

SJSU

The Phyllis F. Simpkins International House

# NEWSLETTER

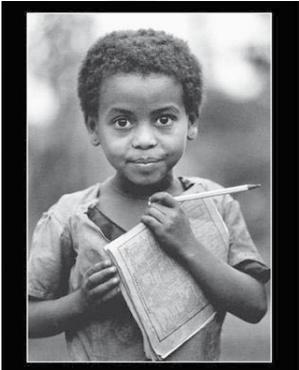
Spring 2009



*Change  
Challenge  
Chance*

# Do you know how lucky we are?

“I’m gonna cut that boring class at nine in the morning”



This dialogue may be familiar to some of us who think getting up early in the morning to attend class is a formidable challenge. However, according to the UN Human Development Report 2003, of the 680 million children of primary school age in developing countries, 115 million

do not attend school—three-fifths of them girls. In India 40 million children are not in primary school, more than a third of the world’s total. “How can they cook such awful foods? I can’t stand it.”

“They are too sweet and cold to eat!”

Whenever you go to the SJSU Dining Common (DC) or any restaurants off-campus, trying the foods which are not delicious or taste as similarly as the ones originated from your countries, you even find it challenging to swallow it bit by bit. In fact, do you know every day 799 million people in developing countries—about 18% of the world’s population—go hungry. In South Asia one person in four goes hungry, and in Sub-Saharan Africa the share is as high as one in three. India is home to the largest number of hungry people, 233 million, while Sub-Saharan Africa has 183 million, China 119 million, the rest of East Asia and

the Pacific 74 million, Latin America 55 million, and the Arab States 32 million. Having a chance to stay in the International House and study in the First World, have you ever thought that we are so lucky among the other hundreds of thousands of people in the Third World? However, in order to pursue



a “better life,” we may at times be dissatisfied with the blessing we have already had today and may try our best to keep up with the Joneses. We are hungry for new and more fashionable clothes and thirsty for a more sophisticated and fancy car while the people living below the poverty line just want to have a cup of clean water or a slice of bread so as to survive in the chronic hunger, let alone thinking of studying at school to change their destinies.

Now, we may start to turn our attentions to and feel compassion for the people in the Third World, wondering how to give a helping hand to them for a moment. In fact, changing our attitudes towards what we can eat and counting our blessings today have already been the right manner to show concerns to them with dignity and respect.

- Honey



HUMAN DEVELOPMENT REPORT 2003. Rep. no. United Nation, 2003. 28 Apr. 2009 <<http://hdr.undp.org/en/reports/global/hdr2003/>

# Coachella Arts and Music Festival April 17-19, 2009

Possibly one of the most mind-blowing events I've ever attended. A one-off chance of a lifetime. To have seen and experienced so many brilliant acts live at the one place, on the same weekend, was worth every penny and restless night's sleep leading up to the event. It started with a road trip that left the I-house at 1am on Friday morning, finally arriving at the Empire Polo Fields in Indio, CA at about 11am that day. We checked-in at the on-site camping grounds, set up our tents and prepared for the big weekend ahead – beginning with a few drinks and munchies.

The gates opened at 11am each day, but the first acts usually started just after midday. Even then, that doesn't necessarily mean that everyone gets there at the very beginning - most people usually drift in over the course of the afternoon, specifically to see the bigger acts that come on in the early evening in anticipation of the headliners. But as loyal festival kids, we went in at about noon to check out the up-and-coming acts and found some gems along with already established favourites. Noah & the Whale were great in the perfect setting that was the 'Outdoor Theatre'. A new discovery that I will definitely continue to follow up on is Cage the Elephant – an indie rock band from Kentucky. Aren't band names great? I won't go through the whole day because that would make me too melancholy. But I have to mention the legend that is Sir Paul McCartney. Woah! The one thing that I wanted to claim most from having attended Coachella, was that I would have witnessed Paul McCartney before my parents ever did or maybe ever will. And now, I have. It was amazing. While he did make us wait almost half an hour before he started his set, he is still legendary in every right, and I'm pretty sure he's a Beatle and has received a knighthood and that is more than anyone else in that audience could claim. So I waited patiently, unlike a few others around me. He started off grandly, but when he spoke between songs, it made me wonder if he was on something... But whatever. As the night wore on, it became steadily colder. As Louise and I had no sweaters or sarongs to keep ourselves warm we retreated to our tent to end our night as McCartney continued to



play. The last two songs I remember hearing before reaching slumber were "Let it be" and "Hey Jude". Paul McCartney sang me to sleep. Awesome.

