Ian Haight was born in Kenya, spent the first decade of his life living in Zambia and Zimbabwe, and then moved with his family to Italy for middle school and high school. A self-proclaimed “Europeanized White African-American,” Ian found adjusting to Bowdoin College in small-town Maine a bit rocky.

“Culture shock hit me pretty hard. I realized that I wasn’t just here this time for a few months or relaxation; I was here to live and work in college. I felt really far away from home.”

Almost all college freshmen go through an adjustment period when they head off to school. But the Foreign Service or Third Culture Kid — someone who has spent most or all of his life living in at least one foreign country — gets hit with a double whammy.

“The particularly challenging aspect for this group is that they are so invisible,” says Anne P. Copeland, Ph.D., executive director of the Interchange Institute and co-author of Understanding American Schools: The Answers to Newcomers’ Most Frequently Asked Questions (Interchange Institute, 2001, 2005). “They look American, sound American, are American. And so, unlike their international student classmates, no one (including them, perhaps) expects them to be having culture shock, or to need cultural information. They are adding this to the normal stresses of moving away from family and encountering the academic and social demands of college, but these cultural issues are harder for being unexpected and invisible.”

What to Expect
If you’re a Foreign Service or Third Culture Kid who has lived most of your life overseas, what can you expect from your first few months at college in America?

• You may feel “different.” Everyone comes to college feeling a bit insecure about how they’ll fit in, but for Third Culture Kids this feeling is likely to be compounded. “It was very easy to feel out of place as a freshman. You just assume that everyone else is more in tune — more American,” says Mark Mozur, a 2005 graduate of Harvard University who has lived in Eastern Europe and South America.

“During the first day of orientation, I listened to many other incoming freshmen bonding over their common New England backgrounds,” recalls Elisabeth Frost, a recent graduate of Bates College. “When people asked me where I was from, I felt like I was telling them my entire life story: Guinea, Mexico, Honduras, and Brazil, with only two elementary school years in the U.S.”

• You may not know how things work — but you’ll learn quickly. TCKs can face many of the same adjustment problems as international students. College of the Overwhelmed (Jossey-Bass, 2004) authors Richard Kadison and Theresa Foy DiGeronimo posit that international students are “thinking about every move. … How do I choose from two dozen different laundry detergents, and how do I turn on this washing machine? Conscious living gets very tiring.”

Some FS kids “can lack the basic skill of taking care of themselves, because they’ve always had a maid to tend to them,” observes Katia Miller, a sophomore at the College of William and Mary, who spent her high school years in Peru. There, as in most developing countries where labor is plentiful and salaries low, domestic help is the norm, even for middle-class families.

Yet TCKs also learn to be self-sufficient very quickly. Along with international students, they’re often left alone on campus for at least one holiday, and while other kids’ parents arrive at end-of-term with the minivan to help their kids

Continued on page 66
SALEM ACADEMY
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My Friends My Family My Sisters

The oldest girls’ school in continuous operation in the nation, Salem Academy continues the story of a diverse mix of young women from around the south, around the country, and around the world. They live together and learn together in a place where there is a choice rather than rigidity, support rather than rivalry, challenge rather than the mundane. Safe and beautiful, the campus that encompasses Salem Academy provides the perfect backdrop for snapshots that capture the serious, the lighthearted, the intense, the fun. We invite you to find out more about Salem Academy by contacting the Admissions Office at 336-721-2643 or visiting www.salemacademy.com.
pack up, TCKs are on their own, vacating their dorm rooms with ticket and passport in hand.

- **Other students may not know — literally — where you are coming from.** “When I tell someone I went to high school in Austria and they say, ‘Oh, where the kangaroos are?’ it makes me think we may not have much in common,” admits Sarah Pettit, a senior at Washington University in St. Louis.

Feeling different is not helped by the fact that other students might not know quite how to categorize TCKs. For one thing, they can’t relate to the TCKs’ life experiences.

“Whenever my friends talked about something, whether it was politics or cars or computer games, all I could add was ‘well, in Italy ...’” says Ian Haight, now in his sophomore year at Bowdoin. “It got to the point where the conversation would die if I said anything.” Happily, Ian reports that his new friends soon “got used to me. And I got more in touch with American culture.”

“There is sometimes resentment from the U.S. kids because of the traveling you have done and the places you have lived,” says Steve Catt, a junior at the University of Hawaii at Manoa, who arrived there from high school in Tokyo. “Just remember that your actions and words can play a big part in helping them understand. And you can always learn something from them, too.”

Chelsea Jensen, a freshman at Point Loma Nazarene University in San Diego, Calif., says, “I came back to the U.S. thinking that everyone would be uncultured. I’ve known countless FS kids who thought the same thing. But in fact there are many American kids who are not the stereotypical ‘proud to be an American because we’re better than everyone else.’”

“Be prepared for a lot of questions,” advises Emily Frost, a sophomore at Hollins University in Roanoke, Va., who has lived in South and Central America as well as in Guinea. “But be watchful of talking too much
They look American, sound American, are American. And so, unlike their international student classmates, no one (including them, perhaps) expects them to be having culture shock.

about your international background as some people will think you’re showing off.”

In fact, Steve Catt reports that several students did not believe him when he told them of his experiences abroad.

- Alternatively, Foreign Service and Third Culture Kids may be perceived as more interesting than the average college student. “Sometimes when I tell people I’ve lived overseas my whole life, they react as if I were a god,” says Ian Haight. “Sure, it’s unique, but it doesn’t mean I’m better than someone who’s lived in the same town his whole life. I’m just different.”

John Taylor, a junior at the University of California, Riverside, who lived for two years in Ankara, finds his international experiences are viewed as almost universally positive by his peers. “People are interested and even envious that I have had experiences people twice my age haven’t. I often find myself at the center of attention.”

- You will not believe the food! Depending on where they were living before they arrived, FS kids’ reactions to college food will be as varied as diets around the world. A student coming from the Third World may be

Continued on page 68
astonished, even embarrassed, at how much food is offered at the college cafeteria — and how much is wasted. Conversely, a student coming from a country where cuisine is renowned may hate the repetitive daily fare in the dining hall. “Getting used to the processed food at school was a huge adjustment,” says Leah Speckhard, who attended James Madison University for two years before transferring. “It was funny to have all of the food that I only used to get on vacations, such as Tater Tots and Doritos, available to me all the time,” says Emily Frost.

- You may be stupefied by things most Americans take for granted. “It’s really weird to see my classmates driving!” my daughter, Annalisa Kelly, a sophomore at Wesleyan University in Connecticut, exclaimed on her first phone call home from school. Like many TCKs, she was used to urban public transport, and had never learned to drive. Other things international students have mentioned as surreal are seemingly endless strings of shopping malls, gigantic meal portions and polite, orderly lines at checkout counters.

- You may be frustrated by the legal drinking age — and by the college drinking culture. Many students who have lived overseas as teens are used to a lower drinking age and have learned how to use alcohol moderately.

  “It’s difficult to be allowed to do something and then have that right taken away from you,” admits Sarah Pettit.

  Ian Haight adds, “American [students] look at drinking very differently. I don’t think they even see it as pleasurable, just ‘cool’ only because it’s illegal and everyone else is doing it.”

  However, most students interviewed have found friends who do not abuse alcohol or drugs. “There are even substance-free floors in some dorms,” reports one student.

- “Diversity” might not mean “tolerance” or “integration.” Sarah

Continued from page 67

Continued on page 70
How Can Foreign Service Parents Help?

