In fall 2006, as the grand opening of the Lavin-Bernick Center for University Life approached, it was announced that the basement watering hole known as Der Rathskeller — or, more familiarly, The Rat — would be rechristened the 1834 Club. This was disappointing news for the student body, who craved a return to normalcy after a semester of Katrina-imposed exile and the subsequent upheaval of the Renewal Plan. Students launched a grassroots effort to preserve this long-standing Tulane tradition, and administrators ultimately agreed to reopen The Rat as The Rat. The more refined moniker of the 1834 Club was bestowed on the elegant new faculty/staff dining room, on the third floor of the Lavin-Bernick Center.

The new Rat is operated by WOW Café and Wingery, a popular local chain, and eight flat-screen televisions are normally tuned to football, baseball, or basketball games. But on certain nights during the spring 2009 semester, students stopping by The Rat for chicken fingers got a side of live jazz with their order. Jazz at the Rat, a new concert series presented by the Lagniappe program, transforms the basement sports bar into a jazz club, presenting some of the biggest names in jazz alongside students and faculty from Tulane’s Jazz Studies program. With the help of Jazz Studies piano tutor Jesse McBride, the Office of Cocurricular Programs set up an inaugural series of seven concerts, featuring guest artists ranging from jazz legends Harold Battiste and Clyde Kerr Jr. to up-and-coming superstars like Stefon Harris and Tim Warfield.

The Lagniappe program, designed to introduce Tulane students to the music and culture of New Orleans, is anchored each fall with a performance by revered jazz pianist Ellis Marsalis,
Letter from the Editors

From our office in Cudd Hall, we are keeping a wary eye on the storm clouds outside. It’s impossible to approach late summer in New Orleans without a certain degree of apprehension, especially after the fateful events of four years ago. But the prevailing mood as we await the start of the fall 2009 semester is one of hopeful anticipation. Once again, we are expecting a first-year class filled to capacity with outstanding students, many of whom have chosen Tulane and New Orleans because they are committed to making a difference.

After developing a passion for public service during their years at Tulane, our students can often be found making a difference across the globe. In the Summer 2009 Newcomb-Tulane Collegian & Review, we hear from Erica Mire, a recent graduate who traveled to Cambodia to do mission work and teach at a rural school. Mark A. Beirn and Emily Capdeville of the Office of Study Abroad provide a glimpse into the program that allows students to travel the world while furthering their Tulane education. Closer to home, another recent graduate, Catherine Freshley, writes about the campus impact of Sculpture for New Orleans, a city-wide art initiative. And since no Tulane education is complete without a taste of New Orleans’ musical heritage, our cover story takes a look at a new program that’s bringing New Orleans jazz to campus.

The Review features an excerpt from Professor Richard Campanella’s acclaimed book, Bienville’s Dilemma, which explores the decision of New Orleans’ founding father to situate the city in its present location. Professor Peter Cooley contributes two poems, and Professor Paula Morris shares a short story from her recently published collection, Forbidden Cities.

We hope you will enjoy the 2009 Newcomb-Tulane Collegian & Review. As always, we invite you to submit your news, ideas, and original work for possible publication in next year’s issue.

Best,
Trina J. Beck
Tom Moody

Photo Credits

TRINA BECK: page 7 (Obeidallah)
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TOM MOODY: pages 3, 4, 5, 7 (MacLaren), back cover
Courtesy of SCOTT KENSELL: page 8
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Courtesy of KATIE TRIPPE: page 9
Courtesy of MICHAEL ZOLNICK: page 9
In the spring, caterpillars and love bugs invade Tulane’s uptown campus; azaleas bloom. In August, incoming freshmen replace the seniors that graduated in May. Daily, chalked announcements — advertising speakers, student government candidates, and sorority bake sales — are washed away by rain and footsteps, and are replaced by others. It’s a steady, predictable ebb and flow. Gibson Hall was built in 1894, and though almost twenty buildings now fill the academic quad, little else changes.

