Had somebody told me when I graduated from high school that within the next four years I would travel far and wide within the United States and abroad, become fluent in a second language and begin to tackle a third, study abroad, witness the beginnings of a revolution while in a foreign country, survive organic chemistry, pass the MCAT, and actually get into medical school, I probably would have laughed. But hey, c'est la vie. That’s life.

"You transplanted a vine from Egypt... it took root and filled the land." And did it ever! In hindsight, my time at Augie is more or less divided into two parts: Before Egypt, and After Egypt. The real journey, however, began a few months before that. During the summer of 2010, I spent two weeks in Latvia with my grandmother and other assorted relatives visiting family friends. In the evenings at the hotel, my grandma would reminisce about growing up in Riga, Latvia’s capital city. She spoke of the terror of the Soviet Occupation, fleeing the country when World War 2 broke out, living in a refugee camp in Germany before coming to America after the war, and then returning to Latvia to visit after the Soviet Union collapsed. As I listened, I felt so spoiled, so naïve--and rightly so. It really hit home one afternoon, when I was wandering around the town with my friend Kristine. We walked past a tiny house and she paused. "That’s where we lived when I was small," she said, pointing to two windows of a room at the top of the house. "I don’t really
remember it, because I was young and I didn’t know any better, but those were
difficult times." And that’s when it hit me. I found myself face-to-face with the
uncomfortable realization that although by American standards I’m far from rich, in
the global picture, I’m loaded. Here people I knew personally had lived in poverty
while the greatest hardship in my life had been when The Gap discontinued my
favorite style of jeans! Like they say, there are real problems, and then there are
Rich World Problems.

With this awareness still burning in my mind five months later, I boarded a
plane to Cairo with the rest of the Augustana Band. From hearing the call to prayer
five times a day to attempting to repeat basic phrases in poorly-pronounced Arabic
to seeing the Pyramids of Giza in the skyline, we were in a whole new world. Of all
the events and epiphanies of that month, one in particular has stuck with me. After
visiting mosques, having frank discussions with our guides about Islam, and
growing accustomed to hearing the call to prayer and having the weekend be Friday
and Saturday instead of Saturday and Sunday, I realized that I wasn’t afraid. Not that
I had been--not outright, at least. But, having grown up in the West, the only things
I’d heard about Islam in my daily life were negative. It was remarkable to
understand--and not just conceptually--but really see that Islam is indeed a religion
of peace, mercy, and charity. It was liberating.

The hardest thing about travelling, in my opinion, is coming back--coming
back to the same places, trying to reintegrate into the same routines, facing the
same prejudices and misconceptions, knowing that the only thing that’s changed is
you. At one point during our last few days in Egypt, when revolution was in the air
and all eyes were on Cairo, a few of my friends and I turned on the news. As we
watched the BBC coverage of the action in Tahrir Square from the comfort of a
luxury resort, far removed from any hint of danger, one of my friends sighed and
said, "You know, they'll never believe us when we tell them that we were fine." He
was right. If I had a nickel for every time somebody approached me in public, said
they’d seen me on the news, and gone on to make uninformed, prejudiced remarks
about Islam, or the Middle East, or the situation in Egypt, I’d have my student loans
paid off! It’s taken a while, but I’ve come to terms with the fact that there are some
things that other people will simply never get because they haven't experienced
them firsthand.

Also difficult is accepting that, upon return, you might never fit back in like
you used to. One evening during our last weekend in Egypt, between games of UNO,
finding out about flight delays, and checking out the latest on the BBC, I got to
talking with Khalid, one of our guides. He asked how I felt about going home, and I
didn’t know what to say. It was strange to think of returning to the Land of the Ice
and Snow. For as eager as I was to get back to Sioux Falls and see everyone and
chatch up, I knew I would leave a piece of my heart in Egypt, a place that, 21 days
previously, had seemed like a whole new world and now was no longer so foreign.
This was even harder when I returned from studying in Paris last August. Having
spent weeks learning to blend into a different culture, speaking a different language,
and living a different way of life, I found that I couldn’t go back to being American
overnight—nor did I want to. Home didn’t feel so much like home anymore. I’ve
come to realize that although I carry a passport with the Great Seal of the United
States embossed on the cover, listing South Dakota as my place of birth, for me, "home" has taken on a much broader meaning. Sioux Falls, Minneapolis, Omaha, Riga, Cairo, Cesis, Chicago, Nuremburg, Alexandria, Paris--wherever I have friends, I'm home.

