

where there be
dragons



The Map's Edge

FALL 2013

Global citizenship and leadership programs in the developing world since 1993

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VOTES ARE IN FOR 2013 SEMESTERS - SEE BACK COVER FOR BEST-OF PHOTOS

DO YOU HAVE AN UNBELIEVABLE PHOTO FROM YOUR DRAGONS COURSE?

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Nepal

A Letter

from the executive director

Chris Yager



Sometime in the last year – I don’t recall exactly when, I saw an interview with Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia. Explaining a core, foundational belief that forms his approach to the interpretation of the US Constitution, Scalia said that history-changing works of genius (such as the work of the Founding Fathers on the US Constitution,) occur rarely. When they do occur, says Scalia, they ought to be canonized, and should not be subject to reinterpretation due to changing context. What interested me was not Scalia’s position on “textualist” jurisprudence, but the idea that the human experience is so heavily impacted on so few occasions by so few people.

The most impactful teacher I ever had once told me a story of a holy man who was put on trial for the crime of producing miracles. “Show us that you can create a miracle by the power of God,” said the judge. Turning to the crowd that had assembled, the holy man said, “In the name of God, I command the miracle to happen.” (The story would be better if I could remember the miracle, but I regrettably cannot.) What’s important is that the miracle did not happen. Then, with a glint in his eye, the miracle-maker turned away from the judge and said, “Now, in the name of me, I command the miracle to happen.” The miracle happened! And for his perceived hubris the holy man was subsequently stoned to death. Not a great ending for the holy man, but the parable is meant to illustrate the power of the individual’s Godhead - a power to source incredible potential from deep within; a power to realize a transformative act of genius, at any time.

I don’t think we have to wait for a signature moment in history when a rare few produce something that enables humankind to take a step up the evolutionary ladder – leading to greater qualities of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Moreover, I don’t think we can afford to wait. Resources are diminishing as population and consumption levels are on the rise. Visionary action, leadership, and acts of genius are essential if we’re to sustain the planet. At Dragons, we’ve long believed that by teaching cross-cultural empathy, we can contribute to the evolution of global citizenship. We believe that Dragons’ courses provide skills, wisdom and inspiration that will help tomorrow’s leaders produce the acts of genius that are needed now.

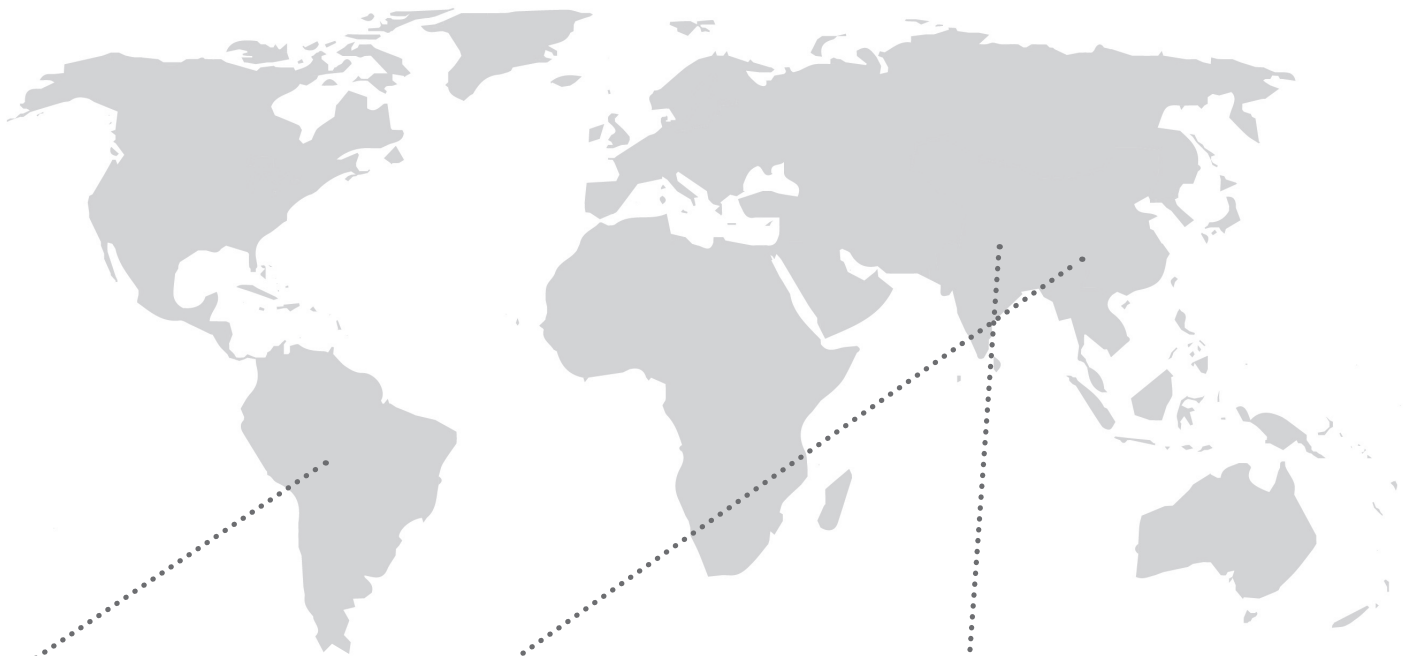
It is our hope that this newsletter helps students to contextualize their Dragons experience, to learn from the work of others, and to be inspired to participate in constructive change that will yield a healthy planet and a sustainable peace. There are men and women of exceptional talent who occupy lofty positions in business and government. And yet, anyone who believes in the power of herself can realize the miracle that we need, when we need it. And we don’t have to wait around for it to happen.

–Chris Yager

Founder and Executive Director

NOTES

FROM THE FIELD



HANNA, DANIEL, TOMU NICO & THE I-TEAM

ANDES & AMAZON

Fall 2013

¡Hola y'all!

We're back in Cochabamba after a month of constant travel! Just to get you up to date, we spent seven days trekking in the high Andes around Illampu Circuit and the Camino de Oro.

Then, we floated down the Beni River for three days, and finally arrived in the Amazon where we spent time visiting four different indigenous communities. It was rad, but we are happy to be back in Cochabamba, settled in and ready for action.

This week, we are back in Spanish classes in the morning, focusing on new conjugations and verbs, and out working on ISPs in the afternoon. We're feelin' good, and gearing up for our expedition in Peru next week.