It’s not surprising, then, that students making the usual trek to and from classes watched with curiosity while six large, abstract sculptures were being installed amongst the old buildings last November. The sculptures, by artists John Clement, Mark Di Suvero, George Tobolowsky, and faculty members of the Tulane art department Steve Durow, Gene Koss and Jeremy Jernegan, are part of the Sculpture for New Orleans project.

Local artist Michael Manjarris founded the non-profit Sculpture for New Orleans organization. “I’ve been showing in New Orleans for twenty years and I’ve always wanted to do a sculpture garden — that’s what sculptors do, but it never happened.”

Though Manjarris doesn’t have a piece on Tulane’s campus, he has been instrumental in creating a city-wide sculpture garden. Thirty sculptures have been placed around the city and the organization plans to place an additional 70.

In the wake of Hurricane Katrina much of the cultural recovery efforts were targeted at helping the musicians, Manjarris explained, and few people were working to assist local artists. With the help of local art advocates, and after struggling to find insurance for the millions of dollars of artwork, Manjarris was able to found the 501(c)3 organization. The first sculpture was installed in front of the Ogden Museum of Southern Art in January 2008.

Over coffee at nearby Rue de la Course, Manjarris and a Tulane art professor decided that the uptown campus would be an ideal location for displaying one of the sculptures. After a little finagling about the placement of the sculpture (Manjarris initially hoped to place the 28-foot-tall Di Suvero in front of Gibson Circle on St. Charles) and the addition of five other sculptures, the exhibit “opened” at the beginning of November.

Jeremy Jernegan, who was chair of the art department when plans for the project started, and is now the associate dean for finance and planning in the School of Liberal Arts, helped coordinate the effort. In addition to cooperating with the administration and working out the logistics of moving and installing the large-scale sculptures, selecting the sculptures and deciding where to place them was an involved process.

“Ultimately the goal was to have a grouping that would be exciting as individual works, that would be effective both in their individual sightings but also contribute to the overall experience of walking from Freret Street to Gibson,” Jernegan said.

These considerations affected both the selection of the individual pieces and their placement on campus. Jernegan explained that the intention was for the pieces, as installed, to be “complementary and also somewhat challenging — or provocative — in terms of how you experience one to the next.”

Jernegan’s own piece, “Full Weight,” has been installed in front of Cudd Hall. Jernegan said that his artistic career can be separated into three periods. “Full Weight,” completed in 1999, was one of the last sculptures of nearly 30 pieces made during his second period. Its totemic structure is characteristic of the work he did during that decade, and like his two sculptures that are on display outside Tulane’s law school, was inspired by maritime navigation aids.

As Jernegan said, “The piece is part of a series of vertical forms that were, you could say, formally based on a vertical assemblage of disparate parts that appear somewhat fragile.”

For Jernegan, much of the sculpture’s visual interest is created by the relationship between the sculpture’s individual components. “There’s a kind of tension to the apparent delicacy of the balance...
which creates an interesting visual quality, as well as — for me — there’s a metaphorical reference to the durability of the work and more broadly the durability of our own endeavors.” He also noted that despite the careful planning that includes sketches and small-scale models, it is “still kind of a surprise the first time you see [a sculpture’s pieces] together.”

Not only is Jernegan intrigued by the dynamic interplay the sculpture’s separate parts create when assembled, he is also compelled by the relationship that people form with art.

“They experience [a sculpture] on a continual basis if they walk that route, so it’s unique interaction between people and art — which other than art that hangs in your office or in your home, you rarely have that kind of repeated experience, repeated interaction.”

But this repeated interaction changes from day to day, another concept that intrigues Jernegan. “Outdoors there’s the variables of light and time of day and atmosphere that change the appearance of the work,” he said. “So in a way it keeps it fresh and allows it to be a part of a general dialogue or conversation between people and their physical environment.”

Jernegan said that physical environments often affect people more than they realize. “Buildings are the dominant experience of the physical environment.” Because sculptures are often much closer to human scale than buildings are, Jernegan explained that “when you put sculpture in the mix, you have a more complex conversation.”