This is why we travel. Because in all, life isn't about politics, or about governments, or about religions or money. It's about friendship. It's about acceptance. It's about kindness and compassion and love. It's about people. Because for better or for worse, we're all still people. It's about turning off the TV and tearing down the walls. Keeping our eyes open to similarities, our minds open to differences, and our hearts open to each other. Understanding what you can, respecting what you can't, and letting every moment make you grow as a human being. In the end, we're not our governments or our religions or our bank statements. It's about going exploring, facing fear head on, and making home wherever you are.

In a few weeks' time, I'll be graduating. As to where this series of adventures will lead me next, I have no idea. In the words of the Irish rock band U2, "I have run, I have crawled, I have scaled these city walls, only to be with you. But I still haven't found what I'm looking for."

No, despite it all, I still haven't found what I'm looking for. But given the way things have been going so far, I almost hope I never do.
MORNING WORSHIP
Friday, April 13, 2012

Prelude
Welcome/Announcements
Invocation
Prayer
All: Lord God, you call us your servants to ventures of which we cannot see the ending, by paths as yet untrodden, through perils unknown. Give us faith to go out with good courage, not knowing where we go but only that your hand is leading us and your love supporting us, through Jesus Christ, our Lord.

Hymn
"Lord of All Hopefulness“ ELW #765

Scripture
Psalm 80:3-15

Sermon
Meredith Reynolds
Hometown: Sioux Falls, SD
Majors: Biology, French

Benediction
Celtic Blessing of Light

Hymn
“Go My Children, With My Blessing” ELW #543

Recognition and Thanks for Pastor Andrea
please respond to each petition, “Thank God for Andrea!”

Postlude

CAMPUS MINISTRY ANNOUNCEMENTS

CONCERT! - Come hear Marilyn Schempp and The Augustana Orchestra play a full program in celebration of the 50th Anniversary of Schlicker Organ at Our Savior's Lutheran Church, on Friday, April 13, at 7:30 p.m. You will hear selections by Handel, Ravel, Merkel, and Haydn.

PR. ANN ROENDALE begins work on Monday, the 16th! Come by to welcome her! Her installation will be April 25 at 10 am in the chapel.

VERDIER WEEK BEGINS ON MONDAY - It is our celebration of Augustana’s core values and the covenant awards.

MALARIA CAMPAIGN - “BE THE CHANGE!” In support of the ELCA Mil lenium Goal to combat and eliminate Malaria throughout the world, Campus Ministry is kicking off campaign for Malaria awareness. Watch for canisters for coins set out around campus for people to conveniently drop coins into. This is to emphasize how even small amounts of “useless” pocket, purse, & backpack change can make a huge difference when it is applied to changing people’s lives. A table in the Commons will contain information and fund-raising items - “Munching Against Malaria”. Canisters of M & M’s will be sold for $1 the campaign.

April 25th is World Malaria Day. A film, “When the Night Comes” will be shown in Madsen Center classroom #202, about the fight against Malaria. Watch for more details.
Check out our Facebook page - Augustana ELCA Malaria Campaign

GUITAR WORKSHOP - Every Monday night in April, at 7 pm there will be a beginner guitar workshop in the Humanities practice room (basement). Guitars are provided. Please email Dan Bock to sign up - drbock08@ole.augie.edu

CHAPEL PRESIDENT ELECTION - Two candidates have offered to serve as chapel president for next year, and they prefer to do so together. To preserve the integrity of a community election, they are willing to serve separately. So the ballot will be between Alaina Heiskary, Michael Seeley, or the team of Alaina Heiskary/Michael Seeley. Voting will be next week Fri., and Sun, Apr. 20th and 22nd.

TAIZE’ IN CHICAGO - May 24-28 - All students are invited to travel to Chicago for a weekend of Taize’ worship and discussions on peace and justice. Taize’ is a community in France dedicated to the renewal of young adults. Cost is just $100, including bus fare. Partial scholarships available. Details - see Pr. Paul.

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Mon., Apr. 16th Morning Worship, 10 am - Pr. Paul
Wed., Apr. 18th Holy Communion, 10 am - Mike Mullin, Hist.
Fri., Apr. 20th Morning Worship, 10 am - Karise Stillson, Sr. Spkr.
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