Paz y amor!

GRACE ARNOLD

CHINA SOUTH OF THE CLOUDS

Fall 2013

We've been having a great time in Kunming over the past few weeks, and have 10 days left before heading out on our expedition phase. Highlights of the past week:

-A Halloween celebration, complete with homemade costumes, a Monty Python movie night, and a parade down to Green Lake Park.

-A scavenger hunt downtown, which helped us practice Mandarin while doing things like, "take a picture with the oldest man you can find," and "buy a present under 10 *kuai* for the instructors."

-Lots of lessons, ranging from a discussion of Chinese development issues to a talk about *guanxi* (connections) and *mianzi* (face) in China. We're also doing "Dynasty talks," where each member of our group is responsible for giving a presentation on a different Chinese dynasty, and so far they have been super interesting!

GERMAINE, KATIE & AMRIT

HIMALAYAN STUDIES SEMESTER

Fall 2013

Namaste! We've just returned from our six-day meditation retreat. We were fortunate to spend our retreat in Pharping, a town located on the southern rim of the Kathmandu Valley. This particular area is a sacred place for Tibetan Buddhists, as it boasts a number of caves in which the man who brought Buddhism to Tibet, Padmasambava, was said to have spent much time meditating.

One highlight of the week was exploring the ancient caves in Pharping. We were able to sit and meditate for a moment- with our whole group packed into a cavern no bigger than the inside of a car! We received *tikka* and lit a butter lamp, and then hiked up one of the hills overlooking the valley. Hundreds of prayer flags fluttered at the summit. We blessed prayer flags as a group, and wrote the names of our friends and family members on each flag before we strung them up to dance in the wind.

Tomorrow... we head to western Nepal!

YAK YAK HOME AWAY FROM HOME

WE'RE ALL PIGEONS HERE

GRACE ARNOLD

China: South of the Clouds, Fall 2013

A FEW WEEKS AGO, I sat in a large square outside the local Tibetan Buddhist temple under an umbrella, surveying the rapidly developing city of Tongren. My host sister, Momo, and I had spent the last hour visiting the temple, chatting with some of her former high school classmates, and lazily spinning the prayer wheels on the temple's perimeter, wondering whether the threatening sky would make up its mind and start pouring rain. In the meantime, we rested on a bench, chatting and watching pigeons peck at the flagstones and preen their dark grey feathers.

"We're the same, you know?" Momo turned and said suddenly to me. The combination of my limited language skills and my host sister's propensity to veer off into random conversation topics made me wonder what I had missed.

"Shen me?" "What?" I asked.

"Zhe ge gu zi." "These pigeons." She gestured to the nearly black pigeons around us and explained, "We are just like these pigeons. We look different- you are from America and I am *tu zu*, but at last, we are both just two pigeons." Linking her arm through mine, we two pigeons then began the long walk home.

DURING THE PAST FEW WEEKS IN CHINA, as our group has traveled from east to west and encountered too many types of people to count, one thing I have inevitably noticed is how people handle what is different. I have become acutely familiar with the feeling of being stared at, so clearly not fitting in as I walk down the street, and have similarly noticed the ways that those who don't fit under the typical ethnic Han Chinese umbrella are treated and viewed.

More often than not, people have a Type A reaction, with behavior that parallels my host sister's "pigeon reaction" outside the temple. They will acknowledge my different-ness and comment on it for sure, but then take the time to chat a little further, smiling and making me feel, if not less of an outsider, then certainly welcome. This is part of what makes me love China so much- the unwavering friendliness and generosity I have encountered in many of the people here is remarkable.

However, there is another reaction I have seen here that is slightly less positive- a Type B, if you will. Particularly in response to many of the *xiao shu min zu*, or Chinese ethnic minorities, oftentimes the overwhelming reaction is to highlight,

distort, and commodify those differences. That's not to say that that the distinct cultures and traditions of ethnic minorities shouldn't be celebrated, but when a Disneyland-esque performance of "Mongolian" culture become a tourist destination, something doesn't feel right to me.

LAST WEEKEND, soon after arriving in Kunming, my host dad took me out for a "fun outing" (his words). We ended up driving out to an Yi minority village for dinner, and I was filled with a sort of resignation - he kept saying he wanted to teach me about culture, and my worries were confirmed when we ended up at what is called a "tourist village", a place where Han Chinese people can come, have a "cultural" experience, and then head back to their city lives. Throughout the afternoon, I became more and more frustrated by what I saw. This seemed to be the epitome of a Type B reaction - a place for tourists looking to fill their yearly 'culture quota' to gawk at a brighter, cleaner, sterilized version of a minority people's traditions. As we sat down to a dinner of barbeque meats and veggie dishes, I resigned myself to a night of waitresses in bright minority attire and my father telling me that the food was "real Yi food".

However, as dinner began and more and more people trickled in to join our little round table, I realized that perhaps I wasn't as smart as I thought I was. I had condemned this village for the commodification of their own culture, feeling good about my cultural awareness and ability to discern true authenticity. But as my host dad welcomed the owner of the restaurant to sit down with us, toasting him and his wife, then seeing an acquaintance's family arrive and inviting them to sit with us, then insisting that the woman grilling our food join the party, I realized I had no idea who at the table was Yi or who was Han, and even more remarkably, didn't feel stared at or ostracized for being so clearly different myself. Things were no longer as black and white, and I saw that there is, in fact, a Type C reaction that I had missed. People of Type C, I found, don't always do or say the right thing and certainly aren't politically correct all the time, but are equally capable of passing you some barbeque and saying, "We may have different feathers, but we're all pigeons here."

THE VALUE OF BEING **BRAVE** over being **Perfect** — by *Susie Caldwell Rinehart, director*

GRACE MCNALLEY, on our West Africa Fall semester, arrived in a rural village in Senegal last week. She found herself alone in a homestay in Senegal in a village with four huts and ten people. She doesn't speak Pulaar, and her family doesn't speak French or English. She communicates by moving her hands, her head, and acting out stories. She says there are multiple awkward silences and much laughter. A baby goat just walked into her hut. She wonders how she will survive the week.

At Dragons, we lean into risk instead of trying to avoid it – in order to expose ourselves to learning that we can't get at home: learning how to be brave in the face of the unknown, to be resilient, and to connect deeply with someone who is different from us.

