

WORLD SCHOLARS

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A Newsletter of the Friends World Program at Long Island University's Southampton College

The First Finegan to Return

Sara Finegan – European Center

*"I know a man named Michael Finegan,
He's got whiskers on his chin again
They fall out and then grow in again
Poor old Michael Finegan, begin again..."*



The old song, taunts of my childhood, they follow me here. They walk like ghosts in my fallen shadow cast by the Dublin sun. I am the first Finegan to return. The moment of my arrival I realised I had been possessed. My eyes were no longer mine but belonged to the

dead who had made them.

My Grandfather was named Eddy Finegan. He was born in Pennsylvania, the son of an Irish immigrant. He grew up in a newly replanted but righteously Irish family. When my father was born, Eddy did his best to teach him about Ireland. My father, being a true youth of the 60's, abandoned his family's traditions. He was raised Irish Catholic, went to Catholic schools, but that faith couldn't keep him.

My father turned 20, bought a motorcycle, and drove it to Colombia, South America. He learned to speak Spanish, not Irish, married my mother, had my sister and me, and vowed not to burden us with his family's traditions. "Tradition and religion are control mechanisms," he would tell us.

My sister and I, being happy tropical children, had no complaints. We were raised on lizards, freedom and cynicism towards patriotism and Catholics.

On the few occasions we went to visit my father's parents' house, my sister and I were encouraged not to conform to rules. We never said grace at dinner, we barely swallowed the strange boiled vegetables and roast beef, and if my grandfather were to mention Church or Tradition we would roll our eyes and hope that our father would rescue us.

I was 14 when my grandfather died and I grew to wonder about him in the years after his death. People would say of my name, "Could you be any more Irish?" Or ask if it was one of my ancestors in a James Joyce's novel. I wondered about my family history, something my father could have cared less about, something I knew my grandfather had.

I am the first Finegan to return. Every step I take I am

being accompanied by the trail of blood behind me. My grandfather is here, by the Shannon, at the Temple bar. Three times I catch myself looking at him on the bus. On the sidewalks of Limerick I see my great-grandmother as a girl. She is no longer starving and shops at the United Colors of Benetton, but I still recognise her... High cheek bones, curly hair, large round eyes. Everyone here is familiar. Family-ar.

I am momentarily broken from my trance when one of the other students I am travelling with suddenly says, "Ireland sure has some ugly people." My heart breaks. That's my family he's talking about! I find myself defending people I've never known.



I am defending my grandfather, his father. Without them I wouldn't be. I wonder when I began to care.

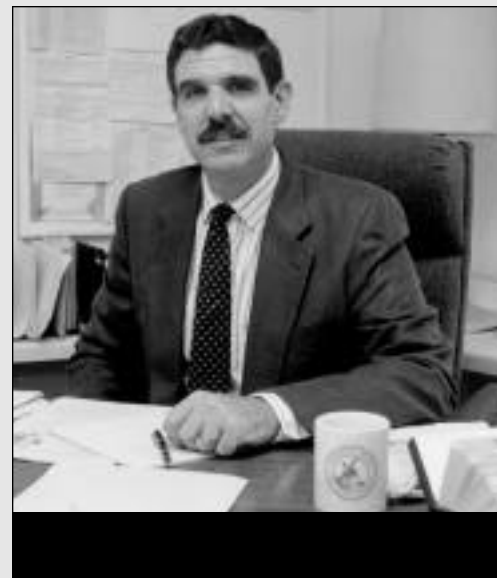
Is it only now that I'm faced with their living past that I want to be a part of it? I am proud to have an Irish history, even if I feel it's not truly mine. I am aware that I am a tourist in this country, staying for one week. I don't know more than three words in Irish: I am an American.



Our teacher takes us on an Angela's Ashes tour of Limerick. I listen to the stories of the children picking coal up from the road to cook their dinner. I see the tiny stone houses that are gradually being lost under new developments. Every step I take I wonder if my feet are landing where their feet once were. I listen to the stories about the famine, about all of the lives lost. My Irish ancestors survived, I am grateful.

