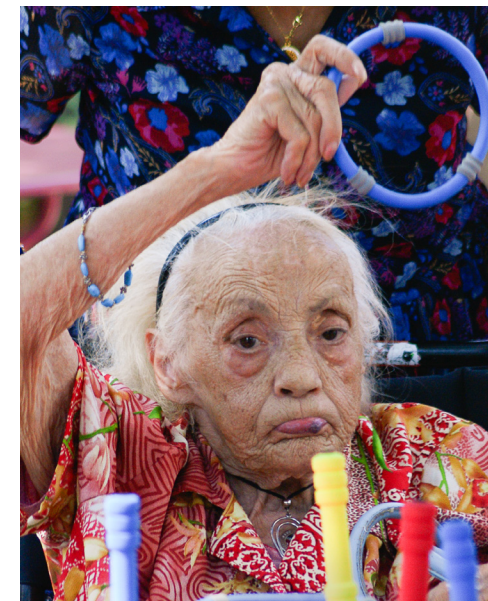
along well. She explains that she just recently arrived at the center, and that she plans on packing up in just a few days to go back home. She clutches at a small dog plushie that the staff had gifted her while explaining that her pets must be anxiously awaiting her return.

I feel a strange blend of emotions when I think about these conversations with Madame Sanchi. On one hand, I feel a deep sadness knowing that, because of dementia, she has been trapped in the same loop for nearly a decade, with no end in sight. I can only imagine the constant confusion, fear, and frustration that Madame Sanchi goes through with no living family and nothing but her small plush dog to bring her company.

And yet it is difficult to speak of her without feeling a sense of joy. There were the silly stories,

familiar as they became; her witty humor; and an innocent optimism that endured despite everything.

We visited her every week, and the conversation was always the same. Well, almost always. Once when we said that we were with Les Petits Frères Des Pauvres, she looked at us with a raised eyebrow and a smile. “Oh, I know them,” she said. “They used to come around and visit from time to time.” That little comment that she made still stands in my mind as a testament to the effect that we can have in the lives of others.





Somewhere deep down were echoes of conversations and interactions that were otherwise lost to memory. I knew that I was making a difference.

But even more miraculous was the effect these conversations were having on me. It almost seemed paradoxical that someone as anxious about efficiency as I could spend every last penny and devote so many visits to conversations that would be forgotten just hours later, yet happily walk away a changed man. However, it was that very dichotomy

that helped me shift my perspective. If all I wanted to do in life was to get a well-paying job as quickly as possible, I would have never chosen a path that requires decades of study. I don't want to be a doctor for a paycheck or a title that gives me status. I want to be a doctor because I thrive on personal connection. I want to be a doctor because every time I get the chance to serve God's children, I feel closer to my Savior and His constant love.

Madame Sanchi lives a life full of confusion, isolation, and frustration, but for a

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“Somewhere deep down were echoes of conversations and interactions that were otherwise lost to memory.”

fleeting moment she was not so alone. For a brief time, no matter how quickly she forgot it, she had two friends by her side to share laughter with, to share pain with, and to bond with. In the months since returning home I have tried my best to focus less on efficiency and more on intention. I changed my major to neuroscience because there are millions of people like Madame Sanchi, and I pray that through my studies I may be able to help and comfort those who struggle with similar pains.

Reflecting on all this has been a humbling reminder that God has a plan for us. And as much as I would like it to be, that plan is almost never a straight path to the destination. Yet at every twist and turn lies a lesson to be learned and a soul to be served. ☰

The God *of the* Whole Earth

Photos courtesy of Natalie Fernsten



The cathedral felt cold, despite the summer heat and the bustling throng of bodies within. I'm sure God's presence was there—among the perfectly crafted sculptures of martyrs, in the ornate stained glass depictions of baby Jesus, or even in the smell of the dust or the shouts of children—but I did not feel it. This was our third cathedral in two days—one of fifteen we would visit altogether on our London Centre study abroad program. They blurred together in my mind: the stone floors, the priests' clothing, the altar pieces, the intricate architecture. I felt the discomfort of hours spent on a humid coach. I felt the exhaustion of living on a less-than-adequate amount of sleep. I felt the stress of finishing *Wuthering Heights* before class. I felt the annoyance of hearing loud classmates distract me before entering this house of worship. But I did not feel connected to God.