The following day we woke up drenched in sweat – the temperature in the desert reached about 95 degrees Fahrenheit by 9ish. It was time to start the day! We already knew that Saturday would be the big one. Most of the acts we had come to see were on that day and we had more friends coming from the Ihouse too. I'd have to say that Saturday was my favourite day of the weekend – made some new friends, saw some of the coolest acts and ate and drank coconuts!!! It was a full day of amazing musicians – Joss Stone, Paolo Nutini, Michael Franti and the Spearhead, Calexico, James Morrisson, M.I.A. and last but not least, The Killers. Wow. They put on an incredible show! But all good things must come to an end, sadly... And that was our cue to head over to the Sahara tent where MSTRKRFT was finishing up his set - it was great to jump around to, a kind of last chance explosion of energy for the evening. After the

sound system had been switched off, we sat on the grass outside the tent in the hope that the music may possibly be switched back on – because frankly, we weren't ready to stop dancing. While we were sitting, waiting most likely in vain, the Ihouse kids and all the new friends we made throughout the day turned

up in the same spot in a brilliant stroke of fortune. It was the perfect ending to an insanely incredible day.

Sunday was rather chilled out, a great mix of laid back but fun music gigs. It was also extremely hot, the desert showing off its extremes. Our personalized set list for the day included the Friendly Fires, Sebastian Tellier, Lykke Li, Lupe Fiasco, Peter Bjorn and John, the Yeah Yeah Yeahs and Devendra Banhart. All awesomely cool. We didn't get to see the headliners, the Cure – because we had to hurry on home before the beginning of class Monday morning.

Everyone returned to their 'normal lives' – I say that loosely, because on exchange, nothing is normal. As for me, my so-called 'normal' life in San Jose, began with a group presentation in my Conservation Biology class at 9am. What fun?

- Comila

# Living in the U.S. - yes Having the U.S. Experience - maybe

In the I-House this year, 20 of our 70 residents, nearly 30%, came from different parts of California, while the other 50 residents represented 29 countries worldwide. Odds are good then that students coming from around the world to live at International House have opportunities to get to know at least a couple of U.S. Americans well. Like most other opportunities, however, choices are made on how and where we invest our energies. For people coming from distant parts of the world, getting to know someone from the U.S. may provide many cultural challenges that can be avoided by sticking with people from cultures more similar to one's own.

In many cases, U.S. students join the Asian or European/Australian/South American contingents depending on family background, education, travel histories, and personal interests. The interaction with U.S. students is very important for international students who may not otherwise be immersing themselves in the culture of the U.S. and getting to know U.S. Americans. While in the I-House, how much can one learn about the U.S. without developing friendships over the course of a semester, a year, or longer with several different residents who were raised in the U.S.? How does an international student's knowledge of the U.S. and Americans grow and change over the course of their stay in the U.S. if they are primarily in the company of people from their own region of the world? How do their perceptions and knowledge differ from

those who visit the U.S. for two weeks as a tourist?

Scot Guenter, an American Studies professor at SJSU, facilitated one of our cross-cultural workshops a year ago. He asked residents to speak about their interactions with the elderly in the U.S., or with children, or with those who are disabled. Most residents responded that they had not had any such interactions while in the U.S. Professor Guenter then very kind-



ly cautioned residents to remember that they must temper their perceptions of the U.S. to reflect the limited experiences they had with people in the U.S.

As we read applications each semester, we seek new residents who seem to truly have a desire to live in a very diverse environment and to interact with others from cultures very different from their own. At I-House, we can only create opportunities for international students to meet U.S. Americans and vice versa, and then hope that our new residents choose to challenge themselves culturally by stepping far out of their comfort zone and developing friendships with each other.

- Leann

# Serious request for change

2009 has been a year of many events that demand change. It has been a year of big fightings between Israel and Hamas, a year in which Iceland swore in the first female prime minister and a year with almost daily suicide bombings in the middle east. At the same time Sweden legalizes same-sex marriage. 2009 has been a historic year for the United States of America!

After elections in 50 states and the district Colombia the US welcomes its first black president: Barack Obama. This could be considered as one of the



most impressive events of 2009 so far and the official inauguration of January 20th will definitely make it into next generation's history books.

The U.S. is always considered as the country with the endless possibilities and at first sight one might feel and think this is actually true. In addition, being in one of the pro Obama states, CA can be considered not just as the sunny, or golden, state, but also as one which is open for change. On the other hand, past but also recent events indicate that there is still a lot of controversy in this state and country of the endless possibilities. So the question is: are the U.S. (and the world) ready for a big change?