Melanie Kerber, Ed.D., an educational consultant, has found that FS teens and TCKs vary tremendously in their adjustment to college. “Some kids who have lived their entire lives overseas go off to an American college with little to no difficulty, whereas others struggle with not fitting in and do not relate to the campus activities: drinking parties, carousing, etc. The same can be said for kids who have lived their entire lives in America.

“I always give parents three pieces of advice. Number one is to stay connected with their country. It is important that the child always feel as though he or she has a home country. This is particularly true regarding news, culture and current trends. Second, expect at least one semester of turmoil where kids want to come home or transfer. I urge parents to handle it accordingly, not by bringing them home but helping them through it at a distance. It undercut's kids' confidence to bring them home unless they are on the verge of suicide.

“Finally, parents can be influential in steering their kids’ college choices based on the type of child they have. For example, if the teen tended to be clingy as a child, he or she might revert back to that under the stress of college life, and it might be wise to select a college close to relatives or close family friends.”

Becky Grappo, education and youth officer for the Family Liaison Office, agrees. “Don’t be surprised if you get mixed messages when your kids call home. The idea of college being ‘the best four years of your life’ is sometimes misleading, and kids expect it to be great all the time. So they might call one time loving it, and the next time bemoaning the fact that they don’t click with the other kids, it’s not the right place for them, they want to transfer, etc. Sometimes that might be true, but they need to be encouraged to give it time, make the effort to get involved, and realize that their feelings are shared by many others.”

She adds: “When selecting a college, Foreign Service kids sometimes have additional factors to consider other than those that are obvious. For example, if the parents are overseas, how easy is it to get to an airport? Where are other family members going to be who can offer help and support? Every student has a different comfort level with distance and their newly-found independence.”

— Francesca Huemer Kelly
Alternatively, Foreign Service and Third Culture Kids may be perceived as more interesting than the average college student.

Pettit was surprised by a less diversified system than she expected. “I found people, especially minorities on campus, to be much more conscious of their differences and, as a result, more segregated. Black students tended to group together, Asians grouped together, and Hispanics grouped together. A lot of clubs of different minorities might detract from diversity more than promote it.”

“I feel I understand racial differences and cultures better than the average American,” acknowledges Katia Miller. “Everyone has his or her own belief, own tradition, and I’ve learned more about that overseas.”

• You may end up hanging out with other TCKs and international students. FS kids and TCKs often feel most comfortable with the kinds of people they went to high school with: international kids, for the most part. Mark Mozur says, “I found kids I could relate to through the International Club. I ended up hanging out mostly with Polish kids because Poland was where I had lived before coming to Harvard.”

“Search out the international kids,” advises Steve Catt. “Like us, they are also having some difficulty adjusting and will love that you reach out to them. You will find they are probably more compatible with you than other Americans.”

Ben Harburg, a senior at Tufts University who grew up in Spain and Switzerland, as well as in the States, reflects, “I’ve ended up feeling equal-
ly comfortable with both international and American students among my friends.” But he points out that there can be different subcultures of international kids: students from poor backgrounds/countries on full scholarship, as well as very wealthy international students whose parents have set them up with luxury cars and apartments, and “who are perceived to be snobby.”

“I made it a point to hang out with the American kids as well as the international kids,” says Ian Haight, “because I knew that being friends with them would help me adapt to my new life. Talking to my former high school classmates who had also just moved to the U.S. from overseas was important, too, because they were in exactly the same boat I was in.”

- Your tolerance and resilience will help you in making friends and finding your niche. Foreign Service kids have spent their lives moving to new countries and finding new friends. This adaptability and resilience is one of the many strengths they bring to being college freshmen. “One advantage to being a Foreign Service kid, when adjusting to college in America, is that I already had a lot of experience dealing with new situations, because of this past history with change, and thus made a smooth transition into college life,” says Janey Symington, a junior at Yale University, who arrived there from Niamey, Niger, West Africa, where there were only five students in the entire high school.

Ben Harburg says, “In many ways the adjustment to college was the easiest move I ever made, because everyone there is new and facing the same thing together, and because I was so well-prepared by our moving around so much during my childhood.”

Top Ten Things They Want You to Know…

Now that their adjustment to college life in America is behind them, what advice do these TCKs give to

Continued on page 72
high school students who are now living overseas?

1. In making your college choices, consider carefully the student body makeup and environment — and visit the campus if you can. “A Third Culture Kid might feel completely alien in a rural, homogenous area,” says Ben Harburg. “I love the Boston area because it is so diverse.”

Your decision should also be based on what “just feels right.” My daughter was certain she’d end up in New York or Chicago, but she ultimately chose Wesleyan in rural Connecticut, partially because it reminded her of her overseas high school. Visiting the campus was what made the difference.

Says Leah Speckhard, who is now attending Vesalius University in Brussels, “I went to college in Virginia without ever having visited the campus, and I ended up transferring. Visiting first would have made a big difference.”

2. Don’t pack too much stuff, unless it’s the green stuff. Yes, you may get a shipment allowance, but, as Michelle Beaudry, a student at George Mason University, points out, “try not to pack absolutely everything, because you will be the one who has to move it all in and out of your dorm room.” (She also advises saving “lots of money” before college, because “it goes really fast.”)

3. Get involved in something fun right away. “Don’t be passive. Initiate. Join a club. Get out of the dorm,” urges Mark Mozur. “I wish that I had gotten involved in more activities from the beginning,” admits Elisabeth Frost. “Think about what you like to do and try to pursue your interests in college. However, be prepared for those academic and extracurricular interests to change, and don’t be afraid to try new things.”

4. Don’t think of this as “coming home.” Yes, you’re returning to your native land, but you may set yourself up for disappointment if you don’t lower your expectations. Many Foreign Service kids only know America as “Vacation Land.” So you might want to get in touch with at least some aspects of American popular culture before you head stateside. Read People magazine. Get someone to tape some American television shows for you. And even if it’s only during home leave, visiting America does help. “Returning every summer to Missouri, where I was born, also...
helped lessen the culture shock that many Third Culture Kids feel when they return to their ‘native’ country,” remarks Janey Symington.

5. Ask for help. If you find that you are seriously overwhelmed with adjusting to both life in America and the stress of the college workload, do ask for help, whether it be from university counseling services, friends, family or religious community. Look for support groups.

And don’t feel that your issues always necessarily have to do with being a Foreign Service kid. Every college student, no matter what his or her background, goes through a rough patch. Sarah Pettit volunteers as a crisis counselor on campus: “If you are having trouble adjusting, don’t suffer in silence! Adjustment issues are very common, so take advantage of the resources available to help you.”

6. Home is not as far away as it seems — or, home needn’t seem as far away as it is! Third Culture families tend to be more close-knit; they “pull together” during every international move. “Through all the moves, my family was the main thing that remained constant — and this time I was moving all by myself,” reflects Emily Frost. “You are going to miss your family, so make use of the great technology available: instant messaging, e-mailing and video conferencing with a webcam.”

“It’s important to realize that you’re not all that far away from home,” says Ian Haight. “When I’m sitting at my desk with three papers to write and only four hours of sleep, and I’m sick, and my friends won’t stop making noise, I reassure myself that soon I will be sitting with my family on the balcony back in Rome.”

7. Expect surprises. “People will say, ‘Wow, your English is really good!’ even though I am an American,” laughs Sarah Pettit.

Leah Speckhard claims she went to school with an open mind, and “didn’t expect to run into the stereotypical American … but I did.”

Ian Haight’s “Carpe Diem” (Seize the Day) tattoo was similar to those of Continued on page 74
his Italian friends. “But when I showed it to my American friends, they looked at me like I was a biker or a prison inmate.”

“Everyone around me spoke English!” exclaims Emily Frost.