Why?

That hot summer day, I remember wrestling my way through the people to find a seat and having a realization: I hadn't prepared myself mentally and spiritually to experience the spirit and majesty of this grand space. It's the work *before*





entering a sacred space—such as a Latter-day Saint temple—that makes those experiences meaningful for me. That realization changed how I approached the rest of the sacred spaces we visited on study abroad, whether it was another cathedral, a mosque, or a Greek Orthodox church. I started taking the time to research each space before arriving, spending a few minutes in quiet reflection before entering, and distancing myself from my group once inside to have a personal spiritual experience.

A few weeks later, I sat on a train headed for the Neasden Mandir, a Hindu temple in North London. As I watched the trees whizz by while gazing at the blue sky, I was in awe of London's beauty and appreciative for the many sacred spaces that had been teaching me about the nature of God. I remembered my childhood best friend, Amulya, was Hindu. I couldn't recall exactly what she believed, but I remembered how she was always kind, welcoming, and willing to share her snacks with me at lunchtime.

“The beauty of this space was disruptive; my eyes welled with tears as I pondered the countless hours of care and worship that happened here.”

I remembered the smell of her mother's cooking and the posters of Hindu figures on the walls of her childhood home. Her example, alongside her incredibly warm and hospitable family, was what I was thinking about as I entered the temple.

We entered a completely different space from what I was used to: monks in orange robes, partially nude statues of their many gods whose names I couldn't pronounce, and statues of decorated elephants. Yet I didn't feel any religious anxiety. I knew that I would

connect with God while I was there because I had prepared myself spiritually and because of my connection to Amulya. I assumed all the worshippers there would be reflections of the warmth and openness I had felt with her family—something that proved to be true in every interaction that day.

We ascended a set of stairs into the temple's most sacred space. The room was filled with ethereal white pillars, all carved with different gods and patterns. Larger-than-life statues of deities lined the walls,



draped in fresh garlands of bright, living flowers. I lagged behind as our group took a lap around the room. I wanted to absorb this with my eyes, my head, and my heart. The beauty of this space was disruptive; my eyes welled with tears as I pondered the countless hours of care and worship that happened here. I felt a spirit of religious kinship in their worship in ways that resonated with me: As members of the Church of Jesus Christ, we also build grand houses of worship to connect with a higher power, worship in community settings, believe that practicing our faiths help guide us through a troubled world, and believe in taking care of those less fortunate than ourselves. These were only a few of the similarities I found.

After having a few moments to walk around their most sacred room, we sat in the center of the space, facing a few of the larger-than-life statues of their gods. A bell rang, and the monks in their orange robes filed out with offerings to place at the feet of the gods. A voice came over the speakers in an unfamiliar language that was repeated by the local worshippers in whispers as they prayed with heads bowed, eyes closed, and hands clasped, slowly rocking back and forth. My heart swelled and the corners of my mouth turned up. I was witnessing living devotion.

What I saw was almost entirely foreign to my religious experiences, but what I felt—the overwhelming feelings of peace, love, and warmth—were identical to what I felt in the houses of worship I attended growing up. I felt my Christian God in the Neasden Mandir; hadn't I always believed God to be the God of the whole earth? As a committed Christian, how could I claim that my God was limited to my church buildings? I'd be worshipping a very small god, if that were the case. God isn't limited to religious spaces we claim as our dedicated houses of worship if we have the spiritual eyes to see divinity everywhere.

