



“During silent week, a little Chinese girl came up to me. I couldn’t speak or even make eye contact, but I had my sketchbook so I started drawing and put the pencils where she could reach them. She caught on quickly, and before you know it, I was surrounded by little girls, all coloring in parts of the drawing and adding to it. There was this amazing feeling of having no language barrier ... we were all just there, experiencing a moment of pure connection through art. It was my favorite part of the whole trip.”

Living Like Monks

BY KIM DEMBROSKY '13

A year ago, I knew virtually nothing about China or Buddhism, but after taking “Art in China Since 1911,” with Dr. Allison Miller, assistant professor of art history, and a fellow student from China, Yinlin Dai, I fell in love with the culture.

In the spring, Dr. Miller told me about the Woodenfish Project, a program designed to allow students to live as the monastics do in an ancient Buddhist monastery in China. I was accepted into the program and was privileged to be invited to live with Yinlin’s family for a week before it started.

The trip turned out to be even more of an adventure than I expected it to be! This was the first time in the history of China that any large group of foreigners has been allowed to stay in a Buddhist monastery (although the program has been going on in Taiwan for 12 years). We stayed in the Shenshou monastery in Wenzhou, China, where the monks and nuns welcomed us with open arms.

The Shenshou Monastery is about 1,400 years old and is surrounded by mountains. Living like the monastics, we had to learn to get by without many of the comforts of home. We slept on wooden beds covered with bamboo mats; washed our own dishes and clothes by hand; and lived without TV, phones or computers (except for essential communication). It was as hot and muggy as Houston in August, but we had no air conditioning. Most days, we woke up at 5 a.m. and went to bed just before midnight, learning to fall asleep knowing that Buddhists don’t believe in killing anything, even spiders or cockroaches. But, our food was a vegetarian’s dream, and we spent each morning doing Tai Chi by a large Koi-pond and a beautiful pagoda.

We sometimes meditated eight hours a day—with sore backs and numb feet—and spent an entire week in silence, not even making eye contact. However, these hardships only made the experience that much deeper. It’s not a “tourist boot camp” after all; it is simply the same as the daily life of the people who live there. If anything, we had it much easier than them. Suddenly, I could see what is truly essential.

The people in China were just as thrilled to meet us as we were to meet them. In fact, several well-known artists, performers and designers flew in from Beijing to meet us. Because we were pioneers in a sense, they decided to film a documentary about us. It was interesting trying to meditate to the sounds of cameras clicking. The last few days, we went to Changsha, stopping at several monasteries along the way. We were given gifts, fed delicious meals, and generally treated like rock stars everywhere we went.

This journey has changed me—I feel the same, yet profoundly different. It’s not so much that I found myself, but that I remembered myself. I was able to step out of my life, and even out of my thoughts (through meditation), to see things as they actually are. I feel more present, more centered than ever before. I know the trip will have a life-changing effect on my career as a professional artist. I am thankful for the preparation, guidance and support I received from my Southwestern art professors. Without it, I believe I would have missed the beauty and meaning of the journey, and may have never even taken the risk to go in the first place.

Dembrosky’s artwork on weather patterns was exhibited this summer at the Art.Science Gallery in Austin and at the Museum of Geometric and MADI Art in Dallas.

RECEIVING HIGH MARKS

If you know someone who is (or whose child is) looking at colleges, they may have mentioned seeing Southwestern University in a variety of guidebooks, including:

- ▶ Southwestern is among the colleges featured in Princeton Review’s college guide, *The Best 378 Colleges—2014 Edition*.
- ▶ *Washington Monthly* ranked Southwestern #43 on its 2013 list of Top Liberal Arts Colleges, based on schools’ contributions to the public good.
- ▶ Princeton Review rated SU #7 in the nation for Best Career Services.
- ▶ *Forbes* magazine gave SU an “A” for financial health.
- ▶ *Forbes* ranked Southwestern #94 in the U.S. on its list of schools with “Grateful Grads.”
- ▶ The latest edition of *College Prowler* gives Southwestern an “A+” in the area of Health and Safety.
- ▶ Southwestern is one of the colleges included in an updated edition of the book *Colleges That Change Lives: 40 Schools That Will change the Way You Think About Colleges*.
- ▶ Southwestern was included in the *2014 Guide to Military Friendly Schools*, published by veteran-owned Victory Media. Only 15 percent of schools nationwide are included in the guide.