Louis said, “Promoting Global Understanding is an appropriate theme for the essay contest. That, after all, is at the core of a university. What we do asserts the possibility of a receptivity between minds—and in that receptivity there is, every time, every day, everywhere, another example of how people can find a common ground and clear it and build a place in which to live together.

“The University believes that mankind should survive with dignity, with energy, with moral purpose. Students and teachers accept and understand this belief, and thus, the activity of learning leads us out of ourselves into a shared understanding that our hope for a decent, civilized life depends upon others—across the globe—sharing the same hope.”

Undergraduate Chris Kelly (Philosophy and Physics) and graduate student Lynn Richards (SPEA) were each awarded a $1,000 first prize. Second prizes of $500 each were awarded to undergraduate Beth Bessmer (Arts and Sciences) and to graduate student Suzanne Polak (History).

Certificates of Merit were awarded to undergraduates Valeria DeCastro (Italian) and Mark Schneider (Chemistry and Political Science) and to graduates Colleen Berry (East Asian languages & Cultures), Allen Koshewa (Language Education), and Krista Miller (Anthropology).

—Susan Carty
Program Associate
OIP

Notes from the Field
by Lynn Richards

It’s 10:00 a.m. and we have to reach the 15,000-foot peak before the sun strikes our path. A foot of snow fell the night before, adding to the existing two feet, and our hiking party is worried about avalanches. The ascent is steep and the going slow. A winter expedition? No, it was a hike to Lake Issuk-Kul in the middle of July and part of my job as an environmental grass-roots organizer in Central Asia. The mountain range we were crossing is the Tien Shan and Lake Issuk-Kul is the world’s fourth largest lake, located in Kyrgyzstan.

I had arrived in Almaty, Kazakhstan four months earlier to begin my three-year post as Central Asian Environmental Program Director for a small non-governmental organization in Washington, D.C. Unlike my few other western colleagues, the focus of my work was to get out of the capital and explore the region, identifying and assessing environmental NGOs and environmental problems. However, being fair skinned, female, and young (in the eyes of my Central Asian colleagues), I had credibility problems. This lack of trust is not surprising for international travelers and even less surprising considering the traditional culture and mannerisms of this obscure steppe culture with direct ancestral ties to the time of Genghis Khan.

The hike was proposed by Green Salvation, an environmental NGO in Almaty, who wanted to preserve this part of the Tien Shan as a national park. Government authorities were not convinced that preserving the area was the right thing to do, since many local shepherds and herders depend on the mountains for grazing areas. However, over the last several years, these herds had doubled in number, causing widespread environmental degradation and soil erosion. The direct purpose of our hike was to gather more data to convince unsympathetic officials that this area was in need of preservation and to provide me with an opportunity to verify the destruction of the mountainous ecosystem by the

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traditional sheep herders. However, I realized that the hike would also be an opportunity for me to prove my mettle, dedication, and knowledge of the region and its problems. I eagerly accepted the proposal.

The struggle for land preservation is common among environmentalists, local communities, and government officials. The local communities are dependent upon the land for their survival and for their culture and traditions. Yet during these years of economic collapse, their use of land increased far beyond sustainable levels, causing environmental degradation as a result of soil erosion, deforestation, and soil depletion. The fragile mountain system further intensifies these problems. The environmentalists, trying to preserve the land, or at least stop the degradation, petition the local government with various solutions. The local communities, fearful of losing their only source of income, also petition the government. Usually officials listen to those solutions with the greatest economic benefit. Green Salvation, aware of these tensions, has been active in cultivating relationships with key governmental figures sympathetic to protecting the environment and also working to develop grazing alternatives for local shepherds.

The hike was 100 kilometers, crossing two mountain ranges over 12,000 feet. During the five days, I took photos of the mountains, the overgrazing, and the erosion. I asked questions of my colleagues and kept pace even during the most grueling days. We spoke of the proposals currently before the Ministry of Ecology and the chances for success. I stressed that for the national park project to be successful, all involved parties must be satisfied. Coalition building needed to continue, and the scope of those involved had to be increased. Green Salvation needed to be tolerant of the traditional communities which had used this land and to accept that some alternative had to be found for them.