Here are some other comments that come up in discussions with Foreign Service college students. “Americans always seem to be in a rush.” “Everyone dresses the same way.” “People are obsessive about diet and weight.”

The point of these disparate stories is this: you may not, right now, have any idea what will surprise or even shock you, but you can pretty much count on the fact that something will.

8. Accept that you may have several homes, and that each one may not be perfect. Some students report that coming home for the holidays or for the summer feels just like old times, while others no longer feel as if they are the same person who left just a few months ago. Accept that you may feel like one person at home with your family, another person at school. In fact, you may have even more than two homes.

“When I graduated from high school in Ottawa, Canada, I went off to the University of Virginia and my family moved to Ethiopia,” reflects Jimmy Galindo, a senior at U. Va. “The reality of being separated from my family by the width of an ocean and a continent struck hard at times.”

If, like Jimmy’s family, your family moves while you are at college, you may return home for the holidays and realize that you don’t know anyone: all your friends from high school are back at your last post! Consider making special arrangements to visit your “old home” during part of your vacation if at all feasible.

9. Don’t forget who you are. “Follow up on and embrace your international background,” advises Jimmy Galindo. “Tutor a child from an immigrant family, take classes in international affairs, attend cultural events, study abroad, search out unique living experiences. (U. Va., for
“Even if you have lived overseas your whole life, go abroad your junior year. It is a different experience to be in a foreign country on your own as opposed to with your parents.”

— Sarah Pettit

example, has an International Residential College where 300 students, about 100 of whom are foreign students, live together in a multicultural community.) All this will make you feel a little more at home.”

“Even if you have lived overseas your whole life, go abroad your junior year,” suggests Sarah Pettit. “It is a different experience to be in a foreign country on your own as opposed to with your parents.”

10. Finally, remember your strengths. You’ve adjusted to new situations all of your life. This is just another one. Chances are you will soon be embracing college life in America and all its wild and crazy roller-coaster turns.

“My advice is not to worry so much,” says Owen McMullen, who grew up in South Africa, Fiji and Burma. “I was concerned about not fitting in to Drake University in Des Moines, but have found it easier than I had feared.”

Says Ian Haight, “At first the going was rough, but now I love it here. Bowdoin is an excellent college and has excellent people. I really feel like I belong here, and I don’t regret a single choice I made. It’s great.”
Resources for Going to College in America

Books:
Suzette Tyler, *Been There, Should’ve Done That II: More Tips for Making the Most of College*, Front Porch Press, 2001
David Pollock and Ruth Van Reyken, *Third Culture Kids: The Experience of Growing up Among Worlds*, Nicholas Brealey, 2001
Karen C. McCluskey, *Notes from a Traveling Childhood: Readings for Internationally Mobile Parents and Children*, Foreign Service Youth Foundation, 1994

Web Sites:
*Foreign Service Youth Foundation* — www.fsyf.org (clubs, support, resources, interactive opportunities for FS kids and teenagers)
*Third Culture Kid World* — www.tckworld.com (resources for TCKs)
*The Interchange Institute* — www.interchangeinstitute.org (resources for people moving to new cultures)
*U Magazine at colleges.com* — http://www.colleges.com/Umagazine/ (college culture)
*Co-Ed Magazine* — http://www.co-edmagazine.com (more college pop culture)
— Francesca Huemer Kelly
A New Kind of College Guide

U.S. News & World Report’s annual ranking of colleges, and others like it, have become very influential in the choices parents and their children make about schools. Understandably, parents want to be assured that the considerable financial outlay for their child’s higher education is “worth it,” and existing college rankings aim at identifying the “best” schools in terms of academic excellence.

By contrast, the Washington Monthly College Guide that debuted this fall sorts schools according to what the schools give to society. “Other guides ask what colleges can do for you,” says Washington Monthly. “We ask what colleges are doing for the country.” In the new college guide, schools are ranked by how well they perform three vital socioeconomic functions: how well they serve as engines of social mobility; how well they serve as producers of the scientific minds and research that develops new knowledge and drives economic growth; and how well they promote an ethic of service.

Not surprisingly, the headline schools routinely found at the top of the U.S. News list did not necessarily finish at the top of the Washington Monthly list. In fact, only three schools in the 2006 U.S. News top ten are in its highest ranks: MIT, Stanford and the University of Pennsylvania. Among the Ivy League schools, only Cornell and the University of Pennsylvania made Washington Monthly’s top ten. Princeton, tied with Harvard for first place in U.S. News’ 2005 list, ranks 44 on the Washington Monthly list.

Interestingly, MIT earned its overall number-one ranking in the Washington Monthly guide not so much because of its ground-breaking research. What made the school number one was its commitment to national service, where it ranked 7, far better than most of its elite peers. Similarly, UCLA, which finished second on the overall list, excelled in research and came in first in the social mobility rating because of its astoundingly high graduation rate given its large number of lower-income students. Overall, the Washington Monthly list contains many more first-rate state schools than the U.S. News list, which has no public universities within its top ten.

The rankings have had a growing impact on schools, too. College administrators scramble to increase the amount of money given by their alumni or raise the SAT scores of their incoming freshmen to improve their score in the ranking. Competition to improve rankings in the Washington Monthly guide could have far-reaching effects as schools start enrolling greater numbers of lower-income students and making sure that they graduate, encourage more of their students to join the Peace Corps or the military, and intensify their focus on producing more Ph.D. graduates in science and engineering.


— Susan Maitra, Senior Editor
As many Foreign Service families already know, studying abroad is an exciting, challenging plunge into the culture and academic life of another country. There may be other attractions, too, such as enrolling at St. Andrews University in Scotland in hopes of meeting Prince William. Whatever their motivations, over 170,000 American students study abroad each year, according to the Institute of International Education. Cities in Europe remain a hot spot for many, but more and more students are choosing locations off the beaten path, in Asia, Africa and South America. And the numbers increase year by year as more students recognize the importance of studying abroad in a globally interdependent world — and as the understanding these students acquire becomes increasingly valuable in today’s society.

People often ask me why I chose to go abroad for a semester of my college career: “Why would you want to leave this wonderful nation to go to some backward country where most people don’t even own dishwashers?” I am tempted to respond that the answer is simple: to avoid people with that attitude! But the answer is more complicated.

Study abroad isn’t just a carefree semester spent traveling, exploring nightlife and meeting new people. It is an experience you won’t find anywhere else. Completely removed from all you’ve ever known, this is a chance to discover who you really are while exploring a culture and a place completely foreign to you. You’ll be amazed at how quickly you will bond with new friends. You will have to budget, take tests and write papers, and still be responsible enough to balance work and play.

It’s also about learning how to survive on your own, emotionally, mentally and physically. This is why I call it a life experience. Sure, you can learn these things in the United States, but living in another country as a young adult will give you the insight to better understand another culture and another people.

Getting Started

So how do you become part of that group of 170,000 overseas students? Here’s what you need to do well before you get on that plane.

Start early! Studying abroad takes a great deal of preparation. Most programs require applications at least one semester before you go abroad. But well before that, you must decide where on earth you want to go, which may take longer than you think. Begin by making a list of places you’d like to live. Many students use this as a chance to explore their family roots or to discover new and exotic places. If you can, talk to someone who has studied or lived in these countries. In addition, start saving money now — travel is not cheap! And keep in mind that you can even choose to study at another university in the United States as a visiting student if you don’t want to stray far from home.

Narrow your choices. After enough debate, you should be able to weed out some of the choices you are less enthusiastic about, ending up with two or three universities in which you are truly interested, whatever the reason.

Apply early. Get those applications in as far ahead of the deadline as possible. Many programs accept students on rolling admissions, so the earlier the better. You’re also likely to receive word of the school’s decision sooner that way, so if your first choice falls through, you can still apply to others.