When we returned from the temple that afternoon, we took a poll on words we would

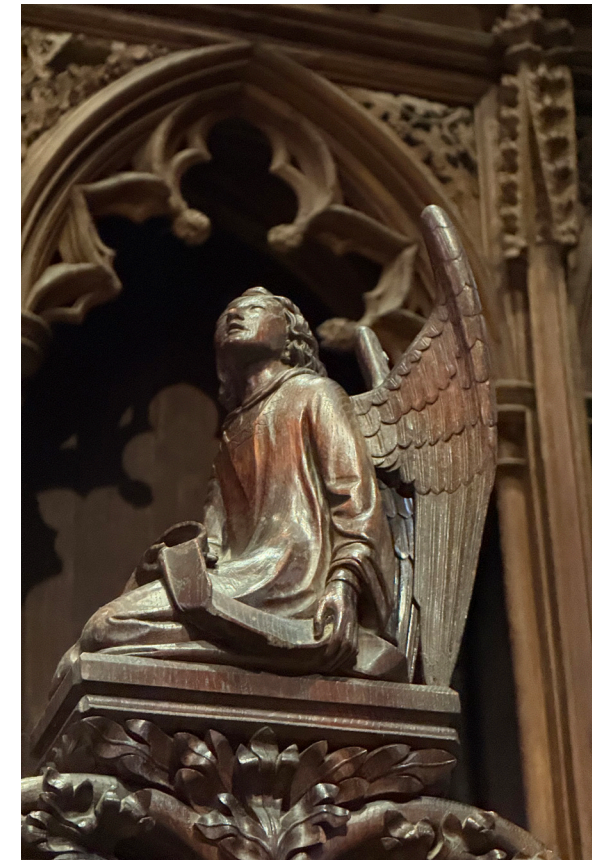
use to describe the experience. I added the words *familiar* and *peaceful* to the selection, still on a spiritual high from visiting that wonderful place. I looked at the board where other students' words appeared: *eerie*, *creepy*, and *uncomfortable*. I was confused. How could others not have seen and felt the love and reverence of this sacred place? How could someone use the word *eerie* to describe such a peaceful environment? We were in the same building, seeing and hearing the exact same things. Why was I able to have such a powerful spiritual experience at a place that felt foreign to my peers? What allowed me to feel God's presence while others felt unease?

I think it was a few things. First, that moment of self-reflection at the cathedral had reminded me that sacred experiences

“God isn't limited to religious spaces we claim as our dedicated houses of worship if we have the spiritual eyes to see divinity everywhere.”

wouldn't come from passive worship; I needed to be intentional about seeking God when distractions might have hindered me. My preparation before visiting the Neasden Mandir put me in a calm and receptive state for spiritual impressions; I was void of any religious anxiety that could have prevented me from feeling the spirit. Then there was my connection to Amulya. My relationship with just one person of the Hindu faith opened my heart to all of them. A human connection made a divine connection possible.

My mind and spirit were open to being moved by the unknown, and in that liminality I found God in what I first might have considered foreign: the overwhelming smell of incense, the steady hum of choral music, or the statues of the saints. Divinity is everywhere if we are open to finding it. ■





Camilla Smith

The Camino: *Finding Answers in Seashells*

Photos courtesy of Camilla Smith



PART ONE: THE LEGEND
Legend has it that nearly two thousand years ago, a small, unmarked boat approached the northern coast of Spain near Galicia. Onshore, a royal wedding procession was underway, with the bridegroom leading on horseback. As the boat drew near, the horse suddenly spooked and plunged frantically into the sea, dragging the bridegroom beneath the waves. When the boat passed by, however, the bridegroom and horse emerged from the sea, miraculously unharmed and mysteriously covered in scallop shells. The people onshore looked into the boat and discovered the body of Saint James, one of Christ’s apostles, who had recently been beheaded in Jerusalem for preaching the gospel. The event was hailed as a miracle from God, and the scallop shell was deemed a sacred symbol of Saint James.