According to the above, how can a beautiful Miss CA end up in losing the crown for miss USA? The answer lies in a slightly controversial issue about gay marriage. Considering the whole world, including her different cultures, this issue is undergoing some change. Many countries have changed their views and opinions about this already, which resulted in changed laws and special arrangements years ago. For me, as a full blood dutch girl, it is even harder to believe that America is still so conservative in some cases and issues. Especially, since this is a people

issue. Back to miss 'bye bye'. One of the jury judges Perez Hilton asked the blond sparkling lady what her view and opinion is about gay marriage, in reaction to the legalization of this in the 4th state. A piece of her answer included: "I think that I believe that a marriage should be between a man and a woman. No offense to anybody there, but that's how I was raised and that's how I think it should be, between a man and a woman". (Prejean, 2009). Change is not just a concern of changing the law or regulations. For a real change, people's views and opinions should be changed, a shift in mindset in accordance with some government arrangements. After this 'crown incident' all in all, one can say that some cultures still have a hard time in changing direction, or said in another way, changing of frequency.

Going overseas:

Cinemas were overcrowded during the Oscar-winning movie 'Slumdog Millionaire'. Actors of the movie are 'real' people who live in the worst neighborhoods or slums of Bombay, India. The story is about a young man who lives in these slums and plays in the so called 'Who wants to be a millionaire?' quiz and against all odds, reaches very high levels. One of the actors, the 9-years old star Rubina Ali was on the front page of many newspapers last week. Her own father Rafiq Qureshi (36) is arrested for trying to sell his little girl for more than \$290,000. He denies this, which lead to a big investigation. What does this has to do with change? Well, the filmmakers paid the actors money, which for Indian



people who live in the slums can be considered as a lot of money. Since, his little girl was 'famous' now he realized that he could earn a lot of money when selling her. This shows how big cultural differences and life situations still play a large and even critical

role in daily life. The more and more money India earns in becoming more and more a booming business district, the people who live their life's in the worst slums of one's imagination are not gaining any of those advantages. Actually, it even looks like the gap between both sides of the continuum of rich and poor is still growing. So change will be a long (and maybe endless) journey.

All in all, one can say that some cultures still have a hard time in changing direction, or said in another way, changing of frequency. So maybe there still is only a small line between change and controversy.

In the end, 2009: the year of change? Is the cow getting more and more – diversified – spots? At least it is my year: the year I went to the International House in San José for a student exchange program. A semester full of changes and differing opinions and views about life. Cultural differences coming

together by creating one big family of 70 people under one wooden Californian roof. A change which will last a lifetime. A change which made me stronger and independent. A change which made me smile. A change which made me happy. A change which will give me precious memories. A change which I can strongly advice to everyone who does not dare to take that step. A change, which I will remember forever and lastly, a change which will cause a tear in the end. So, the US, country of endless possibilities? Yes! CA the golden state? Yes! Exchange, best step ever? Yes! So, changing lanes after all.

- Mirjam

# “Congratulations! You got accepted to live in the International House of San Jose”

This quote may not mean anything for many people in the world; but I can imagine how expressive it is for an I-House resident who shared the greatest moments with me during this amazing year. This sentence is the beginning of a worthwhile life experience that very few lucky people all around the world can find the opportunity to have. This new life starts with planes taking off from many countries in Asia, Europe, Australia, Africa, and America; heading-off to San Jose International Airport; carrying their special guests to their final destination, I-House. Seventy two people from various countries are starting to come one by one to their new house, to the beginning point of a new life full of challenges, great opportunities, and fun.

Every single student arriving at I-House would not even know that they were on their way to the land of wonders which had already started with the chance given to live in the I-House; continued with a challenging life experience with unforgettable memories, and is ending up with new minds changed and opened to the real world. New minds opened to the real world... This sentence means a lot of things to me! Because these minds know many things about many countries. They think to know that Indian people



are the most hardworking people in the world. These minds think that the Japanese are quiet, wise but conservative and observing; which lead to the overall success of Japanese people. Several people have the impression that Asian people always live healthy and are against to violence but harmony; Germans are punctual and worth to take at their words. And many more examples which are gathering at a common point. The minds of all these people who came to I-House shared a year of their lives together in one house.

They loved each other so much that they do not even want to think about the end of the semester. They did not see fights, discrimination, or humiliation but humanity and convergence. Because, the most important thing; these seventy two people learnt that the world can live in peace, and it could be a more livable place without fights, wars, starvation, and indigence.

What could be a better combination of chance, challenge, and change in anyone’s life than this unique house?