Get all your documentation together. No matter how much time and deliberation you put into making your final decision, you won’t make it there without the necessary documents. First and foremost, every person traveling internationally must have a passport, so apply for one as soon as possible; it can take months to receive it. Depending on the country, you’ll probably need a student visa and certain inoculations before leaving home. You can

Continued on page 82
Life in the Foreign Service can be exciting, but also confusing and isolating. You don't have to go it alone. Since 1960, the Associates of the American Foreign Service Worldwide (AAFSW) has been bringing the foreign affairs community together to promote a better quality of life through:

- **Connections** AAFSW's Livelines email group unites over 1,400 FS people worldwide.
- **Communication** We wrote the book, *Realities of Foreign Service Life*, and created the website, www.aafsw.org, on FS life.
- **Support** We have groups for toddlers and parents, French speakers, foreign-born spouses, medical evacuees, and more.
- **Recognition** AAFSW annually contributes to the Secretary of State's Award for Outstanding Volunteerism Abroad and college scholarships for FS youth.
- **Institutional change** The Family Liaison Office, the Overseas Briefing Center, and the Foreign Service Youth Foundation exist thanks to AAFSW!

Spouses, partners, and employees of U.S. foreign affairs agencies, active or retired, are encouraged to join AAFSW at www.aafsw.org today! Your membership and tax-deductible contributions help AAFSW help all of us.
## Schools at a Glance

Go to our Web page at www.fsjournal.org and click on the Marketplace tab for more information.

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<th>School Name</th>
<th>Enrollment</th>
<th>Gender Distribution</th>
<th>Percent Boarding</th>
<th>Percent International</th>
<th>Levels Offered</th>
<th>Common Application</th>
<th>Accepts/Offers ADD and LD</th>
<th>Miles to Int'l Airport</th>
<th>Int'l Students Orientation</th>
<th>Dorms W/F (e-mail, phones)</th>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>British School of Washington</td>
<td>72</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>50/50</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>PK-12</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>NA</td>
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<td>Christ School</td>
<td>73</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>All boys</td>
<td>82</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8-12</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Limited</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<td>Dana Hall School</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>465</td>
<td>All girls</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6-12</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Limited</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<td>84</td>
<td>1,010</td>
<td>All girls</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>PK-12</td>
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<td>Y</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>30,170</td>
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<td>69</td>
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<td>49/51</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>7-12</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<td>30</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
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<td>17,360</td>
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<td>55</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
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<td>76</td>
<td>265</td>
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<td>60</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>5-12, PG</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
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<td>335</td>
<td>61/39</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>20</td>
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<td>Y</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
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<td>Stone Ridge School of the Sacred Heart</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>JK-12</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
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<td>Stony Brook School</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>336</td>
<td>55/45</td>
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<td>20</td>
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<td>Limited</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
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<td>29,600</td>
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<tr>
<td>St Margaret's School</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>150</td>
<td>All girls</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8-12</td>
<td>Limited</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>34,500</td>
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## SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School Name</th>
<th>Enrollment</th>
<th>Gender Distribution</th>
<th>Percent Boarding</th>
<th>Percent International</th>
<th>Levels Offered</th>
<th>Common Application</th>
<th>Accepts/Offers ADD and LD</th>
<th>Miles to Int'l Airport</th>
<th>Int'l Students Orientation</th>
<th>Dorms W/F (e-mail, phones)</th>
<th>Holiday Break Coverage</th>
<th>Annual Tuition</th>
<th>Room &amp; Board (USD)</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dublin School</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>60/40</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>9-12, PG</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>35,400</td>
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<tr>
<td>Emma Willard School</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>All girls</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>9-12, PG</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>32,750</td>
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<td>Foxcroft School</td>
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<td>170</td>
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<td>66</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>9-12</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Limited</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>35,700</td>
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<tr>
<td>Idyllwild Arts Academy</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>262</td>
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<td>85</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>9-12, PG</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
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<td>215</td>
<td>60/40</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>9-12</td>
<td>PG</td>
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<td>Y</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>33,900</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>302</td>
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<td>55</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9-12</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<tr>
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<td>175</td>
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<td>75</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9-12</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>35,800</td>
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<tr>
<td>Oregon Episcopal School</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>290</td>
<td>53/47</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>9-12</td>
<td>Limited</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>33,445</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: NA - Not Applicable. ADD - Attention Deficit Disorder. LD - Learning Disability.

Continued on page 86
Dublin School • 18 Lehmann Way

Dublin, New Hampshire 03444 USA

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check the “Travel and Living Abroad” section of the State Department Web site for that information (www.state.gov).

All students should receive a “student validation letter” from their host university prior to leaving home; you will have to present this to the immigration office once you arrive at your destination. Don’t forget to obtain an International Student Identity Card (www.isic.org/sisp/index.htm) for emergency assistance as well as discounts on travel, hostels and entertainment abroad. In addition, some study-abroad programs demand proof of financial security. The requirements vary from program to program, so make sure you know them well in advance.

Have back-ups. Make at least two extra copies of all your documents. Leave one set of copies at home with your parents, and keep another with you, in a separate place from the originals.

Do good financial planning. Every study abroad program is different, so make sure you know exactly what your program entails. Some offer housing for their students; others do not. You might need to provide your own transportation to the destination as well as around town. And you’ll almost certainly be responsible for covering your own household expenses, personal spending, etc.

Once You’re There…

Starting out in a new environment is usually tricky, even for Foreign Service dependents and other seasoned veterans of overseas living. Prepare yourself for an emotional roller coaster ride, usually in three phases. Most students are nothing but excited for the first couple of weeks, when everything is brand-new and calls out to be explored. But brace yourself to crash into homesickness; after a few weeks, most international students begin to miss family, friends and 24-hour supermarkets. There are always a few things that study abroad programs won’t tell you. Not only that, but you might even resent things about your host country (like not having constant Internet access in your room or the tedious matriculation process at your university).

But don’t worry; this phase won’t last long. Soon you’ll grow accustomed to the new way of life you are
leading, and most likely enjoy the rest of your time as you would at your American university. By the end of your term abroad, you’ll understand everything that you once considered foreign. You might not even want to return home!

Here are some suggestions to ease the transition:

Reach out. It may seem obvious, but particularly when you’re homesick, it can be difficult to befriend local students. Many Americans abroad find themselves stuck in their American bubble, always hanging out with the other students in their program because it can be difficult to go out and meet foreign nationals, particularly if you don’t speak the local language. But do it anyway; you’ll be glad you did.

Join student clubs. Campus organizations are a good place to start, particularly those that cater to your

Continued on page 84

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Five Things I Wish I’d Been Told

Here are some other snippets of advice, things I wish people had told me before I went to Scotland:

Bring shower shoes. This is especially important when you plan on staying in a youth hostel. Believe me, you’ll regret it otherwise.

Experience local nightlife for yourself. Of course, be careful and go with a group, but there’s just no substitute for seeing “Eurotrash” first-hand!

Take overnight trains to save on hotels when traveling.

Don’t be surprised that most people will be able to tell you’re American, whether by your accent or your tennis shoes. I once had a stranger in Edinburgh, say to me, “You’re American, aren’t you?” When I asked him how he knew, he responded, “You just have that cheery look about you.”

Similarly, don’t be surprised to encounter anti-American sentiment. Almost anywhere you go, you will be expected to defend yourself and U.S. policy on a wide range of issues. To make this easier, brush up on U.S. history and politics before you go abroad, as well as the basics for the location in which you’ll be studying. Be honest about how you feel and support your ideas; most people will be glad to listen even if they don’t agree.