At night the other students and I eat dinner at a Thai restaurant. I laugh to myself as my grandfather rolls his eyes at me. Eddy Finegan, have I made you proud? Tears get caught throat deep. The last words he ever said to me were, "You're beautiful but dumb." What would he say of me now? I am only a student on a field trip, but you got to come back Eddy. I've taken you here. Isn't it strange how blood moves?

Letter From The Dean



Dear Friends,

World Scholars editor, Mary Graves, has been after me to write this message. I have been reluctant because I didn't want to write a "last" letter to all of you. But she pointed out that if I didn't write **this** last letter then the last letter I wrote would have been the last letter. Do you see?

In any case, it is with very mixed feelings that I undertake this assignment. Friends World has been the focus of my consciousness for eight years and it will always be firmly in my heart. Susan and I are moving to northern Vermont at the end of the summer to reclaim a falling-down farmhouse we have owned there for most of twenty-five years. It is not retirement; we both fully expect to work (I think we'll have to) again after a year but at what we don't know. Perhaps we'll return to Africa as teachers or go elsewhere abroad to teach. Or, perhaps, do something entirely different. But this year is for reflection and relaxation. What I'm not sure about is how relaxing cutting several cords of wood is actually going to be. But I do think this year is for us very much in the true spirit of Friends World and we are looking forward to it.

I am pleased to be able to say that the Program is in good shape. Our place in Long Island University is secure and our unique nature recognized. We will be opening a center in Ghana in just a few months time. The Program in Comparative Religion and Culture is bursting at the seams for next year. We will be welcoming new center directors in China and West Africa. Much thought and effort is being devoted in all quarters to further strengthening the academic program. We still face a constant struggle to generate enough income to support operations but we are managing, or nearly managing.

I think we can all take comfort in the naming of Robert Glass as the Interim Dean of the Friends World Program for 2001-2002. A full search will be launched next fall to identify a permanent Dean in which all constituencies of Friends World will be asked to participate. In the meantime, the Program will be in good hands. Robert has been the Director of the Comparative Religion Program for four years. He knows Friends World intimately and has spent the current year here in Southampton as a member of our staff rejuvenating CRC and becoming familiar with all aspects of the Program. I trust you will all join me in welcoming Robert to this new responsibility and assist him in any way you can.

I appreciate the confidence and support that you have shown me over the last eight years. I hope we will stay in touch. For those of you who can remember your kiswahili, *ninataka kusema asante sana kwa kila kitu. Kwenda na mungu*. I bid you adieu and wish you a very happy summer.

Cheers,

Lewis

La Lucha Sigue! The Fight Continues

Angelique Stevens – Latin American Center

“Zapata vive!” the crowd chanted after the two-week wait for the Zapatista arrival in Mexico City. The “Zapatour” began on Feb. 25 in the mountain town of San Cristobal de Las Casas with 15,000 supporters sending it off. As it snaked its way north through towns and cities in Mexico’s countryside, the Zapatour gathered followers in the form of nongovernmental organizations (NGO’s), journalists, foreigners, students, and indigenous people. On March 11, the Zapatistas arrived to a crowd of 100,000 in Mexico’s capital.

Symbolically attaining a goal of the war begun over seven years ago, the Zapatistas finally took the capitol, the Zocolo. An



Marcos, Subcomandante Insurgente. Photo courtesy of NarcoNews on the web.

unnatural silence hung in the air as people waited to hear Subcomandante Insurgente Marcos, the head Zapatista rebel. “We have arrived!” he said. The silence was broken. Applause echoed off the walls. Marcos is a Mexican hero. “The grandstand [behind us] is not there by accident. It is because, from the very beginning, the government has been at our backs. Sometimes with artillery, helicopters, sometimes with paramilitaries...bomber planes... war tanks, soldiers...” His voice was calm and persuasive.

His words are not far from the truth. On January 1, 1994, at the time of NAFTA’s initiation, thousands of armed and masked men and women came down from clandestine jungle bases and took the town of San Cristobal de las Casas, as well as some 15 other villages. They called themselves, the EZLN, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation. Their intent, as stated in the Declaration from the Lacandian Jungle was to declare war on the Mexican Army and to take Mexico’s Capitol thus crowning a 500-year struggle for work, land, food, health care, education, independence, democracy, justice, and peace. But the Zapatista capture of San Cristobal and other towns lasted only a day. On Jan. 2, they returned to the jungle with 14,000 Mexican Army troops in pursuit.

