



Witness to History

More than 70 student members of the Augustana Band and 20 staff members, alumni and friends were in Egypt amid historic anti-government protests. Despite the social unrest, the students called the 22-day adventure 'the trip of a lifetime.'

What started out as the trip of a lifetime turned into a real-life history lesson for more than 70 Band members who were in Cairo when thousands of Egyptian demonstrators, angry at a lack of freedoms and long-standing economic hardships, took to the streets in a series of unprecedented anti-government protests.

In an early effort to stop protesters from using social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter to organize additional demonstrations, the Egyptian government shut down the Internet and blocked most cell phone signals as College administration worked to reschedule flights back to the U.S. amid airline cancellations and a rush of thousands seeking to flee Cairo. As a result, Band members and their parents and families back home were forced to weather a tense weekend of little contact. As protests intensified, the Band's final concert of the tour, set to be held at Cairo's Mubarak Hall, was cancelled as a precaution and Augustana Band Tour leaders moved students to a different hotel on the grounds of Cairo International Airport.

Egyptian protesters craving democracy and desperate to stop decades of bleak economic opportunities were demanding an end to President Hosni Mubarak's three-decade-long dictatorship. After more than three weeks of

demonstrations, their wish was granted on Friday, Feb. 11, when Mubarak resigned his presidency and placed the military in control of the country.

Providing Perspective

On the day of Mubarak's resignation, Augustana Band members Thomas Alexander, '11, Rachel Hurley, '11, Meredith Reynolds, '12, and Maren Peterson, '11, discussed their experiences in Egypt during a "Rendezvous," a weekly gathering organized by the International Programs Office.

Junior Meredith Reynolds, 20, a biology and French major and a saxophonist in the Band, understands the significance of the Egyptian protests and says, for her, being in Cairo provided the ultimate real-life lesson on democracy.

"It wasn't a religious thing, it wasn't a socio-economic thing, it wasn't a political thing. It was a people thing. The [Egyptian] people wanted change. And, they stood up for themselves and for their freedoms."

Reynolds said the trip also taught her a lot about the importance of perspective.

"In Egypt, a large percentage of the population makes about \$2 a day. I'll spend that on Starbucks without even thinking about it. Here in America, we have it so good. This trip abso-

lutely made me realize and think about all the things I take for granted."

Touring Egypt

Prior to their departure, the students completed a course on Egyptian culture entitled, A Portrait of Egypt, led by Dr. John Pennington, professor of music and instructor of percussion at Augustana.

During their tour, the students saw a number of ancient Egyptian landmarks, including the Great Pyramids; the Sphinx; Saint Virgin Mary's Coptic Orthodox Church, also known as the Hanging Church; the world-famous Bibliotheca Alexandrina, the new library of Alexandria; the Alabaster Mosque (also known as the Mosque of Muhammad Ali); the Temples of Philae; and the Aswan High Dam, just to name a few.

The Band's concerts were, in most cases, the first by a college band from the United States. Their opening concert was held at Cairo University, home to more than 200,000 students. At CU, the Band played in the same 3,500-seat hall where President Obama gave his "address to the Muslim world" in 2009. Stop No. 2 was Tanta University, located in the Nile delta and home to 150,000 students. The Band also performed at the Bibliotheca Alexandrina and at Assiut University, a school with nearly 100,000 undergraduate and graduate students.