---

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Email: dburnell@purnell.org
www.purnell.org

Our Open House dates are:

Sunday, February 5, 2006
Sunday, April 9, 2006
own interests and hobbies. Besides giving you a connection to life beyond the school, they can be a reason to come back to this city where you lived for a semester or two.

**Keep a journal and take lots of photos.** You’ve probably already heard those pieces of advice, but they’re both true. When you get back home, you’ll have a first-person chronicle and timeless reminders of international adventures, ready to return you to your time abroad.

**The Re-entry Process**

Believe it or not, coming home might be the hardest part of the entire experience. Returning to the world of midnight fast food and endless supermarkets can trigger a nasty case of reverse culture shock. And whether you fell in love with your host country or not, and even if other friends also studied abroad, you may feel frustrated that no one else can relate to this amazing experience you just had. What do you say at Christmas when your grandparents ask, “So how was it?” How do you describe this incredible experience?

Studying abroad drops you right into the lifestyle of another corner of the world. Although you might feel like one at first, you are much more than a visitor — you’ll need to know the essentials: where to buy groceries, how to use the public transportation, which gestures are offensive … the list goes on. I found out, for instance, that in the United Kingdom, the word “pants” refers to what we Yanks call “underwear.” So you learn to watch what you say (sometimes the hard way!).

The study-abroad experience is unique in that, in the end, you are a tourist and a local, and soon when people ask you for directions, you’ll be able to answer them. You can still enjoy the tourist traps of the city and then join local undergraduates at the student union, which, if you happen to be in Europe, will usually serve cheap alcohol.

Above all, being removed from your normal situation gives you a chance for introspection, so you can learn who you really are. Study abroad gives new meaning to the phrase “discovering different perspectives.” You go abroad to learn about another way of life, but end up learning even more about your own identity, and returning to the United States with a new appreciation for life at home.

No matter how much traveling you have done, studying abroad is something every university student should do before graduating. After all, college provides you with this one chance to live abroad that you will most likely never have again. It’s easy to dream about it. Now take the next step. Go ahead — take the plunge.
All over the world, every week, there are impromptu international school reunions. Just last month, I had dinner with former students from my school, and this made me think back to my international high school. I sent out a request for stories on a couple of listservs and talked on the phone with other Foreign Service brats and other internationally raised people. I got responses from more than a score of people and had lively e-mail conversations and phone conversations with most of them.

The reunions seem to fall into several distinct categories: official reunions, alumni clubs and activities, major events (weddings, birthdays and funerals) and casual get-togethers. A recent article on adult Third Culture Kids reports that they maintain regular contact with people from other countries. (A TCK is a child who has his or her parents’ culture, the one that they are living in, and his or her own, “third” culture created out of this cultural mélange. TCKs can be military brats, missionary kids, Foreign Service and corporate kids, and others who have lived as children in foreign cultures.)

“Whether in professional or volunteer roles, through friendship or family networks, the vast majority (92 percent) have at least yearly contact with people from other countries. Nearly a quarter associate with internationals at least once a month, some daily,” state Ann Baker Cottrell and Ruth Hill Useem. “A majority also report some, though often infrequent, contact with people they knew as children abroad. Increasingly popular are school reunions which validate the third culture and TCK identity and maintain contacts.”

Searching the World Wide Web

Even if you have lost contact with your old school and classmates, it is possible to find them. David Hocking, a former pupil at Lakenheath High School (a U.S. Department of Defense school), set up a Web site, www.libertynet.co.uk/LHS, for his high school. On the site, he included a “brat links” page with useful links. He explains his reason for starting the site: “What you see here is the culmination of an idea. After I left Lakenheath in 1986, I lost touch with a lot of people. With the foolishness of youth, I allowed some good friendships to lapse. In the years since nostalgia set in, I looked back at my years at Lakenheath as some of the best in my life thus far. Then there was this little problem... It suddenly became extremely difficult to find people. People moved, got married or, even worse, got unlisted phone numbers!”

Hocking’s brat links include the All England American High School Virtual Reunion, which is a weekly chat room; the Department of Defense Dependents Schools home page, For the Brats (www.geocities.com/SoHo/7315/); Global Nomads (www.worldweave.com/GN.html); Military Brats International (http://www.militarybrat.com); and Operation Footlocker, which leads you to the TCK World Web site (www.tckworld.com).

The AFCENT/AFNORTH International High School alumni site, a NATO school located in Brunssum, the Netherlands, has a creative approach to dividing the classes. It segments the students as Flower Children (the 1960s); Village People (the 1970s); New Wavers (the 1980s); Generation X (the 1990s) and Millennials (the 2000s). They then give names, years of attendance and e-mail addresses (including a “bad e-mail” list, where people can check to see if they are still listed under an old e-mail address). They also note the year of graduation, usually meaning from the American 12th grade — though some respondents consider their 13th year their graduation year.

As I trawled the Internet, I found many specialized Web sites for finding and organizing school reunions (see p. 88). Many of these sites include international schools. I also discovered that most international schools have Web sites of
### Schools at a Glance

Go to our Web page at www.fsjournal.org and click on the Marketplace tab for more information.

#### Senior High School Continued

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<thead>
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<th>School Name</th>
<th>Enrollment</th>
<th>Gender Distribution</th>
<th>Percent Boarding</th>
<th>Percent International</th>
<th>Levels Offered</th>
<th>Common Application</th>
<th>Accepts/Offer ADD and LD</th>
<th>Miles to Int’l Airport</th>
<th>Dorms w/E-mail, phones</th>
<th>Holiday Break Coverage</th>
<th>Accepts/Offers Int’l Students Orientation</th>
<th>Int’l Students Orientation, Dorms W/E-mail, phones</th>
<th>Assumes Tuition, Room &amp; Board (USD)</th>
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<td>All girls</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9-12</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
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<td>52</td>
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<td>19</td>
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<td>N</td>
<td>Y/N</td>
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<td>90</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>Y</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>N</td>
<td>31,600</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**DISTANCE LEARNING/HOMESCHOOLING**

University of Missouri (at Columbia) 66 Independent study; 3-12, PG, accredited HS diploma. Go to: www.cdis.missouri.edu/go/fsd3.asp for more information 21,000

**MILITARY SCHOOLS**

Valley Forge Military Academy 87 600 All boys 100 12 7-12, PG Y N 15 Y Y N 28,550

**SPECIAL NEEDS SCHOOLS**

Frederic L. Chamberlain School 71 112 61/39 82 2 6-12, PG N Y 50 Y N Y 116,226

Gow School 73 143 All boys 100 20 7-12, PG N Y 20 Y Y N 41,900

Riverview School 70 182 50/50 100 Limited 7-12, PG N Y 75 Y N N 55,643

**OVERSEAS SCHOOLS**

Leysin American School in Switzerland 87 350 54/46 100 65 9-12, PG Y Limited 75 Y Y N 33,000

Marymount International School 66 800 49/51 NA 50 PK-12 N Limited 15 Y N N 19,285

St. Stephens School 76 211 45/55 16 63 9-12, PG N N 12 NA Y N 31,177*

Prem Tinsulanonda International School 67 431 53/47 24 70 K-12 N N 15 N Y N 9,000

**OTHER**

AAFSW (Associates of the American Foreign Service Worldwide) 79 Bringing the FS community together to promote a better quality of life. Go to www.aafsw.org

FSYF (Foreign Service Youth Foundation) 82 Assists Foreign Service Youth by coordination development programs. Go to www.fsfy.org

ISS (International Schools Services) 81

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But then, Valley Forge is a remarkable place.
Classmates.com said that I had 313 other classmates registered. You go to their Web site, click on “Overseas American/Canadian schools” at the bottom (or go straight to the Canadian, German or Swedish icons). Then pick your country and city. The site’s current directory includes only schools located in the United States and Canada and American or Canadian schools located overseas, and does not support the addition of other schools. When you click on your school, you get to a page that tells you how many from your school are registered. There is a fee, but to avoid it you can click on “basic” to see who is registered from your school. I saw at least 15 names that I recognized. Students from the four years prior to your graduation year are listed, but you can see all the years if you want to. There are e-mail addresses or groups or photo sections. To e-mail someone, you need to pay — it costs $32.50 for a year.