Over the next 10 days, rebel soldiers and Mexican troops fought and died until then President Salinas ordered a cease-fire and appointed a Commission for Peace and Reconciliation. When the Zapatistas agreed to the first of what became years of peace talks, they learned that thousands of people had gathered in Mexico’s capital to protest the fighting. The people wanted peace.

And today, three presidents later, they still want peace. The recent inauguration of President Fox ended 70 years of PRI rule. Things finally look hopeful for the national and international community. But it hasn’t always been that way. In 1996,



Mexico’s Capitol, The Zocolo, where 100,000 people gathered for the Zapatistas. Photo courtesy of NarcoNews on the web.

President Zedillo signed the San Andres Accords with the Zapatistas. The Accords were to legislate changes for the indigenous people giving them autonomy, preserving their culture and language, creating higher standards of living with potable water, education, health care, roads and electricity. But the Mexican economy was in shambles, and President Zedillo, forced to make a sign of good faith with his right wing PRI compadres, went back on his word and never followed through with the Accords.

Over the next four years Chiapas saw a low-intensity war. Zedillo moved 70,000 troops into Zapatista areas, issued federal arrest warrants for Marcos and other high-ranking Zapatistas,



Zapatista Caravan February 25 to March 11, 2001. Photo courtesy of NarcoNews on the web.

and in 1997, sent troops into the village of Acteal to stop Indians from taking over. Almost 43 men, women and children were massacred. The peace talks were over, and though the San Andres Accords were signed, they

went unfulfilled. But on Dec. 1st, 2000 the first day of his presidency, Vicente Fox signed an order to withdraw troops from 53 Chiapan checkpoints, to free some political prisoners, and to

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Burmese Refugees in India

Erin Wiegand – South Asian Center



Almost immediately after beginning internship work in February at the South Asian Human Rights Documentation Centre in New Delhi, I was thrown into a massive project dealing with the problems and hardships faced by the some 60,000 to 70,000 Burmese refugees in India.

Most of these refugees are in the northeastern states of

Mizoram and Manipur where a fairly large political base of exiled pro-democracy activists has sprung up, as has also been the case in Delhi.

The aim of the project is to call attention to the refugees' pressing social, economic, and legal issues, as well as to the at-times shockingly insufficient care and protection they receive from the United Nations Commission for Refugees, their only source of financial and legal aid in a country where they are not accorded refugee status.

It is estimated that there are now more than 300,000 Burmese nationals, including such ethnic minority groups as the Chins, Rohingyas, Arakanese, Kachins, and Karens, among others, living as refugees in India, Bangladesh, and Thailand (where the international community seems to have primarily focused on their plight).

They fled from Burma (the Union of Myanmar since 1991) to escape torture, murder, arbitrary arrests and detentions, forced labor, exploitation by other means, political oppression, and "ethnic cleansing" at the hands of the Burmese military regime, known euphemistically since 1997 as "The State Law and Order Restoration Council."

The Chins, who are Christians, make up the largest refugee group in India, having fled to its northeast states to avoid forced labor and religious oppression in Burma, a largely Buddhist country.

As mentioned above, India, with the exception of Tibetans, does not recognize the Burmese refugees as such, but rather as

foreigners or migrants. The United Nations High Commission for Refugees was established in order to provide an international support structure for refugees whose host countries do not or cannot so provide, but in India the commission's efforts have been restricted to the 15,500 refugees in Delhi, the overwhelming majority of them from Afghanistan. The commission numbers 653 Burmese refugees in this group, but there are more than 350 others in Delhi who go unrecognized.

All "foreigners" are prohibited from working in India or from receiving any social aid, such as the commission is empowered to give to refugees who are unable to provide for themselves. But the commission's budget has been severely cut by the Geneva offices, so these subsistence allowances, usually in the form of monthly cash grants, are beginning to dry up.