Grace comes from the most sheltered and structured generation in US history. She is used to a full schedule each day, and the ability to express herself freely. But she also comes from a generation that is afraid of expressing who she truly is, for fear of being average.

I recently heard Thomas Friedman, author of *The World is Flat*, speak at a conference of college counselors and

university admissions officers. He said, "Average is over." He pointed out that close to 90% of applicants to Grinnell College came from China, and most of them had 800s on their SATs. And he said, once you graduate, you better be creative, because companies are only hiring if they absolutely have to.

So high school students have to be uniquely above average. But this is a logical impossibility – they can't ALL be above average.

So a student like Grace might internalize that message like this: I better be exceptional, perfect. And when I look around at school and see others who are far more worthy of the exceptional tag than I am, I give up, eat

a sandwich, and zone out on Facebook.

But in that Senegalese village, there is no sandwich, no Facebook. Grace is sitting, facing her homestay mother, and wondering how to ask her about her fears and her hopes.

How do we help students express their true selves in a world where average is not good enough? Especially if the world needs people who like to figure stuff out where there is no obvious answer. And especially if success in the academic world mostly hinges on figuring out what the teacher wants.

The answer lies in a question: what do I love as this student in the center? Connection.

MY STORY: I grew up in Toronto, Canada with two older brothers. I threw baseballs and footballs, played hockey and skied, camped in the wilderness for weeks at a time and people called me brave because I would jump off a high cliff into a cold lake or run up a tall mountain. But I realize now that I was not especially brave, I just had to step forward in the face of fear in order not to be left out. I was motivated by connection.

Then I became a teacher to connect with students and to have them connect with the world. I was motivated by Mary Oliver's poem, "Wild Geese" that begins, "You do not have to be good." The geese fly overhead, announcing "your place in the family of things." She presented a world where we were already profoundly connected. And I wanted students to feel that. It was always about connection. To place. And to people.

But as an English teacher, I couldn't ignore that the sound of

the geese call is not sweet or easy; it is "harsh and exciting," just like the journey of finding our place in the world.

Over twenty years of teaching, I read hundreds of student journals and I discovered this: teenagers are the opposite of apathetic - they are seekers - seekers of truth, of connection, of wisdom. If you look closely at the Dragons logo, you'll see that the dragon is chasing a bright, flaming ball. It is the ball of wisdom that some part of all of us is continually seeking.

But in most cases, my students were afraid to do the work of seeking because it included the possibility of failure. They didn't want the 'harsh and exciting'. Or the rejection. I saw students who were afraid to fail - even desperate not to fail. I saw teachers who were afraid to fail students. And I had to acknowledge my own tendency to avoid failure at all costs if it meant criticism or people not liking me. But if we don't fail, we don't try. And how can we be truly innovative and creative, if we are afraid to fail? At the very core of innovation is failure.

BACK TO GRACE IN SENEGAL. Here is where she ended up only after a few days: "My homestay family knows nothing of Grace, of Seattle, of Reed College or of my life at home. And I also am eternally ignorant of much of their lives. But what we do know of each other is worth more than I ever recognized. We know of the effort made to communicate, the laughter shared at awkward moments, the sound of chewing, the look of bleary, morning eyes, the smell and feel of our different bodies, the emptiness of our silence together. I am realizing that this is all my family needs to know about me. My life here may be stripped of context but I have been given the freedom to be simply, beautiful human. I am grateful to Nene Balde, (my homestay mother) for my week of freedom."

How did Grace move from a place of fear to a place of connection and gratitude? How does anyone?

We do it by valuing being brave

over being perfect. We have to lean into risk and intentionally place ourselves in situations where we face the unknown.

"Courage," says the poet Maya Angelou, "is the highest virtue, because without it, you can't practice any of the other virtues." ■

About Susie - Having gone to school in Canada, France, the United States, and West Africa, Susie believes that the best education she received was not in one particular country, but in connecting those experiences together and seeing herself as a global citizen. In Boulder, her role is to empower the talented admin team and field instructors to develop the safest, highest quality programs in cross-cultural education.



HIDE

and go for a walk

—by ANNE VETTER

YOUR PHONE UNDER THE BED



DOES IT OVERWHELM YOU TOO, how connected we all are? Sometimes, I feel like there is no such thing as alone in this Western world of ours. Somewhere along the way, we changed our minds and subscribed to the philosophy of “I share, therefore I am.” Think of the last beautiful view you saw, last meal you ate out, last late nighter you danced at that didn’t end up posted, filtered and captioned, on Facebook, on Twitter, on Instagram. We think in hash tags, interact in only the most photogenic ways. When did we start climbing mountains for the Facebook ‘likes’ we will get for our photo at the top and stop climbing just because the mountains are there?

And doesn’t it overwhelm you that with all of these thin tendrils we are sending out to the ether, all of these ‘friend’ requests and pokes and re-tweets, we are not really connected at all? We’ve traded longer, deeper conversations with fewer people for slight nudges from, it seems, everyone we have ever met. Don’t you ever feel as though we’re losing hold of how to connect to one another? I don’t know how, but it all makes me feel both claustrophobic and like I am alone in a very large desert.

Why are we so drawn to these small connections? Is it because they are easy, fast? I think it’s because we, teenagers at least, are all on this track. You’ve heard of it, this race we run, the scramble to work hard at a good high school, to work hard at a top college, to work hard at a fulfilling and well-paying position in the real world, all so that when we are 65 we can stop. The track is stifling; it’s easy to lose your breath trying to keep up, not fall off. And these little pings of quick enjoyment we get from our online lives are easy feelings of accomplishment,

short breaks from the fight forward.

I really can’t remember exactly what possessed me to take a gap year, but I don’t think the idea of getting off the track had anything to do with it. I mean, it sounds incredible, doesn’t it, to take a year off and do whatever you want, wherever you want? I didn’t think I needed a gap year; I had my life together. I was already accepted into a top college, had planned out which graduate school I wanted to go to, what kind of poetry I would write. I probably even knew the type of tea I would be drinking at 30. I was chugging away, speeding ahead on my set path, and without meaning to, I stepped off.