Graduates.com is free. It also starts with a simple registration including a message space. Then you move on to selecting your school by country. And it’s fast. I got an e-mail confirmation and welcome within two minutes of registering. You have to click on the link and activate your account within 15 days. On your profile page you can post all sorts of things, including pictures. The selection of schools includes elementary and high school, and also has a section for colleges and universities. You then add yourself to your school by year that you graduated. Then you can search for classmates. The site allows you to invite people to join, but if they haven’t then you can’t find them on the search engine. The Web site was started by Jason Classon, and you can donate money to help him maintain and run the site.

Reunion.com also allows for simple info (but include the slashes in your birth date!). Don’t forget to unclick the “Please include me in dating directory” part at the bottom of the registration page (unless you want to use this service as well). It costs $36 for a year or $72 for three years to use the site to contact people. “Limited site access” is free, but if you want to e-mail people you will have to pay. You have to download a software program called “GoodContacts,” and you must have Outlook installed on your computer for this program to install. Alas.

Alumni.net asks you to sign up, fill in a resume/CV and also provide the e-mail addresses of two friends, so that they can invite them. They then bombard you every step of the way with ads for online dating, pop-ups, etc. I managed to finally get through to the members-only section (I gave up two of my own dead e-mail addresses), and tried one search. Then I gave up as the barrage of ads was so great. All through the process they tell you that it’s all necessary to maintain a free site, but I took my freedom elsewhere.

Classreport.com seems a clean site allowing you to donate money via PayPal and to post comments. It has a list of about 20 international high schools. It was started by Tim and Barbara Davis and officially launched on Feb. 5, 2003. On their Web site, they tell with wry humor their tale of why and how they started classreport.com. They set out a clear mission and with a successful background in database management, they have created a Web site that allows for their objectives: “Create a Web site where students could keep their own contact information current. Create a class-based system rather than a school-based system. Rely strictly on volunteers from each class to operate their own class Web site. Rely strictly on voluntary contributions from each class to support the Web site. No advertising, no pop-up ads, no spam!” Allow all class members to have full participation with no membership fees and no dues. Create simple reports for the volunteer class administrators to print mailing labels, track missing students, send bulk e-mails to their class members and to easily back up the data to their personal computer. Create a dynamic online experience which would spark an interest among classmates in the lives of their fellow alumni — not just a huge, overpriced, online directory service.” Although a purely voluntary system of donation does allow for free-riding, there will most likely be someone in your class willing to pay the suggested $15 per year to maintain your class site.

Alumni-find.com is free. You can even search before signing up. Then you sign up and fill in all kinds of information about yourself (if you feel like it). You can also add a school to the site. I added my international high school as I couldn’t find it on the list of international schools.

Gradfinder.com has an extensive list of schools in Denmark — near 100. And it’s free. It easily guides you through the registration. The only drawback is that you have to know what state your school is located in. Once I had researched which “state” the school was located in, I easily navigated the Web site.

Youralumni.com will help you set up your alumni organization for a fee. They will also train the main contact person.

Other than Web sites solely dedicated to finding old classmates, there are those where you can find out friends and family such as www.friendsreunited.co.uk, a British-based Web site. This one also costs money only if you want to contact people, and sends confirmations. But while the application process was simple, the Web site kept freezing, so I gave up.

— Mikkela Thompson
their own started by alumni, and many have alumni clubs that have held successful reunions. All of the sites had a similar set-up: a place to register, class representatives, a way to contact other classmates and a place for you to get involved in the search for other alumni. Many also had a place where you could donate money or time, either in their name, your class’s name or your own, for a good cause.

**Encounters of the Global Kind — Reunion Tales**

When I sent out my cybercall for tales of international school reunions, I heard, as expected, from most of the corners of the globe. The stories were tales of heartache, catharsis, resolution and discovery. As I read and listened to the stories, I realized that there were many common experiences and revelations.

Many of the former students had been to reunions and many had been back to visit their old school. Some admit to looking back with rose-tinted glasses. I even heard stories of some alumni who have found that they have been living in the same town as a long-lost friend from decades and continents ago. Some meetings are accidental, but many are planned events. A typical response to the question of what it was like to go back was: “I went back for my five-year reunion at the private school and then my 10-year reunion. Both were odd experiences. This one guy gained about 50 pounds and lost most of his hair in five years, which was alarming. When I’ve gone to the private school, I’ve always been in awe of how beautiful it is. The school has a view of the beach, and is really stunning. I don’t think I really appreciated it while I was a student there.”

Then there are those experiences which are uniquely international. Walteen attended the International School Bangkok in the 1960s and 1970s when her father worked for USAID. Walteen says of her reunion

Continued on page 90
experiences, “I have attended reunions of my school and class (1969) from the International School Bangkok. It’s affirming to see people who shared my peculiar childhood. We can speak about experiences that people in our stateside lives just don’t have a clue about. My attendance at reunions goes back to the late 1970s, when I attended one in the D.C. area. I got that invite via snail mail. E-mail has made communications so much easier … I got to see a number of folks from my class as well as the son of a friend of my dad who worked with him in Saigon during the war. It was really satisfying to talk with him about our fathers, both of whom had passed away by then. He is a person I would have never known in the States had we not had the common experience of living overseas. He is a farmer from Idaho or some far off place in the Midwest. What surprises me is how much the reunions seem to be the center of some people’s lives, as if the time spent in Bangkok was the best time of our lives. While it was a wonderful two years for me, it was not the best time.”

Walteen expressed a common theme, that of having a shared experience and therefore a bond with otherwise disparate people. She also said it helped her sense of identity to meet with others who were like her, at least in their experience of having lived some of their formative years abroad. She was surprised to find that now, as an adult, she found she had more in common with her classmates than she did when they were in high school. Walteen was involved in many activities at her high school, including serving as editor of the yearbook. Yet she was not part of the party scene and as she says, “I didn’t get asked to the prom — because I was one of maybe two black girls in my class … There were so few blacks at ISB, I felt no racial tension, just isolation. Isolation was an element of being an American overseas; it was just particularly nuanced by race. I was treated as unique, one of a kind, voted most likely to succeed ... It was not a terrible way to be perceived, just not real helpful when I came back to the U.S. in 1969 to the racial climate here and the unfolding
events. That was overwhelming. I think many of us experienced more culture shock returning to the U.S. than we did when we left. When I returned to the States I entered a nationalist phase — culminating in joining the Nation of Islam. From where I sit now I can see that I did this to find a community with which to identify in the U.S. I just didn’t fit in anywhere.”

For others it is the double return — going back to a place that one has special memories of — that causes the most stress. Going back for a reunion 14 years later was “a profound but shattering experience” for one woman. “No longer was I cocooned in the international community, but had to live in a hotel (horrors). I felt vulnerable and ill-prepared to take on India,” she says. “I wasn’t the seasoned veteran of living in developing countries that I had been as a kid. My starry-eyed memories of my time in India were rudely shaken by the realities of poverty and pollution and traffic-choked roads, even on the wide boulevards of my beloved New Delhi and the swanky neighborhood which housed the school and the various embassies and embassy-workers. My coping mechanisms for dealing with this were no longer in place.”