In the years that followed, news of the apostle’s burial site spread throughout the region, and Christians from across Europe journeyed to Galicia in pilgrimage to honor Saint James. Before returning home, pilgrims collected scallop shells from nearby beaches as proof that they truly had reached the body of Saint James.

And so, the scallop shell became the famed symbol of the Camino de Santiago (the Way of Saint James), still guiding pilgrims today toward the memory and miracle of Saint James.





“I often wondered
whether these difficulties
reflected divine
intent or the limitations
of imperfect people...”

PART TWO: THE QUESTIONS

When I was accepted into the Spain: Camino de Santiago study abroad program, I saw it mostly as an opportunity for adventure: walking five hundred miles through northern Spain, seeing the beautiful natural landscapes, exploring ancient cities, and immersing myself in a foreign culture. I certainly did not expect the journey to bring clarity to questions about faith and religion that I had begun to carry.

Over the past few years, I had sensed a tension between my understanding of Christ’s gospel and some of my experiences in the Church. I had a personal relationship with my heavenly parents and I knew that they loved me, yet I struggled with questions about why pain and injustice seemed to persist in religious spaces connected to my faith. I often wondered whether these difficulties reflected divine intent or the limitations of imperfect people shaped by history, tradition, and culture. Whenever I shared my concerns, I was often encouraged to pray more earnestly, study the scriptures more deeply, worship in the temple more frequently, and set my questions aside for a time. I sincerely tried to follow this advice, but it did not yield the outcome I hoped for. I felt frustrated. At times, I worried that the

differences in perspective between me and other members of the Church might never be fully reconciled.

PART THREE: THE ASSIGNMENT

During the first week of class, our professor introduced us to the concept of “figurative language.” Figurative language communicates meaning through creative imagery; it is the language of metaphor and symbolism found in poetry, art, music, dance, clothing, architecture, and religious rituals. He then gave us an assignment to find 18 examples of figurative language along the Camino, with an emphasis on those associated with a spiritual feeling. We were to write about what those examples meant to us and how symbol and metaphor offered new ways of understanding.

At first, the assignment seemed daunting. I struggled to know what to look for. Seeing figurative language did not come naturally to me. My eyes seemed to pass over everything without distinction, despite my best efforts to detect some meaning hidden beneath the surface of my surroundings. The feeling was familiar. It reminded me of my search for meaningful answers to my questions of faith—reading widely in hopes of finding clarity, often coming away still searching and uncertain.

PART FOUR: THE STRANGER

Everything changed during a chance encounter with a stranger at a fork in the road.

A friend and I had been walking for about a week on the Camino. We arrived at a spot where the path diverged into two unseen directions. There in the middle of the junction stood the familiar blue sign with the yellow scallop shell—the guiding symbol of the Camino. However, unlike the other markers we had been following, this one had no arrow on it.

We stopped, unsure. We were in a forest with few travelers, no cellular service, and no tracks to follow. The sign that had already guided us for miles suddenly felt

useless. To make matters worse, these scallop shell trail markers were placed sporadically along the Camino, so it was possible to walk for several miles before realizing we were lost. Choosing the wrong path would cost us valuable time and energy.

While we stood there debating, a fellow pilgrim came up the path behind us and quickly saw our confusion.

“Are you looking for which way to go?”

“Yes!” we said, relieved to have someone there to help us. “We’re confused about which way the sign is pointing,” I explained, indicating the shell at the fork.

“Ah,” he said, pointing at the shell. “You see how the lines meet at the base of the shell? The base always faces the direction you should go. The lines are leading you there.”

I looked at the shell again, reimagining it differently. I had always seen the yellow lines fanning out in different directions like rays of morning sunlight. Now I tried to imagine the lines converging at the base instead. It felt strange to see it this way, but I supposed it made sense that the lines would point in one direction, since the symbol was meant to guide travelers. (Later we found that not all shell signs followed this rule, but I liked the sentiment of the man’s wisdom and held onto it).