The Burmese community in New Delhi, in particular, is caught between the struggles for survival and for democracy. There are an astonishing number of political organizations, 30 or so, here in a community of at most 1,000 people. The various groups and their differing political agendas have been a source of disharmony and conflict, however, and, as a result, little is being done by the community to provide for immediate needs. Quite a bit of money is coming in from international donors, but it is earmarked for political purposes, not for social aid.

Consequently, most of the refugees live in poverty as their leaders campaign to restore democracy in Burma. Some think the money would be better spent on their survival, while others believe that the long-term struggle for a free Burma is the overriding issue.

Most of my research has been in the northwestern Delhi neighborhoods of Janak Puri and Vikas Puri where most of the Burmese refugees in this city live. I would, of course, have loved to conduct primary research in Mizoram and Manipur, but, as Ravi Nair, of the human rights documentation centre, suggested, to have done so might have risked the revocation of my visa.

To say the least, the work I'm doing with the centre and in the Burmese community here is exciting and important, especially considering the human rights commission's waning support. But the report I'm working on only scratches the surface, I've realized, in addressing refugee issues in India, not to mention the problems and issues of refugees worldwide.

It is frustrating to learn about the myriad problems and suffering that people face and not be able to immediately solve them all.

That realization, of course, is one that every Friends World student must face.

Mint Tea and Bracelets

Samantha Witman – In Egypt through the European Center

A five-year-old girl sells bracelets on the beaches of Dahab. A 75-year-old man markets papyrus on the streets of Alexandria. A boy of 14 years furtively pulls passersby into his uncle's perfume shop in Cairo. A woman sits covered in dirt on the sidewalk selling packets of tissues, as her 10-year-old daughter risks her life dodging cars on the road to do the same. A young foreigner walks by quickly with his nose in the air, trying to ignore the sound of voices calling to him. In Dahab, Alexandria, Luxor, and now in Cairo, he has refused to buy a bracelet, papyrus, or tissues, and he rejects the idea of sitting in a perfume shop experiencing the scents of Egypt. He won't involve himself in these scenes, for if he were to stop to look it would waste his time. If he could be persuaded to buy something, then he is certain that this would make him a victim of the trade. He is frustrated with people interrupting his holiday for their own needs. He is drained from the hassles, and as his last string is cut, he reacts inconsiderately with anger.

"Hello, sir, where you come from?" says a young Egyptian boy to the man walking by.

"America. I'm in a hurry. I can't talk," he says as he turns the corner. The young boy follows briskly by his side, "Ahh, yes, I love America. I have my cousin there in New York. I will go to America after six months, insha'Allah. My name is Hussein. Your name?"

"That's great," says the man as he stops abruptly and faces the boy condescendingly, "I told you, I'm in a rush. Thank you, but I don't want anything, and I don't have any money for you. Have a nice day."

He walks away, leaving the Egyptian boy to himself as he goes to nap by the pool at his hotel. The boy is not in shock at the man's retreat, for this is what he faces every day. He saunters away and looks for his next business opportunity.

I am his next opportunity. I am on my way to the post office to mail a letter, and as I cross the street I hear a voice beside me, "Nice earrings."

"Shukran," I say as I thank him in Arabic.

"Ahh!," he exclaims, "You speak Arabic?"

"Shwaya, shwaya," I tell him, 'just a little bit.' It is my third day in Egypt, and that is the extent of my knowledge.

"I am Hussein," he continues, "Where you from?"

"I'm from the States," I answer. "I like Americans," he tells me, regardless of the fact that he was just spit on by one 10 minutes earlier, "I like American friends. I give you my business card. Come, my shop here, only two minutes. You call me."

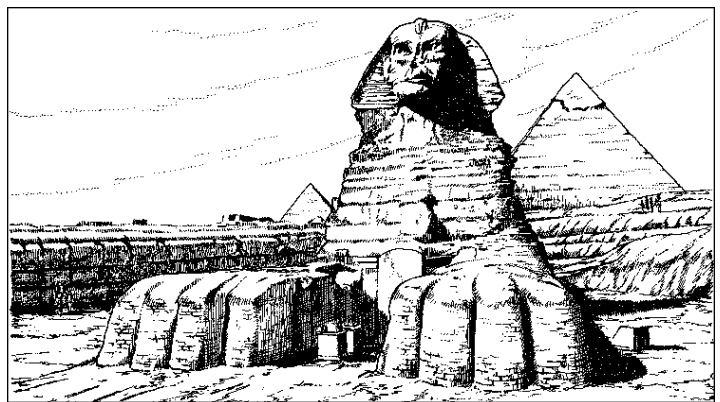
Well, I thought, it can't hurt. I'll just take his card and go on my way. A few streets later, I was sitting in his uncle's

perfume shop drinking mint tea and having Jasmine oil smeared on the back of my hand. I had been duped.