I think part of the fear people have about taking a gap year, or taking time off in any part of their life, is that they will fall behind. It’s easy to imagine that out there, while biking across Chile or working in a coffee shop in Australia, you will lose something. You will lose your momentum, your drive, your intellectual curiosity. You’ll become lazy and give in to an easy life; let your brain melt a little bit. But that’s just not true. There’s something incredibly powerful about disconnecting; the unknown you feel makes your body sensitive to everything around it. Your mind moves to try to comprehend all of that newness. I feel like while I was in high school, my brain worked in patterns, moving over the same types of ideas, pushing through the same type of work, mulling over this one idea of my future. When I stepped away from that, it was like cracking my skull from the top, opening it like

some great mouth, and letting my mind expand into the open space. It's crazy how quickly you will change when you allow yourself to change the way you think, what you think about.

So, no, this idea is not new. Take time off, step off the track, change and grow. This is the story told again and again by gap year students, college graduates who postpone finding jobs, empty nest parents who pack up their lives and move to Laos. But stepping off the track is not all of it, at least it wasn't for me. It just wouldn't have been enough. Think about it this way – you can be traveling halfway across the world yet still be living at home. It comes down to Facebook, to Snapchat, to all of those ways we connect without really connecting with our friends who aren't really our friends. Think of the hours you could spend refreshing and refreshing your Instagram feed, seeing small windows into the lives of those in your life. In those hours, you'd be living in an in-between world; not there with them, but not fully where you are either. And though you could be thinking in this whole new way, you'd still have this barrier around you, a numbness to really see where you are, an inability to be fully present.

I was lucky enough to do the Andes and Amazon semester in Bolivia and Peru last spring. It's an incredible 3 1/2 months spent living in two of the most fascinating countries experiencing cultures so different than ours here in the States. So maybe it sounds odd, but one of my favorite parts of the whole experience was breakfast in La Paz. La Paz is the unofficial capital of Bolivia, a city that's a strange mix of Aymara women with their bolero hats and long skirts and Western coffee shops that serve real espresso and cinnamon rolls. Over the course of the semester, we stayed about 2 weeks in La Paz at different times, but always in the same hostel, close to the main marketplace. So in the mornings, we'd walk there, in groups of three or four, and cram ourselves into these little rooms with just enough space for us, a few more patrons, and the woman cooking our breakfast. It's not the food that made these mornings so special, though *api* and *buñuelos* are delicious, it was the fact that here I was, eating a meal with three of my closest friends, and not one of us was texting. Tell me the last time you ate a meal with a friend and both of you didn't have your phones on the table, buzzing at you, begging you to look down, away from your conversation. Though these breakfasts were simple and no longer than 30 minutes, every morning

I felt as though I was sharing something incredibly precious with my friends, the Bolivian man next to me reading *la noticia*, the sweet woman making my coca tea; I was sharing the now. By stepping away from my phone, my virtual life, I felt the world unfiltered.

I'm not saying that we should all just abandon trying to reach out to our friends and family who are not in our immediate vicinity. I'm just saying we should change how we do it. Don't text; write a letter and in the time it takes to write it. Truly reflect on how you're doing, what you're thinking. Take photos still, but instead of uploading them immediately, collect an album and look through it with your mother, telling her the story behind each moment. Don't comment on your friend's Facebook status; call him up and find out what he's been doing with his life. These connections take more effort, more time, but they give more in return as well. Use these connections as a way to mull through your life and then return to where you are, now, and live again. Fully connect with your friend far away and then disengage, and turn back to the present.

You don't need to go to Bolivia to do this, to fly across oceans and take a year off. In fact, if this were the only way to do it, I wouldn't be writing this. A gap year is incredible, but it's just that – a year. I'm in college now and I do have my phone with me and I do have Facebook easily accessible and I can text and I do text. It's been about finding a balance. My friends and I agree not to use our phones during meals. I don't text my parents back home; rather, I call them once a week and talk for an hour. I catch myself often scrolling through my Facebook newsfeed and I ask myself what I am looking for. If it's a friend I am missing, I'll write them a letter. If it's a distraction from the hours of work I have, I close my computer, hide my phone, and walk into the woods. I take a seat somewhere in the trees, keep my eyes open, and just let myself feel the now. ■

—written by ANNE VETTER
Andes & Amazon, Spring 2013



A LIFE OF LEGACIES

—by SOLA FARQUHAR

I was a student on the *Life Along the Mekong* semester in the fall of 2012. The core curriculum of our course opened my eyes in innumerable ways, but our investigation of ‘The Secret War’ in Laos left me radicalized, angry, and ready to get involved.

Let me tell you the story: Laos is a lush, landlocked little nation

bombs every eight minutes, 24 hours a day, for nine years. Approximately 1/3 of the bombs failed to detonate upon impact, and now unexploded ordnance (UXOs) litter forests, fields, and villages across the country.

Forty years later, less than 1% of the land has been cleared of UXOs. While in Laos, I heard stories of a husband without an arm who

in Laos due to a UXO explosion, and yet the legacy of the war is still largely secret to the citizens of the very nation that waged it.

When I started to think about how I wanted to spend my first summer back in the United States, I immediately thought of my homestay family in the village of Ban Xieng Mene, just across the Mekong from



shaped something like a palm tree. It is also the most heavily bombed country per capita in the world. From 1964-1973, the United States dropped more than 2 million tons of ordnance on the country as part of the CIA’s largest paramilitary operation in history, and subplot of the Vietnam War¹. That is the equivalent of one planeload of

could not work to feed his family of six; I watched a young boy with an amputated leg hang back while his friends played outside; and read about a 17-year old boy who cannot complete his education because he lost his sight and seven fingers in a UXO explosion. These are depressingly common stories. On average, one person dies every day

Luang Prabang. How could I give back to them? How could I honor their hospitality? How could I connect my life in Laos with my life back in the United States? Several Google searches later, I ended up in the outskirts of Chinatown in Washington, DC on the doorstep of a Laotian-NGO called *Legacies of War*.

Legacies of War is the only

US-based organization dedicated to raising awareness about the Secret War in Laos. Founded in 2004 by Channapha Khamvongsa, *Legacies of War* has three primary goals, (a) advocate for the clearance of unexploded bombs, (b) provide space for healing the wounds of war, and (c) create hope for a future of peace³. For nine weeks, I worked as an unpaid intern at *Legacies*, strategizing closely with Channapha about fundraising, policy, and advocacy projects.