We thanked the man and continued on our way, grateful to know that we were on the right path.

Every time I passed a shell, I thought about what the man had said and imagined the lines moving inward toward the center. I reflected on this idea repeatedly until one day I had a moment of realization: I came to see the shell as a symbol of my time not only on the Camino but also in life itself, in this shared human journey. We come





from different places, with different challenges, trials, lifestyles, and beliefs, yet we are all moving toward the same destination in our own way and time. Although our paths are unique, we do not walk alone. We are surrounded by fellow travelers, bonded in purpose as we move to the same end. Our shared destination unites us despite our differences.

When I passed a scallop shell, I did not see it as merely a trail marker. Instead, I was reminded of the sacred unity we shared as pilgrims walking together.

I was surprised by the quiet joy and satisfaction I felt in finding deeper, more personal meanings in the symbol of the scallop shell. It felt like learning to interpret a secret code hidden in plain sight—a new world that I was only beginning to glimpse. As I continued on the Camino, I started seeing figurative language everywhere—in music, books, and artwork and even in the trees, rivers, and mountains around me.

Most of all, I was surprised at the abundance of figurative language woven throughout my religion—the temple endowment, the parables in the scriptures,

the sacrament, and other ordinances. It struck me that symbols and metaphors were some of Christ’s primary means of communicating with us. Through this search for figurative language, I was beginning to see God in a way I never had before. Maybe, I thought, there are deeper layers of meaning surrounding my religious questions still waiting to be uncovered, just as there had been with the shell.

PART FIVE: THE MASS

During the final week of our journey, we stopped for the night in a small mountain village overlooking the green hills and valleys once inhabited by ancient Celtic tribes. That evening, in the little stone church at the edge of town, we joined our fellow travelers for a pilgrim’s mass: a special service held to bless pilgrims with safety and guidance on their journey home.

The pastor invited everyone to gather in a circle around the pulpit and then called for members of the congregation to come forward and read the Pilgrim’s Prayer in their own native language. I was surprised by

“Although our paths are unique, we do not walk alone. We are surrounded by fellow travelers, bonded in purpose as we move to the same end.”



how many languages filled the room: Spanish, French, Chinese, Korean, Italian, Dutch, German, Polish, Ukrainian, and more. As we stood together in silence and reverence, I looked around at the faces and felt overwhelmed by the unity and love present.

We all came from vastly different backgrounds, cultures, and lifestyles, yet in that moment, we were unified by something far greater than our differences. In that room, I saw us as the scallop shell, connected to one another by God’s love. I could feel in that moment that Christ’s love was more powerful than the things that divided us.

Standing in that little stone church tucked in the green mountains of Galicia, I felt a peace so great that it transcended my understanding and gave me hope for the future. The love I felt that evening witnessed to me that God’s love is powerful enough to bring us together no matter our differences.

I still carried unanswered questions, and the pain surrounding them did not disappear altogether. Yet my experience on the Camino taught me a new way to search for answers. Just as the shell had lifted the bridegroom safely from the sea all those centuries ago, the wisdom of the shell seemed to draw me gently upward—away from my grief and toward the love of God. ☸





Photo by Bentley Redden, "Children of the Sea"
2024-2025 Kennedy Center Photo Contest, Honorable Mention,
Information Systems, 4th Industrial Revolution

Discovering Our Calling in Life *Through Internships*



Photo by David John Arnett

The word *vocation* comes from a Latin root that means “to call,” and it speaks to an inner calling or meaningful endeavor that one must pursue. A vocation doesn’t necessarily imply a particular profession or an accumulation of wealth, but it does imply a recognition of one’s place in life and a determination to follow the dictates of one’s heart. Internships offer an ideal way to discover that calling.

