

Describing Colors

By Jessica Cornwell '10

There are certain aspects to human lives that one cannot describe. They can be anything: religion, war, hate, or the first time you saw the person who would later become a significant other. It may be something akin to expressing colors to a blind person. It just can't be done; sometimes words aren't enough. The same thing might be said for my experiences during this Winter III.

I went to Arizona with the Navajo Service Learning Project, led by Ellen Hastay, the Humanitarian Center Service Learning Coordinator. We didn't need our passports because we weren't leaving America, but we did enter an unfamiliar world when we crossed the boundaries to the Navajo Nation. How can I depict the state of the Navajo Nation in one essay? I would need volumes to fully satisfy myself that I had said all there is to say about it. There is poverty; there are gangs; there are people in need, and there always will be. But this is a people so resilient, they can endure conditions and events that make me believe Mother Nature is a truly incensed individual.

Seeing this, I saw my own world in a different way. How can I illustrate it? Even now, I don't really know what happened. Perhaps it was how close everyone lived to the land, how they (and after awhile, we) recognized the deep, inescapable connection between everything. Perhaps it was the beauty of the land itself, the red mesas and indigo-emerald mountains, the vast plains and cloudscapes. Willa Cather weaves the southwest into her writing in an intensely lyrical way, but she had no way of truly communicating the vastness of this landscape and the complexity of its nature. It was big. Really big. Stranger, perhaps, and more beautiful than my own, this world changed me.

Having said that, I can use formless words and other vague phrases to attempt to make you the eternal audience understand, but sometimes words aren't enough. I recommend this course to students who want to know what it is to be speechless in the face of nature, of history and humanity. Any sentiments you might sense will be big. Really big.

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