My day-to-day life in the office was less than glamorous. I stapled, I helped edit grants, I updated small features on the website – but despite the seeming minutia of my contribution, I woke up charged. Channapha exuded passion and irrepressible enthusiasm for her work. She reeled me in, and slowly I began to connect my life with *Dragons* with my life back home.

For all of you fresh off of a *Dragons* course, don't let the pace of

your life overrun your passion. The legacy of 'The Secret War' left me feeling more angry than I had been in years, and it was important for me to reconcile these two personal narratives through my own actions. I'm still looking for ways to bridge the gap between Laos and my life as a student in Middlebury, VT, but pursuing an internship at *Legacies of War* was one place to start.

I wish you the best of luck in connecting your own narratives, and if you'd like to learn more about *Legacies*, please check them out here: WWW.LEGACIESOFWAR.ORG ■

¹ "Secret War in Laos". *Legacies of War*. Date accessed: 11/11/2013. <http://legaciesofwar.org/about-laos/secret-war-laos/>

² "Frequently Asked Questions". *Legacies of War*. Date accessed: 11/11/13. <http://legaciesofwar.org/about/faq/>

³ "PeaceBOMB: The Story." Date Accessed: 11/11/2013. <http://www.peace-bomb.com/peacebomb/learnmore.html>

About Sola – A current sophomore at Middlebury College, Sola is majoring in History and French. Sola believes that the one cure for any ailment is saltwater: tears, sweat, or the ocean. During the year, she balances schoolwork with play time in the Adirondacks and the Green Mountains surrounding Middlebury. And if she could go anywhere in the world next, she would take the first flight to an organic farm in France, where she would care for animals and working at a vineyard, all the while practicing her French. Sola was a student on the Life Along the Mekong semester in 2012.

HOW CAN YOU HELP LAND-CLEARING EFFORTS IN LAOS?

SOLA Recommends
PeaceBOMB



IN 1975, the Vietnam War is over. A man in Naphia Village, Laos begins to collect scrap metal from the 260 million bombs that were dropped on the fields near his home. He melts down the aluminum in an earthen kiln and casts spoons in hand-sculpted molds of wood and ash. Eventually, he teaches the technique to his son. Today, more than 10 resourceful families supplement their income with products made from repurposed scrap metal.

IN 2009, PeaceBOMB bracelets is founded in collaboration with the Naphia spoonmakers, the RISE project, and Article 22, a social enterprise that supports sustainable development through design thinking. Each bracelet purchase supports artisan families, the community development fund, and the clearance of unexploded ordnance from Laotian land.

HOW IT WORKS: For each PeaceBOMB product sold, Project PeaceBOMB donates funds equivalent to the cost of clearing 1 to 15 square meters of land³.

Support the cause:
WWW.PEACE-BOMB.COM



THE

GLOBAL SPEAKER SERIES



The Global Speaker Series is an initiative to support global citizenship and leadership education in public and private schools across the country. Each year, we select a handful of our most qualified instructors to send on a speaking tour of the United States between November and March. This offers our instructors an opportunity to share their expertise with high school students; it provides a unique perspective to enrich any classroom experience; and offers new voices an opportunity to participate in a broader discussion about what it means to be a global citizen in the 21st century.

We would love to help you schedule an event.

NATE MARCUS

Topic: *The Future of Food: Exciting & Disturbing Trends in Sustainability*

Synopsis: Both a globetrotter and a gourmet chef, Nate Marcus dissects the relationship between food, humans and our environment. Using his background in experiential education to engage a diverse audience, Nate confronts students with the big questions related to food today.

Nate addresses the link between the dietary choices and household income; discussing the standard American diet, food subsidies, and the dangerous appeal of fast food. He acknowledges the growing pressures of global population growth, weighing the returns of large-scale agriculture against the risks of monocropping, GMOs, and industrial soil degradation. And he sets this all against the backdrop of the 21st century, where the news touts daily reports of crisis: be it global warming, global water, or global war.

By emphasizing the interconnectedness of our world, Nate is able to draw a path from plate to planet, and ask students, “is the way we eat sustainable for our health or, more importantly, for our future?” And in closing, we think he has a few pretty bright ideas of what’s coming next.

DANIELA PAPI & CLAIRE BENNETT

Topic: *How can I do good in the world?*

Synopsis: Co-authors of an upcoming book entitled, *How can I do good in the world? From International Volunteering to Learning Service*, Daniela Papi and Claire Bennett are out to help people challenge their worldview and change the way travelers approach service.

Their interactive workshop provides a framework for analyzing international service trips and re-examining the systems that help us ‘do good’ in the world. Claire and Daniela present to both students and teachers, facilitating all-school presentations, small group workshops, or teacher discussions that cover a range of topics, including: the common pitfalls of international service work; the prerequisites for meaningful community engagement; and the critical indicators of a successful service project.

Together, Claire and Daniela have over 10 years of collective experience instructing for Dragons, and we are honored to have the opportunity to share their energy and expertise with our extended community.

MATT COLACIELLO

Topic: *Unarmed Forces: How Great Travelers Spread Ideas Beyond Borders Without Swords, Cell Phones, or Sanctions*

Synopsis: Even before the age of digital communication, great ideas crossed imperial borders, languages, mountains, and seas, spreading from the lands that originated them to distant cultures where they were adapted and innovated.

In a bold attempt to illustrate the role that long-distance travel has played in the development of Buddhist cultures across Asia, Matt tells the stories of two prolific travelers of the 11th century CE. The Bengali philosopher Atisha Dipamkara gave up everything to traverse the Himalayas, the Indian Ocean, and the Java Sea to teach philosophy across over 8,000 miles. Marpa Lotsawa, on the surface nothing more than a Tibetan barley farmer, spoke upwards of five languages and made the perilous journey to India numerous times to study with professors and sages and translate their teachings into the language of his people.

Matt weaves these colorful stories with his own story a thousand years later, artfully demonstrating the power of cross-cultural dialogue. He hopes to inspire students to consider how travel today can radically, positively change the course of history.



If you would like to invite one of our speaker’s to your school, please contact cate@wheretherebedragons.com, or call 303.413.0822.

PROGRAM HIGHLIGHT

THE NICARAGUA TRAINING – A PORTAL EXPERIENCE

–by *Simon Hart*, Director of Custom Partnerships and Professional Programming

All quotes taken from the Nicaragua Educators’ group journal.