- Burcu

# Theory of Friendship

Moving into the International House, you are completely aware that by the end of the semester, a lot of the people who you see everyday, you will not be seeing again for a while. You are aware of this, but it never hits you until you realize that it's almost the end of the semester, and your friends start talking about their summer plans back home and the plane tickets they've just bought.

For most of us parting ways with our friends is a sad occasion. But to me, it is not that difficult. You see, I think that goodbyes are only painful if you are never going to say hello again. I have this theory; I think that once you have made a friend, your lives are connected from that point onward. I have never met a friend only once in my life and never again. Even walking through the San Francisco Airport on my way to Canada, I have met a friend who I was very close to in elementary school who I hadn't seen years. She was on her way to Australia to live for 2 years, and we just happened to pass each other as she walked into the Burger King that I was leaving. She ended up coming back to Canada for 2 weeks and we had a reunion with a lot of other people who we were still friends with from elementary school. At the end of the summer, we said our goodbyes and went back to our schools around the world. But I wasn't sad because I knew that sometime, somewhere, we would see each other again, whether the meeting was spontaneous or planned. The more you travel and meet people, the smaller the world will become. I have heard of people from one side of the world

going all the way to the other and up a mountain in a distant country only to meet someone there who knows one of their friends back home.

So as we end the semester and go into the summer, let's enter it with smiles on our faces for the good friends that have gone, and be ready to openly welcome the new friends of the coming semester. Instead of "goodbye" say "see you around", you just might.

"Don't be dismayed at goodbyes. A farewell is necessary before you can meet again. And meeting again, after moments or lifetimes, is certain for those who are friends."

Richard Bach

- Courtney

## Messages from the I-House

Hi everybody, sorry I haven't been in touch I hope you are all well at home. Since I have arrived here I have actually joined the Swedish dogeball team at first we were just playing a few challenge matches around San Jose, you know Fahrenheit and the Irish Bar. But we have also begun traveling as a team. We invested in a team bus and traveled to Santa Barbara first then on to Tahoe and we even made a journey to Hawaii as a team. We are undefeated in our league and are pretty much ready to retire. Our testimonial is coming soon. See you soon.  
-Kevin-

Today one of visiting old residents left. Half of the house was downstairs to say goodbye. And I felt so unbelievably sad. I imagined myself leaving in a bit more than a month. I know that regardless of good intentions and words like "don't worry-we'll definitely meet up and see each other soon" I know that I won't see most of the people I see here every day ever again. And it makes me helplessly sad. I also know that there is no point in "writing a requiem" and being sad for a day that is going to come anyway. I just have to live and enjoy this month I have left here. Because it is really great to be here! Yes of course, I miss you all – occasionally I miss home a lot. But I am happy here. And it is more than just because of the people and the sunshine. It's just about everything. See you very soon! :)  
-Kristine-

Hi everyone, here a short message from overseas. I am doing great! California is even better than I had expected. At this moment I don't see any reason of coming home, which means that you might not see me back in cold, rainy and depressing Holland! ;) I have met so many new and wonderful people, each different in their own way which makes a person special I think. By being 100% yourself you learn to be more secure and respect each person for who they are. By seeing all these amazing places and cities and living in such a diverse environment I could say and end with one short quote: Live your life to the max (and the I-House with all these wonderful people makes this possible).  
-Mirjam-

Since arriving here, I have met so many people, made great connections with a few of them and proved to myself that I've matured a lot since I was last in a foreign setting – similar to this exchange, and that other foreign setting was boarding school. I used to always use the excuse that I was shy and reserved and found it difficult to speak with people. But so far here, I have found it a complete breeze to meet people, make friends and worthwhile connections. I've even noticed the change in my smile when I greet people, and even the language I use when I speak with them. I rediscovered how lovely people are.

-Comila-

I have had very few life challenging experiences but one in particular, I will remember forever. A very exciting trip to Yosemite turned into chaos and lots of disasters (at least for me). Having missed most of the trip (due to car problems), I ended up staying longer than the planned two days. I don't think anybody on the trip was able to feel the kindness of the Gaines family as much as I did. Having come from a conflict area I had lost hope for humanity years ago but the longer I stayed at Bass Lake I noticed that the area is filled with nice people who are willing to help strangers without expecting anything in return. With all this happening I feel sad for who ever did not enjoy the trip due to all sorts of problems. But one thought comes to my mind "It was here where I got to know who my friends were".

-Sevag-

# I want to thank all the Contributors...



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...without your help, this news-  
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possible!! :)