Returning to New Delhi for a reunion allowed her to reflect on the life she had led as a teenager. In high school she had managed a balance between the popular and academic kids. She was involved in sports, drama, music and partying. She adds that as teenagers, they had incredible freedom to try and do many “grown-up” activities — “we were not reckless, but we had a great measure of abandon!”

“So it was with some trepidation and much excitement that I returned to a place where I had spent wonderful, even magical years. Where else could you go get yards of pure white silk for a pittance and draw the prom dress of your dreams and have the tai-

Continued on page 92
lor make it for you for next to nothing? Even down to covering 50 tiny buttons with the same white silk to go down the slit that went up one of your legs? Where else could you walk home at five in the morning through the city with your friends, listening to the exotic squawking and calling of the birds waking up for the day?

“Where else could you hop on a train wearing a cashmere throw and sandals on a cold, fog-enshrouded December morning with your pals and head for a hill station where at night there was no electricity, so you saw every single star in the heavens, and then some? Where else could you go on a tiger safari at a game preserve and feel the large elephant you are riding trembling under you as the beaters corner a tiger in the bushes?

“Where else do you and your best friend discover that the gardener has secretly been growing marijuana plants among the tomatoes in the family garden plot in the back yard? Where else do you observe a solar eclipse one day that has the entire nation paralyzed with fear ... yet you are out gallivanting and climbing water towers in your neighborhood with your best pals? Where else could you jump off the second-story balcony of a luxury hotel into its swimming pool with all your clothes on and not get arrested?”

Although she knew, intellectually, that India had changed in 14 years just as she had, in her heart she wanted to find “home” in a place that had once been just that. After landing, it did seem like the old India with “the same burnt cooking-fire smell in the air ... The airport was the same, teeming with human-kind, noisy and crowded and dingy. The cab ride from the airport to town was the same ... same smells, same trees, same thick acrid air, same ambling cows.” But once she got to her hotel, reality set in and she was saddened to find herself a stranger. Determined to enjoy herself, she changed hotels and joined the other reunion attendees. The rest of the trip was filled with sightseeing, visiting the old school, lunching with former teachers and attending Diwali festivities in the tented VIP section. But she felt a “disconnect ... between being back in Delhi as a tourist versus how it had felt to live there. I could never really get over this feeling and I have to say, this was the hardest part ... because I truly realized the old cliché, you can never go back, and the magic would be impossible to recapture.”

Many see that the communities that they once were part of are actually still alive and thriving today, through reunions, alumni clubs and cyberspace. Returning to the country of one’s memories can allow for closure. It allows you to say your final goodbyes as you see that you and the place have moved on. You realize that you are now only a tourist and no longer a “native,” and the country is no longer your home.

Some reunions happen spontaneously for joyous occasions. When Jenny and Richard got married in August 2005, it was the culmination of a truly international tale of romance. In the late 1970s, Jenny’s mother worked for State in what was then Zaire and her father was a Scot with a senior named Peggy. Peggy was also friends with a sophomore named Richard, whose father worked for USAID. By the end of 1992, they were all friends (Richard came back every summer from college). In 1994, Richard took both Peggy and Jenny to the prom. There was no romance between Richard and Jenny yet.

Jenny and Richard’s paths continued to intertwine as Jenny attended Syracuse University, as had Richard. Then in 2001, Jenny moved to Seattle and she and Richard became god-parents to Peggy’s first-born. Richard couldn’t make it to the baby’s birth, but as they are all part of a group that Jenny describes as “faux family” he made it out for a visit in December 2003. And then, “we stayed up late one night talking, after everyone else had gone to bed, and he suddenly kissed me ... He returned to New Hampshire a week later ... and then a month later drove across country and moved in.

“In March he informally asked for my hand, and then in July he got down and proposed on a camping trip to Rainier. We were together until August; then, he went to Ohio to get his master’s degree in geography. After years of knowing each other and being apart, it’s easier to live with a couple of months between visits. ... Our wedding is in August and it will end up being mostly a reunion of overseas-ers, of whom most will be friends from Islamabad.”

How to Organize a Reunion

Some reunions are organized in conjunction with the school. One such school is the International School of Manila, which has held
many reunions, both in the U.S. and in the Philippines. The alumni page on the school Web site (alumni.ismanila.com) is well organized. There is also a section for “lost alums” on the Web site, and they seem to make an effort to keep in touch with their graduates. The alumni office produces a newsletter for alumni association members.

They had a reunion for the whole school in 2002 in the Philippines, and another in 2005 in San Jose, Calif. That weekend was well organized, thanks to help from the school counselor who worked with the alumni office and some of the teachers. The first night someone from the current school community gave a talk. The participants paid beforehand for the whole weekend, and had to make their own reservations for the hotels. Payment was done through the school — the registration fee was $125-150, with a discount for early registration.

As one alumna said, “Hadn’t had touch with them in 15 years. Fun weekend. You have a different perspective from when you were in the 8th grade. … You stripped yourself of all the pre-pubescent cliques. … We had cocktails by the pool: San Miguel beer, and the scenery could have been in Manila.” She added that it was a full weekend with events including a formal dinner, class photos, a group photo and after-hours socializing. The important part of the weekend was “more like discovery — discovering old friends.” Her class had 150-200 students and she reconnected with some friends.

One of the advantages of talking to others who have shared your experience is that you can say things that would be misinterpreted elsewhere — talking about maids and drivers, which was part of everyday life in the Philippines, and not have people assume you are an elitist. She felt it was a relief to be in a room with others who understand one’s stories for what they actually are.

Often it is an intrepid former student who takes on the task of organizing a reunion. Kathy, who attended a British international school, Green-gates (www.greengates.edu.mx), in Mexico City from the second through seventh grades, got roped into doing the heavy lifting for their reunion. She was contacted via the Internet in a

**Once the party is over, it is still possible to keep the reunion spirit alive.**

**Continued on page 94**
Yahoo group for Greengates alumni. Someone suggested a reunion; she volunteered to plan the main event, a dinner dance. And from there, she eventually planned the whole weekend.

They used Evite to get the word out. One person organized the financial side of the event, which was held in Las Vegas. One of the alumni negotiated a good deal at the Sahara hotel ($120 per night for a double), and the organizers charged $130 for two nights’ entertainment. Another person was tasked with finding people; they used word of mouth and the Internet to reach a final tally of 60 attendees, but with many more saying that they wished they could come.

The party got off to a roaring start on Friday night and on Saturday, the social side of the event, which was held at the Sahara hotel. ($120 per night for a double), and the organizers charged $130 for two nights’ entertainment. Another person was tasked with finding people; they used word of mouth and the Internet to reach a final tally of 60 attendees, but with many more saying that they wished they could come.

The party got off to a roaring start on Friday night and on Saturday, the committee decorated the room for the buffet dinner. They organized a DJ, speeches, prizes, free gifts, nametags, etc. They asked two people to give speeches on how their Greengates experience had affected their lives; they showed video clips from the teachers; there was a gregarious MC and other spontaneous entertainment. They had display tables where people could share their photos, memorabilia and a guestbook.

In this case, the school did not get involved in the reunion but they did, with some prodding, state a willingness to get involved next time, in Mexico. “It seems to mean different things to people, but everybody there was glad they had come and seems to have a sense of ‘coming home’ or even healing,” Kathy said. “I actually felt that I had done something worthwhile once it was all over with. It was certainly a headache to work on but it all came together in the end.”