“Part of why I travel is to widen and deepen my sense of humanity – my own and others. That includes the pain, as well as the marvelous inventiveness, resourcefulness and joy. The Dragons emphasis on process will lay people open to their inner reaches, where there be dragons also.”

At Dragons we’ve worked with new instructors for nearly twenty years, and one thing we’ve learned is that certain skills are impossible to train through cognitive models, instructor manuals, or even workshops. In fact, it seemed that even our own staff learned best through experiential education models, with second year instructors often vastly out-performing their first year reviews, seemingly able to understand the big picture, particularly with regard to risk management and student mentorship.

“If you are open to

process-based & constructivist

pedagogies in challenging

environments, in service of your

professional growth, I highly

recommend DRAGONS.

Their work defines

‘state-of-the-art.’”

–Karen Bovard, Ph.D.,

Watkinson School, Nicaragua 2013

With this in mind, a group of Dragons instructors came together four years ago and decided that we wanted to offer field-based trainings in intercultural experiential education for high school teachers. Our intent in designing professional educator programming would be to provide educators with the tools necessary to facilitate meaningful student engagement in the field. We also wanted to give each educator a felt understanding for what type of transformation they were actually trying to achieve with students.

This summer, I had the opportunity to facilitate the first professional educator’s course in Nicaragua with my colleague and long-time friend, Tim Hare. When Tim and I first came together, we realized that the Nicaragua Educator’s Course was designed to accomplish two things. On the surface, it was professional development – building risk management skills, sharing facilitation techniques, and pondering a deeper understanding of the nuances involved in an effective homestay or a reciprocal service-learning project. But underneath the tools and the conceptual models, the Nicaragua Educator’s Course offered something much more powerful – the cultivation of a felt understanding, an inspired connection to what makes a truly powerful educational moment.

Industry risk management trainings refer to moments that cultivate a felt understanding through personal experience as ‘portal experiences’ - a visceral understanding of a given risk within a specific scenario. Training to portal experiences can be tricky business, but some institutions intentionally do it. Jeff Jackson, a master white water kayaker trains guides by intentionally placing them in a “hole” in the river, where they struggle, sometimes to the brink of drowning before pulling them out.

While whitewater kayaking may seem to have little to do with facilitating a student program abroad, the principle abides: if we hope our students will have a transformative experience, we as leaders must possess the courage to

expose ourselves to the physical and emotional discomforts of rugged travel in a developing country. The crowing of roosters through the night in a rural homestay, or a dusty ride in the back of a pickup truck, invite us into a state of vulnerability where we engage in the inner work leading to the same transformation and self-awareness that we hope to cultivate within our students.

Embracing such physical discomforts and emotional vulnerability can be exhausting. In reviewing excerpts from our group journal before sitting down to write this piece, I found this reflection from one of our participants,

“I know that I was relieved to be finished with our workshop sessions today, not because I didn’t want to learn more, but because of the depth of the work we have done. The exercises have brought up emotions that I work very hard to bury, and as they resurface, offer me opportunity to grow as a guide and mentor for my students.”

In my mind, this reflection was an early sign of success. But visceral understanding comes as much from physical and emotional discomfort as it does from the joy of interconnection. Having succeeded in separating our group from the steady comfort of their lives back home, we simultaneously offered a felt understanding for global citizenship through authentic immersion into the community of El Lagartillo.

Over the course of ten days, each educator lived in a homestay, participated in a service-learning project, and hiked a dormant volcano. We ate, we danced, and we lived alongside local community members, opening up space for unstructured discussions about the complex relations of power, privilege, nationalism, and ethnocentrism buried in the history of US-Nicaragua relations. By creating space for the educators to turn their focus outward, and really engage with ‘place’, we offered an opportunity to learn through experience, rather than by observation.

We left the casa cultural after a phenomenal evening of bonding with the community of El Lagartillo...I felt a deeper connection to the community than I ever could’ve imagined. I felt honored to have been a part of such an inspirational celebration of life, love and forgiveness in a community without prejudice...a true utopia.

When I returned to Boulder, I felt confident that the course successfully prepared teachers to lead students abroad, but perhaps the most refreshing and valuable outcome was the overwhelming inspiration we all felt as a result of our connection with the community of El Lagartillo. This is the fodder that fuels education. And with all of the external pressures and competition in our schools, teachers need to be refreshed, inspired, and engaged with the world on a personal level. Experiences like this remind of us why we educate, and offer an escape from the monotony of the school year cycle. An inspired teacher is more likely to allow students to guide themselves passionately into a subject matter and offer a safe space for students to take risks, fail forward, and find the best version of themselves. ■

book review

‘Man’s Search for Meaning’

By VIKTOR FRANKL

Reviewed by CATE BROWN

My co-instructor, Caleb Brooks, introduced me to *Man’s Search for Meaning*. He insisted that I read the 180-page piece of literature before our course, “because Cate, if you’d like to have any semblance of a perspective on life, this is a good place to start.” So I sat down and read it straight through, and I’d like to recommend that you do the same.

Man’s Search for Meaning was not written for students of experiential education; it was written to catalogue Viktor Frankl’s life as a laborer and physician in the Nazi concentration camp Dachau between 1941-1945. However, I believe that the silver linings of Frankl’s story speak to the heart of the Dragons experience.

Reflecting on days and days of excruciating labor, Frankl repeatedly emphasizes the idea that, “when we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves.” Or put more eloquently, “between stimulus and response, there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom.” As a past Dragons student, and again, seven years later as a first-year instructor, I entered that liminal space where the familiar routine of daily life disappears, and the sights, sounds, and smells of a land unknown flood the being.

Just stepping off of a plane can shock the system, but fully embracing a foreign culture can stimulate every one of our senses for weeks on end. Every new experience demands an unfamiliar response. Every new situation expands our worldview. As Frankl states, it is in this space between stimulus and response that we truly begin to grow. I believe this is the power of experiential education. By divorcing ourselves from our daily routine, we create space to be stimulated and generate a fresh response. As adolescents, this is how we begin to define ourselves as individuals, and truly explore the freedom within. If you’re seeking inspiration, find a copy of *Man’s Search for Meaning*, and then give me a call. I would love to hear your thoughts.