Just as Jernegan is fascinated by the relationship between the materials in his sculptures and between his sculptures and their environments, long-time Tulane professor Gene Koss is also “concerned about how elements work together as one sculpture.”

Koss came to Tulane over thirty years ago to start what is now the world-renowned glass program in the art department. His piece, “Timber,” is installed in front of Richardson Memorial. Completed in 1990, the sculpture has also been on display in Philadelphia, New York, Texas and at the Arthur Roger Gallery in New Orleans.

“Timber,” a 14-foot-tall by 16-foot-long sculpture, made of a steel plate, a wooden beam and cast glass plates, is one of Koss’ favorites and one of “four or five in a series.”

Many of Koss’ “industrial” pieces are inspired by the scenes of his youth. Koss, who grew up on a Wisconsin farm, said his sculptures are “about the people and about working the land.” He wants to “give credit to people who do work that is not so glamorous in our time.” Hence, like “Timber,” much of his work involves “glass and steel and light.”

Echoing Jernegan, Koss said, “I want [my work] to look, in a way, precarious, but it’s not...I like the idea of setting up suspense for the viewer.” Again, like Jernegan, he talked about the dynamic created by the active experience of viewing art: “People might get something from it rather than just how it is put together,” he said. “It’s like writing a good creative sentence.” And just as an individual sculpture is more, or different, than a sum of its parts, Koss said he thinks that the show is “a stronger unit than just my piece.”

Compared to some of the other works in the show, Koss said, “Mine is more ephemeral.” He talked about using glass as a sculptural element, a practice he described as new in the past 25 to 30 years. Koss has long been working to establish glass work as fine art rather than only craft.

Koss noted the selection process for both...
the piece of his that would be displayed, as well as the placement. He said that when sculptures are out in the open, they take on a different appearance than they have inside a studio.

“I felt that [“Timber”] fit best for the space it was going into. It had to be conceptually big enough to hold its own with the space and the trees and the buildings.”

The third faculty artist, Steve Durow, in concert with his colleagues, talked about viewer interaction with sculpture. “The idea for the original concept of the piece is to challenge the viewer,” he said. His piece, “Dasein Column,” installed between Tilton and Norman Mayer buildings, is one of a pair. Though for him the two are parts of one piece, and he prefers that they be displayed together, the twin is on its way to a show in Ohio.

“Dasein” is a German word that Durow said means “to be” or “to exist.” The structure of the piece was inspired by Indian Buddhist architecture.

“The columns, for me, were an object of worship, but nondescript.” He said he created the pair of sculptures because he “wasn’t trying to reference worship to one particular deity.” He likes the challenge and interaction these objects create with the viewer because, as he said, bowing before an object is not a practice of Western religion or society.

Durow became interested in glass as an undergraduate and though he enjoyed the process of glass blowing, he didn’t enjoy what he was making. He was able to teach himself glass casting and joined Tulane’s faculty a few years ago as a professor of practice.

“I came to Tulane primarily to work with Gene [Koss],” he said. “There are very few people who work with glass as a sculptural material and at that scale. As a young artist, you put yourself around people who do what you want to learn how to do.”

Durow explained that he and Koss use different processes to produce their glass work. He feels that they “complement each other well…and do a good job of opening students up to different methods.”

For Durow, a young artist, being included in this exhibit was a “big honor.” Not only is he excited about being displayed with other nationally and internationally known sculptors, he is pleased to see his piece outside. He said the “luminescence from natural light” adds to the experience of the piece.

Texas sculptor George Tobolowsky contributed “Staring at the Ocean” to the exhibit. Tobolowsky works exclusively with found objects and picks up at least a ton of scrap metal a week. For him, it is all about finding pieces that work well together with as little manipulation as possible.

“I could have a piece sitting around for three years or three days,” he said. If a piece of scrap metal has been sitting among his 100 tons of supplies, spread over two or three acres, for too long, he takes it back to the scrap yard to trade it in for something else.