Some schools like the international school in Bangkok (www.isb.ac.th) have an annual membership fee (around $35) for the alumni association and a separate fee for the reunions. These gatherings have an exhibit room with sale items, handouts at some of the events, a dinner and a dance. They also organize hospitality suites sponsored by different graduating classes, which compete to see who can get the best attendance at the reunions. They have a board made up of eight people, and the board members make a four-year commitment. They do not get paid and they use their own funds to get to the locations to investigate and set up the reunions, which are held in different locations in the U.S. every two years. They created a separate organization, ISB Inc., to run the reunions as a registered nonprofit. The reunions encompass graduates from the late 1950s to 2000; despite Hurricane Charlie, over 500 people made it to the one in Florida. In 2002, for the 50th anniversary celebration, the school hosted a reunion (two years in the making) at the Grand Marriott (owned by a 1967 graduate of ISB). There were fireworks on a barge on the Chao Phraya River and that was a huge success.

Once the party is over, it is still possible to keep the reunion spirit alive. ISB has an online newsletter, a vibrant Web community and an alumni directory. The International School of Manila (www.ismanila.com) Alumni Committee sends out highlights of their reunions, including gossip and verbatim (but anonymous) chatter from the parties. They also send out a link with photos, an invitation to send in more reunion stories and a survey.

Continued from page 93

SCHOOLS SUPPLEMENT

“We are recounting experiences that we had in the past … we enjoy each other now because we had this bonding experience.

— Tony Grady

Worth the Journey

Most of those who attend international school reunions think they are worthwhile, even if they do not give it a deeper meaning than having a party. For many former students, attending a reunion is best done years later when people are older and have more of an incentive to reminisce and reflect. For some it is the impetus for the future. As Tony, Walteen’s brother and fellow alumnum of ISB, says, “We’re not living in the past … we are recounting experiences that we had in the past … We enjoy each other now because we had this bonding experience. You can make new friends.”

The reunions are likely to grow in popularity. As the TCK World Web site (www.tckworld.com) put it before the worldwide reunion in 2003, “Reunion 2003 will be the gathering point for hundreds of TCKs from around the world. It will be a time to celebrate our heritage, to learn, to reminisce, to dream, to reunite with old friends and to make new ones who share similar backgrounds.”

There are many alumni who feel they have received so much that they should give back, and are doing just that. The International School Bangkok has an alumni-sponsored scholarship for a Thai student. Some schools reach out even more to their alumni community.

In March 2005, the Woodstock and Kodaikanal schools in India hosted a reunion dinner at Sangam, an Indian restaurant in Arlington, Va. I heard about the reunion through one of the local Global Nomads, and decided to crash the party. Wandering around with chili poppadom in hand, I noticed the majority of the attendees were in their 50s; but there were also several in their 20s. As I stood chatting, who walked in but alumnum Norma McCaig, founder and embodiment of the Global Nomads. Growing up global had such a profound effect on her life that she coined that term and started

94 FOREIGN SERVICE JOURNAL/DECEMBER 2005
Kodaikanal and Woodstock have a monthly alumni lunch in Washington, but this dinner had an ulterior motive. The guest speaker was Kodaikanal International School interim principal Eleanor Nicholson. She was there to talk about the different alumni-sponsored programs at the schools. Glenn Conrad, who graduated from Woodstock in 1968 and is executive director of the Winterline Foundation, was also in attendance. (The Winterline Foundation was founded by Mahendrajeet “Jeet” Singh, Woodstock class of 1981, and makes grants to Woodstock for special programs at the school.)

The amount of money raised regularly by alumni is impressive. For example, the Kodaikanal class of 1954 raised about $16,000 one year, which supported a special creative writing project at the school as well as establishment of the Middle Years Program that prepares students for the IB curriculum. Annually, KIS alumni have raised about $50,000. The Woodstock School alumni have already raised over $7 million as part of a 3-year capital campaign for the school’s 150th anniversary.

Nor does one have to wait to be a graduate to give back. After the Asian tsunami in 2004, students at the Kodaikanal school, together with a teacher, filled trunks with rice, money and other essentials, and these trunks were distributed to the victims.

It may be that the harder the posting, the closer and more bonded the community. For those who attended school in Kabul during the 1979 Soviet invasion, this is true. They also have strong emotions to work through. As one alumna says, “Kabul was a special place because the school was very small, the international community was very close and the place was an extreme hardship post. So we all tended to be very bonded and close to each other. The second Kabul reunion in 2002 in San Antonio was very intense: lots of emotions and very positive. People want to do something to improve the conditions in Afghanistan and many of them did, in fact, go to Kabul on trips and get involved in NGOs.”

Continued on page 96
One alumna, filmmaker Stacia Teele, produced a short film, “Vasila’s Heart,” after meeting Vasila, a young Afghan girl in need of a heart operation. The film aired on ABC. Teele is now in the process of developing a documentary, “Growing Up in Afghanistan.” As she says, Afghanistan is “wonderful. Magical. Childhood memories full of close friendships and exciting adventures. Training for the big soccer tournament, surrounded by the majestic mountains of the Hindu Kush; piling into taxis and heading down to Chicken Street or the Green Door Bazaar for shopping without our parents; playing after school with the Afghan children who lived next door; class trips in our yellow school bus through the Khyber Pass. We had all the elements of a normal childhood: first dates, sleepovers, long summer days at the pool, school plays, proms ... lived out in the bosom of an incredibly exotic, spiritual and thriving culture ... [We felt welcomed] by our host country, Afghanistan.”

The documentary will tell the stories of Afghans who fled to America, those who stayed in Afghanistan, and the alumni of the American International School of Kabul who lived there during the “Golden Age” of the 1960s and 1970s. The effort includes Advocates for Afghanistan, a grass-roots organization founded by the alumni of the American International School of Kabul (www.aisk.org/portal.php).

Dawn Erickson is a co-founder of Advocates for Afghanistan (www.advocatesforafghanistan.net) with Marnie Gustavson, Anne Payson & Stacia Teele — all AISK alumni. Their projects include the Qarabagh School Project and fundraising for Vasila’s heart surgery. Dawn is also involved in the Hayward Ghazni Sister City Formation Committee, organized by Bay Area community members and Afghan-Americans. Their endeavors include sponsoring pen-pal projects; raising funds for a Widow’s Literacy project that will help 30 widows and other women in a one-year, 3rd-grade-level education program; and assisting the Afghan

“The desire to give to the communities that I have lived in has been one that started in my youth and continues.”

— Dawn Erickson
Women’s Association International’s literacy project by purchasing sewing machines so that the program can include job training. In May 2004, Erickson returned to Kabul and taught sewing classes. At the same time two former AISK students, a doctor and an EMT, provided first-aid training.

Dawn’s altruism seems to stem from her international childhood. As she says, “I lived in Kabul for five years, from 1966 through 1971. The experience of being a student at an International School allowed for forming friendships with students from other countries and encouraged me to interact with people of different cultures throughout my life. My sense of the world being inhabited by one people that are only divided by arbitrary boundaries comes from being an international student and seeing so much of the world at a young age. … The desire to give to the communities that I have lived in has been one that started in my youth and continues. When it was possible to go to Afghanistan again and to be directly involved in projects, I was ready to participate along with many other fellow international students. I hope to return again to work with and for the people of a country that helped to raise me.”

Finding Home

My own high school, Copenhagen International School, had a reunion in 2002 (one of my classmates, a TV producer, created a DVD of the reunion festivities), but I did not attend. I figured, with perhaps faulty logic, that I did not need to go dig up the past with people who weren’t necessarily close to me (since I am still in touch with my friends). But having heard many international reunion stories, including tales of those who have exponentially improved on their experiences, I think that I will go and see what I can find next time. 

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