SPOTLIGHT ON ALUMNI

SARAH TOWER

MARKETING INTERN AT NEW LANDS FARM

Himalayan Studies, Fall 2007

When I signed up for the *Himalayan Studies* semester in the fall of 2007, I had never been to Asia before. In fact, I had never traveled before. A Dragons instructor happened to come to my school that winter and when I opened the catalog, I opened to Nepal. All of the pictures looked mysterious and magical; there were pictures of mountains that I had never seen before, and in that moment, I decided that I wanted to take a gap year, and that I wanted to go to Nepal.

Overall, Nepal changed my life. But that story is beyond the scope of this spotlight. The relevant piece is that I conducted an independent study project (ISP) focused on the relationship between people, land and culture. My instructor, Chris Limburgh, was studying geography at the time, and he gave me a few books to read about the geography of the Kathmandu Valley, and the theories behind land as a determinant of culture. This project first sparked my interest between the interconnectedness of land and the people who live on it.

So fast-forward six years: I've now graduated from Gettysburg College, where I studied environmental studies and globalization, focusing on issues of shared resources, food sovereignty, and environmental policy. I've spent the summers working on a variety of farms, and during the school year I volunteered in a program that helped migrant workers integrate into the local community.

After graduation, I wanted to



combine the multiple threads of my life—Nepal, farming, globalization studies—into one story, and that brought me to *New Lands Farm*.

New Lands Farm is a refugee farmer collective in Worcester, MA. It is pilot program, funded by the Lutheran Social Services, *Services for New Americans*. The idea is that the majority of refugees that resettle in Massachusetts are farmers by trade and tradition. Thus, *New Lands Farm* serves as a vehicle to help them stay connected with their cultural traditions and vocational expertise, while supporting them through a difficult transition. By applying to join the farming cooperative, new families gain access to land, where they can grow food to feed their families and earn supplemental income; they also gain access to a variety of social services, including language trainings, financial planning, computer literacy classes and agricultural education.

I play a small role at *New Lands Farm*. I am currently a marketing intern, helping NLS gain traction in the local community and se-



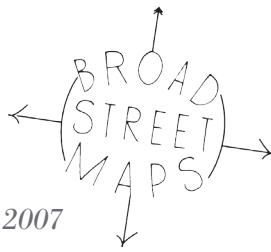
cure business opportunities for our farmers. The best part about my job is that there is a large community of Bhutanese refugees who have settled on the farm and speak Nepali. I try to speak with them, often eliciting large bouts of laughter, but regardless of my success, it feels really good to reconnect.

Before *New Lands Farm*, I had never considered working with refugees. I now believe it is an unbelievable way to be involved with an international community without being an ex-pat in another country. At *New Lands*, I get to be an ambassador for my own country, which feels more sustainable. For now, I am grateful for the opportunity to reconnect with an international community while living in my hometown, and in the future, I hope that I can continue to do meaningful social justice work, both at home and abroad.

For more information about our project at *New Lands Farm*, please feel free to check out our website, (www.lssne.org/NewLandsFarm.aspx) or just come visit the farm!

Q&A with HANNAH JUDGE CO-FOUNDER OF BROAD STREET MAPS

Visions Of India, Fall 2008 & Himalayan Studies, Fall 2007



HANNAH, IN A WORD, WHAT IS BROAD STREET MAPS?

Broad Street Maps equips grassroots health organizations with open-source mapping techniques to visualize data and improve their services.

WHAT'S WITH THE NAME?

In 1854, Dr. John Snow published an essay entitled, "On the Mode of Communication of Cholera," in which he stressed the importance of sewage-free water as a preventative measure against cholera. The essay included a map of outbreak data in the Broad Street district of London, effectively demonstrating that cholera originated in the water at the Broad Street pump. Not only did Snow's map help prove his theory, but it also inspired action which had concrete medical results, marking a shift in the field of medical cartography as maps became more integrated into public health. *Broad Street Maps* is named in tribute to Dr. John Snow, and our shared belief in leveraging the power of visual data to help improve modern healthcare services.



WHAT INSPIRED YOU TO START BROAD STREET MAPS?

My infatuation with the intersection of people, healthcare, and geographic space started during my semester in Varanasi. Personal space is a mirage over there. Rickshaws, elbows, children, and curry all exist in the same space—so that was the geography piece. Healthcare came next. One afternoon my instructors took me to a local clinic, and I by-passed the entire line to see a Western doctor. It was so unjust; I just had money. Between this moment in the waiting room and a group visit to an HIV clinic, I was sold: I was going to dedicate my life to increasing equitable access to healthcare services in the developing world.

WHAT IS THE BROAD STREET MODEL?

Human-centric design. In community partnerships, this means that we build lasting relationships in places with strong local buy-in and a low turnover rate among healthcare workers. Once a project is launched, we participate in the full-scope of the program, including data collection, mapping, and comprehensive training in Quantum GIS. In terms of product development, we'd like to partner with a tech developer to design a new GIS data collection tool that is both accessible and affordable for our local partners.

WHAT'S YOUR LONG-TERM VISION FOR BROAD STREET?

Right now organizations use maps as the exception, rather than the rule. We want it to be more normal for healthcare organizations to incorporate geographic analysis into all forms of assessment.

For more information on *Broad Street Maps*, visit: BROADSTREETMAPS.COM

TRANSFERENCE TOOLKIT

Every Dragons student experiences a post-course 'homecoming' in his or her own way. The resources below are intended to help support you through that transference process, and to inspire you to keep asking, 'how can I do good in the world?'

1. PROJECTTRAVEL.COM

an innovative crowdsourcing platform to fund your future educational travel plans.

2. IDEALIST.ORG

a search engine dedicated to sourcing jobs, internships and volunteering opportunities that 'do good' in the world.

3. GOOD.IS

an online platform that only prints 'good news'.

4. TREEHUGGER.ORG

a blog dedicated to sustainable development. It features radical updates about 'eco-entrepreneurship' across all sectors of our economy.

5. LEARNINGSERVICE.INFO

a website started by instructors Daniela Papi and Claire Bennett, Learningservice.info is dedicated to the idea of 'learning first and helping second.' This website provides specific resources for planning service projects abroad.

& FINALLY WE BELIEVE

Every newsletter we ask our readers a question. This fall we asked, *What is Beauty?* After sifting through many contributions, we selected the two pieces below as the first in a series of archives. Keep your eyes peeled for a new topic this spring – we would love to hear from you.