"Arabian Nights," he told me as he stuck a bottle of brown liquid under my nose, "Very nice. Wear this and your man don't sleep."

I didn't buy perfume from Hussein's uncle, but I sat for 20 minutes and talked with the man about life. I came away with nothing in my hands, but I was not empty-handed. I had learned something in those few minutes. I was not frustrated or angry because I am here to learn and to discover the ways of Egyptian culture. I appreciate the efforts that Hussein goes through to bring business to his uncle's shop. I admire his ability to lure customers in, even though he has to be deceitful about it. I understand that this may be the only way, for the streets of Cairo are many, and most tourists don't wander off the main roads. Besides, these shops are not listed in the guidebooks, so that makes it difficult for tourists to hear about and find these places on their own. They need to be guided in, as I was.

My letter was mailed, and I returned to my hotel as I thought of Hussein and his uncle, and the struggles that come to them each day. I met a British girl that night over a game of pool at the New Palace Hotel. She had just come from Dahab, and she complained about Egyptian children trying to sell her bracelets that they had made. "They wouldn't leave me alone," she said, "I kept telling them to go away, that I would buy one later, and they still kept coming back to me! I just wanted to be alone and enjoy the beach. I'm on holiday, and it is so annoying to be hassled all the time." "Yeah," I said to her, "It can be frustrating, but you have to think about the reasons for it all. We're vacationing on their land. We've taken over their beaches, and maybe their fathers once fished where we now swim. Now there is no income for their families. Think about it. Did you have to work when you were that age?"



One's Best is a High Standard

Sharon Akers – European Center

(The following is a journal extract from a student who took the class "Ireland in Perspective" and went on the field trip to Northern Ireland in October of 2000.)

The new Northern Ireland Parliament at Stormont is an imposing place at the end of a mile-long driveway surrounded by estate grounds and even a small forest with trails running through it.

After a tight security check and a long wait on hard marble benches, we were eventually led up the great central stairway to meet St. Clair McAlister of the Democratic Unionist Party, DUP. We knew we were in for an interesting debate, as any party with 'Unionist' or 'Ulster' in its title is loyal to the English crown and against the independent Republic of Ireland.

McAlister seemed as defensive as everyone had led us to believe a representative of his party would be. He assured us that the Unionists were positive because they believe in a connection to all of the United Kingdom. He also made the point that the DUP does not believe in violence. Unfortunately, it doesn't seem to believe in communication either. The DUP refuses to talk to Sinn Fein "out of principle."

"I believe that your principles do not change because then you would be changing as a person,"

McAlister said. "Policies can change," he went on, "because of growing wiser." But I wondered why he could not draw a parallel between growing wiser and negotiating.

Though Sinn Fein and the DUP operate in the same building, they do not associate. Despite Sinn Fein's attempts to the contrary, if they must make a decision together they use an intermediary. According to Tom Hartley, a Sinn Fein member of the Belfast City Council (whom we met the day before), it even goes so far as to have separate toilet facilities, and a lack of

acknowledgement when passing in the hall. The incredible immaturity of it all is striking. However, McAlister believes — and he claimed that many world leaders also agree — that certain prominent people in Sinn Fein are part of the Irish Republican Army, thus associating themselves with violence which he says he does not condone.

"The DUP has an alternative plan which will sort things out," he said, "but we will not reveal it at this time because the government would pick it apart without listening."

McAlister was very much against the Good Friday agreement of power-sharing, and very much for Democracy. "The big thing for Unionists," he said, "was the

decommissioning of guns, and that all these boys and girls would stop being naughty and become real democrats." I felt like I was witnessing a sit-com political parody: "Naughty boys and girls, respect thy mother Demos."