The other two works of art on display at Tulane are Mark Di Suvero’s “Stairway to the Stars,” and John Clement’s “Freckle.”

Both Jernegan and Manjarris are excited about the future of the project. Many of the sculptures installed across the city are on long-term loans from the artists. Jernegan said he hopes that when the pieces at Tulane come down, they will be replaced with other sculptures.

Manjarris said his hope is that patrons of the arts will buy the sculptures and donate them so that they can be permanently displayed in the city.

At Tulane specifically, he said, “We could put another 10 sculptures. We don’t want to take away from the frisbee area or the sunning area, we want to add to them. Wherever these sculptures are, they command their own focus.”

For Manjarris, Sculpture for New Orleans is part of the recovery efforts. “It creates a positive look toward rebuilding,” he said. “If you put just one bright light in a dark room — or a candle — it brightens everything.” Sculpture for New Orleans has placed not one, but 30 bright lights around the city.
who holds an honorary doctorate from Tulane for his contributions as a musician and educator. The Jazz at the Rat series furthers Lagniappe’s reach by creating regular opportunities for students to experience live New Orleans music without leaving campus, in a safe, smoke-free environment. Not surprisingly, staff and faculty also enjoy attending the concerts, which begin at 8 P.M. and do not charge a cover.

While Jazz at the Rat is intended to introduce jazz to the uninitiated, it is also poised to help develop Jazz Studies into a world-class program. McBride, a graduate of the highly regarded jazz program at the University of New Orleans, collaborated with the Office of Co-curricular Programs to develop a program closely modeled on UNO’s Jazz at the Sand Bar concert series, which was itself established by Ellis Marsalis. Program funds are stretched further by bringing in individual guest artists rather than full professional ensembles, while students and faculty in the Jazz Studies program benefit from the unparalleled experience of playing with jazz masters. It was perhaps fitting that the first guest artist in the series was Clyde Kerr Jr., who is best known as a jazz educator, having taught the likes of Nicholas Payton and Jason Marsalis.

McBride explained that such experiences are “a necessary part of being a budding musician. You have to have a place to work out all of the information that [your teachers] present to you; you can’t just practice all day by yourself in a practice room. You need that human interaction. The Jazz at the Rat series also raised the bar of the students’ own expectations of what they could do, because they got to play with the best of the best.” Students agree. As a freshman alto sax player, Ben Broitman, a history major from Delaware, was amazed at the level of “really serious talent” that he found himself surrounded by. “Playing in one of the jazz combos takes a lot of time and requires you to learn a lot of new music each week to keep up with the guest artists, but it’s one of the best ways to become a better musician and expand your [musical] vocabulary. It was a complete honor to even be in the same room as Harold Battiste.”

For the students who attended Jazz at the Rat as audience members — like Sophie Bjorkquist Rich, a freshman from Colorado — the series brought an “awesome” taste of New Orleans to campus. “It’s harder to know where to find live music outside of campus, so it’s nice to have it right there,” she explained. She was impressed to find some of her classmates jamming alongside such renowned jazz performers: “I would be listening and think, oh my gosh, that kid’s in my Spanish class — he’s awesome!” Emily Berdy, a St. Louis native, also enjoyed the chance to get some New Orleans culture while meeting up with friends and grabbing some food. Berdy, who plans to major in public health and psychology, signed up for Prof. John Dobry’s Art of Listening class as a freshman elective because it “sounded interesting.” When Prof. Dobry offered extra credit to students for attending Jazz at the Rat, Berdy decided to check it out, and found that she really enjoyed herself. “It’s hard to get a whole sense of the jazz scene in New Orleans while you’re in school, so this is a nice way to bring music into the Tulane community without going outside the walls of the school—and it’s especially nice when you don’t have a car,” she said.