ARCHIVE
001

BEAUTY IS SOMETHING witnessed that leaves an indelible mark on your soul. Whether it is a remarkable sunset casting hues of light over a western sea or a youngster stroking an elderly grandparent's hand during her last breath, beauty embeds itself in our hearts.

Beauty can be an apology, a distraction, or a cool cup of water on a steaming, hot day. It can lay dormant, unseen by its keeper, until something triggers its emergence: An unexpected snowflake, a mother cradling her sleeping newborn, a granite peak embracing a blue-hued mountain lake. Even a piece of trash can elicit a response. Who can stifle a smile upon seeing a dirty, crumpled piece of paper being carried by the wind down a cobbled street, twisting and turning, as elegant as a dancer.

ARCHIVE
002

CHILDREN, draped in bright costumes, wobble by me on their mighty stilts. A beautiful girl, moving methodically to a rhythm that flows within her, follows a young boy on a unicycle. The children laugh and shout to one another. They have overcome the odds and learned to cope with failure: When a baton drops, it is simply picked up. It is the Nicaraguan *Los Quinchos Circus*, comprised of former street children who once suffered from drug abuse and neglect.

The girls, who whirl around the dance floor, once sat lethargically on street corners, hoping to sell enough tortillas to avoid abuse. The boys, who

Beauty causes us to react, a release of endorphins flood our senses. Is beauty a trigger then? A stimulus that causes elation? Maybe. I equate beauty with feelings of wellbeing, stupor, emotional highs, peace, quiet, and reflection. My body stills when beauty trumpets. I am attentive, awestruck, entertained. I watch with wonder and anticipation.

I know beauty isn't omnipresent, it is not a constant, but I know it sits dormant waiting for me to recognize its expression. It is always there. Waiting. Everything is beautiful in its own way. All beauty needs is my attention. My alert, open-mindedness can awake its dormancy.

But I must be mindful. Sometimes I am tricked by beauty. When it shouts and glares and makes demands, I take notice but then, turn away. Beauty is

dance a brilliant ballet to loud drum beats, had, just a handful of years earlier, begged for drug money. The children are the center of the universe from the moment the lights in the audience dim until they race off stage for their promised pizza. Each of these young performers possesses talent, but, more importantly, they embody resilience. These children, with the help of *Los Quinchos*, have taught themselves discipline. They have learned to value and love themselves. They have faced hardships and, instead of accepting the seemingly inevitable defeat, they have fought and have made themselves great. The children put on a

not the physical sum of its parts; it is the recognizable quality of any given thing, belief, or mystery; the key word being quality. It is through its subtlety that I am continually charmed by its ability: To make me weep in ecstasy, to stun me into silence, to captivate my senses, to mesmerize my thoughts, to make me desire it like someone who craves chocolate. Beauty resides in my being and it is up to me to recognize its presentation; it is not tangible, but acts like a key that opens my locked heart allowing joy and peace to reside within and reminding me about of the perspective that all is worthy and divine.

I find great joy in unlocking beauty; trying to imitate it, witness it, and especially, harboring it in my heart.

–Judy Betz, *Mother of Jack Betz, Cambodia, Summer 2012*

tremendous performance and use the confidence gained from their show as motivation to reach their full potential. *Los Quinchos* provides the children with a creative outlet, resources to survive, and, most importantly, a place to form community and connections. The rhythm of their show would not be possible without the trust and love they receive from the organization as well as from one another. They exude happiness and allow the audience to do the same. *Los Quinchos* is a true manifestation of the circus, creating wonder and joy for all involved.

–Hannah Gould,
Nicaragua, Summer 2013

CALENDAR STAY INVOLVED

ARE YOU A PROSPECTIVE STUDENT? Would you like to learn what it means to go ‘**where there be dragons**’? Come join us for an alumni-hosted presentation in your neighborhood. **Meet** a Dragons instructor. Talk to an alum. Watch a slideshow. Listen to stories.

To RSVP, please call the Boulder office, or email our Admissions Director, Eva Vanek, at eva@wheretherebedragons.com. If you don't see an event listed in your area, please give us a call. We would love to send one of our instructors to meet with you and your family.

CALIFORNIA

Jan. 18, TBD

LOS ANGELES

TBD, Hosted by the Jacobsen Family

Jan. 26, 1:00pm

LA JOLLA

Hosted by the Secondine Latimer Family

Feb. 2, TBD

LOS ANGELES

Hosted by the Jacobsen Family

CONNECTICUT

Jan. 15, 6:30pm

NEW CANAAN

Hosted by the Posner Family

MASSACHUSETTS

Dec. 13, 6:30pm

CONCORD

Hosted by the Hoffman Family

Jan. 8, 6:30pm

BROOKLINE

Hosted by the Sinagra Family

Feb. 5, 7:00pm

NEWTON

Hosted by the Beth Chodos Family

MARYLAND

Jan. 28, 6:30pm

SILVER SPRINGS

Hosted by the Hester Family

NEW HAMPSHIRE

Jan. 29 - 7:00pm

HANOVER, NH

Hosted by the Brown Family

Feb. 16, 7:00pm

HANOVER, NH

Hosted by the Brown Family

NEW JERSEY

Dec. 6, 6:30pm

PRINCETON

Hosted by the Marrow Family

Jan. 9, 6:30pm

RUMSON

Hosted by the Fleming Family

NEW YORK

Nov. 22, 7:00pm

NEW YORK CITY

Hosted by the Futterman Family

Dec. 5, 7:00pm

CHAPPAQUA

Hosted by the Martin Family

Dec. 15, 3:00pm

HARRISON

Hosted by the Faxon Family

Jan. 8, 6:30pm

NEW YORK CITY

Hosted by the Koffman Family

Jan. 12, 3:00pm

BRONXVILLE

Hosted by the Thomas Family

PENNSYLVANIA

Jan. 17, 6:30pm

BLUE BELL

Hosted by the Advani Family

TEXAS

Feb. 23, 5:00pm

AUSTIN

Hosted by the Carson Family

VIRGINIA

Jan. 26, 5:00pm

RESTON

Hosted by the Metz Family

Feb. 20, 7:00pm

ARLINGTON

Hosted by the Mandez Family

ALUMNI

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Mekong



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Sampor Burke
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