Most of the time my comments were met with thoughtful silence.

We passed several groups of shepherds along the way. As native Kazakhs, they understood little Russian and were wary of the Slavic-looking group passing before them. Smiles seem to be an international language, and even after 12 hours on my feet with a 50-pound pack, I managed a few. Smiles begat smiles and soon, through little effort, we became friends. We invited them to join us for a “quick” cup of tea and that became a launch pad for friendship. Through broken Russian and Kazakh we learned their perspectives and their suggested solutions to the problems. Sitting among wild bunches of edelweiss, seeing the expanse of the Tien Shan stretch out before me, I silently wondered how successful we would be.

The cold nights were spent huddled around the campfire. During these hours, it became my companions’ turn to ply me with questions. What is my favorite food? How much do houses cost in the United States? What is the latest slang? Why wasn’t I married? Why did I leave the comforts of the United States to work in Kazakhstan? I wasn’t new to these types of questions. Exhausted as I was, I felt that sitting around the fire chatting would go a long way towards solving my credibility problems. In

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Japanese Tea Ceremony Performed for School

On April 5, the East Asian Studies Center on the Bloomington campus presented an outreach program featuring the Japanese tea ceremony, as part of the "International Studies for Indiana Schools" project being developed jointly by the Center for Excellence in Education and the Office of International Programs. The interactive video performance was broadcast from the School of Education to a fifth grade class at University Elementary School in Bloomington.

The class of thirty students and their teacher, Phyllis Perkins, were first introduced to the many pieces of an authentic tea set. The class then observed a typical performance of the ceremony itself as it was being narrated to them. They followed along, mimicking the significant gestures, and were provided with their own cups of Japanese tea and tea cakes to taste at the appropriate moment.

The ceremony was performed by Nagako Hirohashi, a graduate student in the Department of Linguistics, who has studied and taught the performing art for many years in Japan.

The narrator for the tea ceremony and discussion facilitator for the program was Jeffrey Johnson, graduate student in the Department of History. Johnson traveled to Japan upon being awarded a fellowship to conduct research on the meaning of the tea ceremony and its performance.

Primary and secondary school teachers in Indiana who are interested in participating in interactive video programs such as this should contact the Office of International Programs on the Bloomington campus (812-855-8467).

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what I thought to be a forested plain, but I soon realized the massive shape 9,000 feet below was the lake. We quickened our pace and by the time we reached the lake, my toes were bloodied from the decent. We changed into swim suits and took what must have been the most enjoyable swim of my life. We celebrated the end of the hike, our successful mission and I felt more a part of the group than I ever had.

I didn’t quite realize the significance of the hike until in the following years when I would tell other environmental groups about my hike. Astonishment was always the reaction, as well as mixed pride and awe. I was one of the gang: an accepted member of the environmental movement and someone who could help. During the next two years, it would not be unusual for my phone to ring at 2:00 A.M. with a call from Uzbekistan, “I have this idea, what do you think?” When members of local environmental NGOs came to Almaty, my small one-room apartment was a central meeting point. One night I counted five people sleeping on the floor and three in the kitchen. There was barely enough room to walk between the bodies. While I still fought credibility problems with local government officials, I had overcome most of it within the environmental movement, which was my primary focus.

The best part of this story is the result of the hike. The ideas of coalition building and increasing Green Salvation’s support base did not fall on closed ears. Green Salvation worked to include more local community groups, more international organizations working on park development, and government officials who understood the necessity of making a change to preserve the mountains. I worked with Green Salvation off and on during my time in Almaty on this project. This past February, I received an email from Almaty saying the Minister of Ecology just signed the proposed area into a national park. The new park includes the trail we took. By working with people (and not against them) and by accepting a culture different from our own, Green Salvation was successful. We all were successful.

Editor’s Note

Lynn Richards is enrolled at the School of Public & Environmental Affairs in the joint Masters of Public Affairs and Masters of Science in Environmental Science program. She has spent the last five years working as an environmental grassroots organizer to develop a civil sector and promote sustainable development in different areas of the former Soviet Union.