Tobin Fulton — car or no car — jumped right into New Orleans’ live music scene when he arrived from Dallas for his freshman year, visiting music clubs on Frenchmen Street and elsewhere throughout the city. When he saw a poster for Jazz at the Rat featuring Harold Battiste, he “immediately wanted to go.” He recognized Battiste as part of a celebrated New Orleans musical family (who more commonly spell their family name with only one “t”). Fulton had seen drummer Russell Batiste Jr. in concert with funk trio Porter Batiste and Stoltz, and says “it was one of the best concerts I’d ever seen.” So he jumped at the chance to see another member of the talented musical clan playing on the Tulane campus. “Nothing beats a New Orleans musician,” said Fulton with a smile.
In last summer’s issue of the Collegian, I wrote about the great strides we have made here at Newcomb-Tulane College; this year, I am pleased to report that despite all of the economic challenges facing the country at this time, interest in Tulane’s undergraduate programs remains strong. This spring the university received over 40,000 applicants from prospective students applying for the 1,500 seats in the freshman class. All indicators suggest that the entering class of 2009 will be among the most academically qualified that Tulane has ever accepted. Interest in attending Tulane is at an historic high; I am convinced that the opportunity for public service — which is part of every student’s curriculum — is a contributing factor in our recruiting successes.

As the academic home for all full-time undergraduates, Newcomb-Tulane College plays a pivotal role in our students’ education by providing much of the academic support services and programming that foster student success. Each office and department of the college has accomplished much this year, and together they have laid the groundwork for even greater success.

Academic advising is probably the single most important support service we provide to students, and we are well on our way to achieving our vision of advising, which will offer a holistic approach that integrates academic and career advice — helping students plan not only for their time at Tulane, but beyond as well. This past year, we added a lighthearted, but very productive and popular new event on Mondays called “Red Beans and Advising,” where students, faculty, and staff can informally meet to talk about majors and degree offerings and, of course, eat. We have also piloted a program called “Maximizing your Academic Potential,” which is designed to identify particular students and provide targeted help for them to succeed at Tulane.

We continue to add study abroad programs to meet students’ interests, to seek external funding for scholarships to help defray the costs, and to develop on-site programming to enrich the overall experience. The college has recently partnered with Cornell, Duke, and Emory to enhance opportunities for students studying in Paris. You can read more about the great work being done by the Office of Study Abroad and the Center for Global Education on the next page of this issue of the Collegian.

Newcomb-Tulane College has had a very active year providing a range of cocurricular programs that started with the selection of The Reluctant Fundamentalist as the 2008 Tulane Reading Project book. In September, author Mohsin Hamid came to campus, spoke to a group of honor students at lunchtime and that evening gave a thought-provoking lecture on his book. His appearance on campus was complemented by other events, including a screening of the film Persepolis, and a visit from Palestinian-American comedian Dean Obeidallah. In February, alumna Gwen Thompkins spoke on campus as the guest of the John J. Witmeyer III Dean’s Colloquium. A New Orleans native, Gwen is currently the East Africa correspondent for National Public Radio, and she delighted her audience with stories about life as a foreign correspondent and how her Tulane education prepared her well for her career. Time magazine columnnist and author Joe Klein came to Tulane in March as the inaugural speaker of the Newcomb-Tulane College Lecture series. He spoke at length about the legacy of the Bush administration and about his hopes for the future. You’ve possibly already read on page one about another new program that began this past school year: Jazz at the Rat was a series of seven concerts held in Der Rathskeller in the Lavin-Bernick Center. These performances proved to be quite popular and we expect this program, along with the others, to only improve in the upcoming school year.

Looking forward, and to meet our strategic goal of addressing the needs of our best students, we are at this moment conducting a search for an associate director for the Honors Program. This person will divide his or her time mentoring students for national scholarships, such as the Rhodes, Marshall, and Truman, advising honors students, and developing new academic programming.