"The IRA said they would try their best to bring about peace," he ranted. "Trying your best isn't good enough!"

Funny, last time I checked, someone's best meant someone's best.

"How would you feel if your university worked that way?" he said, "If all they expected from you was your best?"

It was hard not to laugh. We looked studiously at the table. Still, I understood what

he meant. If you do not set absolutes and standards, leaving things up to interpretation instead, then of course it is tempting just to try and slide by. But one's best is a high standard not always easy to meet. It takes a lack of self-esteem and a lack of respect for others not to understand how high it is. Perhaps university grades were not a good metaphor about violence. If one sets out for close-mindedness, one will have it, good grades or not; if one sets out for violence, one will have it regardless of the law.



A Faberge Egg – Russian Instructor, Zhan Tianxiang at the China Center

By Lucas Ledbetter, China Center

Every once in a while, somebody comes across an elderly Chinese fellow who speaks a local dialect rather than *Putonghua*, otherwise known as standard Mandarin. Nor does this man speak English. The only way to communicate with him then would be to speak Russian.

Such people are part of a generation in China that studied Russian after the Communist Revolution in 1949. As relations with Russia became more important to China in the years following because China hoped to acquire technology and experts from Russia in order to modernize, it was of course popular for students to learn Russian. Zhan Tianxiang, a faculty member of Friends World's China Center, was one such student.

Tian started college as a Russian language major. Before long, the upheaval of the Cultural Revolution landed him in the countryside, schooling rural students for several years – in everything but Russian, that is.

During that time, Chinese relations with Russia went completely sour, and modernization slowly shifted into an Anglophonic phase. After the Cultural Revolution, Tian studied English, which led him to his position with the China Center.

This semester, even as I was taking Mandarin classes along with other Friends World students, Tian began instructing me in

Russian. We meet for two, one and a half-hour sessions of classroom time per week, during which the amount of personal attention and conversation practice I get is unparalleled. There is no doubt that my speaking and listening skills benefit from the situation.

People sometimes wonder why I'm learning Russian from a Chinese rather than from a Russian national. Simply put, there are no Russian nationals available to teach me and Tian is perfectly capable, with the aid of a good textbook, of teaching me Russian despite my absolute lack of experience with the language.

Admittedly, I have not recently met any of those antique fellows mentioned above or visited Harbin, a city in northern China where many people speak Russian. I hope to be able to exercise my new language skill with people in China whom students of Mandarin aren't necessarily able to communicate with.

I would just like to thank Tian for his generous gift of time and dedication to teaching me Russian, and for the rich story of his life he shared with me that has made each class more meaningful.

La Lucha Sigue!

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send the Accords to Congress in the form of a proposal, known as the COCOPA.

The Zapatista caravan to the capital signifies hope for COCOPA legislation. "We are going to speak with the Congress of the Union because it's their turn to make law, and this law... means a great advance for the Indian peoples of the entire country," said Marcos. The Zapatistas said they would not leave until the proposal was signed. But after only a week in Mexico City, Marcos said, "Due to the close-mindedness of the Federal Congress who practice caveman politics, we are going back to Chiapas."

But there is still hope. In one last ditch effort, Fox recently invited the Zapatistas to meet with Congress before they leave. Maybe, as Marcos says, if the government "quickens its pace a bit, it might catch up with us," and, rather than being at their backs, the government will stand at the side of the Zapatistas.

Angelique Stevens returned from Mexico City and has spent the rest of her semester in Chiapas. Her latest email reported that "some people are confident that the cocopa will be passed and they believe that peace talks will begin again soon. After the EZLN addressed congress, Marcos went back to the jungle and President Fox ordered the dismantling of the last three army posts. I went over into Zapatista territory, into the jungle — it was a very intense trip. We were met right off the plane by the army in San Quintin just before we took our two-hour hike into the forest. Although I got to talk to some of the people, many were afraid to talk especially with the army posts so close by. Some people didn't even know who the new President was but knew the new government was making changes with the Zapatistas. It is a very interesting time and many say things are better than before..."



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