C. S. Lewis observed, “What I like about experience is that it is such an honest thing. You may take any number of wrong turnings; but keep your eyes open and you will not be allowed to go very far before the warning signs appear. You may have deceived yourself, but experience is not trying to deceive you. The universe rings true wherever you fairly test it.”¹ When meeting with students, I often ask, “Would you buy a car without first test driving it?” Their answer—“Of course not!” Following the same logic, I ask, “Would you invest thousands of dollars—not to mention years of your life—in a college degree without testing it?” Internships enable students to “test drive” what they think they want to do professionally and to see if, in fact, their real-world experience confirms or disproves their expectations.

Since 2007, I’ve sent many students abroad to intern with providers that run the gamut of academic majors. After returning, some say that their experience confirmed what they thought they wanted to do; others say that it opened their eyes to the fact that they don’t want to pursue what they thought they did. Although different outcomes, both are success stories in that they offer students valuable direction at a critical time in life. It’s far easier to pivot while still a student than to become ensconced in an advanced degree or job post-graduation in a field one no longer wants to pursue.

Classroom learning offers a controlled, hermetic learning environment that regulates content and external factors. Internships move beyond a controlled

environment to a real-world setting in which theory and practice meet. For some, this reality can prove jarring, but those who move into this space without breaking down develop a capacity for handling insecurity and its ups and downs. As psychologist Carl Jung observed, “To experience defeat is also to experience victory.”² Such is the price of expanded self-awareness, and when this expansion alters how one thinks and acts, we can then speak of inner transformation.

Transformation implies a wavelike rather than a linear model, which is to say that testing one’s calling in life requires a certain humility and willingness to accept change. Herein, I would assert, lies the inner meaning of Paul’s teaching that we “die daily”³ to our old self. As Thomas McConkie observes, “Developmentally, if we allow ourselves to move freely from one transformation to the next according to divine timing, the path can’t help but assume new forms across different inflection points in life.”⁴ As such, transformation implies an experience of death, which is something that needs to be surpassed to attain a higher level of development, both personally and professionally.

Each of us is constructing a life, the blueprint for which lies deep within us and awaits our giving it expression. When we test our life’s calling, we serve notice, as it were, to the universe that we’re prepared to realize the potential built into us. To embark on such a journey in no way exempts one from hardships along the way, but when one lives according to the dictates of the heart, which is to say, trusting one’s inner Liahona, even the most vexing of challenges assumes a purposeful character.

Accordingly, when Job declared “my heart shall not reproach me as long as I live,”⁵ he spoke as one who trusts the intimations of the heart, however difficult the trials associated therewith may prove to be. Teresa of Ávila characterized the spiritual life not as a straight line, but as “a mass of winding steps that seem to take

us far away from our goal, while our pilgrim’s feet are pleading with us to trust the process. To trust ourselves. To trust the Spirit who leads us. There is no such thing as falling behind; there is no such thing as getting ahead; there is even no such thing as losing our way, for it is the Way who carries us.”⁶ Indeed, the universe seems to favor those who live from their center and pursue whatever vocation it is that impresses itself on them as an inescapable task.

Those willing to brave the unknown environment of an internship and test what they think is their vocation will return to complete their academic training with more experience and capability to work in real-world conditions with its attendant demands, challenges, and vicissitudes. The 20th century poet, T. S. Eliot, eloquently summarized this return journey in the last of his four quartets titled “Little Gidding”:

*We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.*

Such is the path of expanded self-awareness, and internships can play a vital role in helping one accomplish this task of tasks. ■

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Mention, Around the World: Seeking the Sacred From
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Photo by Aaron Angelbuer, "Reading Between the Lines"
2024–2025 Kennedy Center Photo Contest, Runner Up,
Kilimanjaro: Adventure Travel in Tanzania

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Chia Wei Audrey Wang

International student

Major: Medical Laboratory Science
Cultural Perspectives from India Study Abroad

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Andrew Bonney

Married student

Major: Middle East Studies/Arabic
Jordan Intensive Arabic Study Abroad

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Gardens and Food of the Alps Study Abroad

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