It’s clear, I think, that we achieved much during the past school year, and I have every confidence that the 2009 – 2010 school year will see a continuation of that success.
Studying for a year abroad has occupied a special place in the undergraduate experience at Tulane for more than 50 years. The program began in 1954 with two undergraduate students and one professor traveling by steamship to Birmingham, England, for a full academic year. Since then, the Junior Year Abroad program has grown and evolved into a dynamic option for undergraduates to pursue an engaging course of study for a semester or a year.

The role of the Junior Year Abroad Office changed in the early 1990’s when it was renamed the Center for International Studies. While the core mission of the new center remained undergraduate education abroad, the center took on new initiatives aimed at promoting internationalization in the undergraduate curriculum.

At the same time, the Center for International Students and Scholars, led by William Lennon, worked to bring a vibrant international community to Tulane’s campus. Visiting and degree-seeking international students contributed to Tulane by hosting such events as the It’s a Small World Fair and the International Festival, cooking food and performing cultural acts from around the globe.

Looking ever forward, Dr. Richard Watts saw that the combination of these two offices, bridged with a wing specializing in international scholarships and grants, was the best way to promote the internationalization of Tulane’s campus. Thus, the Center for Global Education was born, housing nine staff members all working toward the common goal of promoting meaningful global experiences for the Tulane community.

Over the past two years, the Office of Study Abroad’s main goal has been to work closely with academic departments to provide a seamless academic experience for students pursuing coursework abroad. The mission of the office has evolved to focus on language acquisition and immersion with locals, so that students will have a positive impact on the host culture. Much like a student’s experience upon arrival at Tulane and in New Orleans, the Office of Study Abroad strives to prepare students for the culture in which they will immerse themselves.

The OSA has also begun to diversify the locales of study abroad programs, sending students a bit more off the beaten path. As study abroad becomes more and more popular with undergraduates in the United States, our students increasingly find themselves surrounded by other Americans while abroad. To mitigate this effect, OSA has given students the option of smaller cities, where they can easily immerse themselves into local culture.

For instance, students now have the option to study abroad in Granada, Spain; Xalapa, Mexico; and Padova, Italy. These three cities have quite a bit in common: they are small (population under 500,000), boast strong universities, and are home to very few Americans. The students who study on these programs tend to have less language proficiency than...
students going to bigger cities, and they are not inundated with people who speak English on a daily basis. A student trying to buy lunch in a market in Xalapa will virtually never be spoken to in English, because so few locals know the language. Similarly, visiting study abroaders do not stand out in Rome; in Padova, they do! This arrangement generally results in a much more productive and satisfying experience for our students.

As the Center for Global Education continues to evolve — Pablo Soledad recently joined the Office of International Students and Scholars as Assistant Director, and Dr. Molly Travis will take the helm January 1 — the number of activities and programs is expected to increase. The Study Abroad Fair, a perennial favorite, will take place in late October. This event generally brings in 20 – 30 representatives from all over the world who, along with program alumni, discuss the details of the individual programs with interested students. In addition, this year the Center for Global Education is hosting a Graduate School Fair with idealist.org the day following the Study Abroad Fair, aimed at helping returned study abroad students find work or school (or other programs) after they graduate.

Perhaps most exciting is the initiative focused on exchange students. This fall, twenty students from China, France, Singapore, Germany, England, and Australia will be matched with interested Tulane students who will help to introduce them to New Orleans and to ensure they can make the most of their semester or school year in New Orleans. Last fall, these students went on a walking tour of the immediate neighborhood that ended, deliciously, at the Plum Street Snoball stand. This fall, a trip to Lafayette and a chance to learn the Cajun two-step on the Atchafalaya Basin is planned. From Fulbright advising to exchange student excursions to midnight canoe rides, to the more perfunctory tasks of visa processing and application sending, the Center for Global Education continues to change and grow. But the primary goal of the office will always remain: to add international flavor and provide opportunities to the entire Tulane community — whether it be tasting Afghan food at the International Festival in the Lavin-Bernick Center or traveling to Beijing for a semester (or longer) to learn Mandarin. Ni hao!
Battles with Logic and Ants
January 16, 2008 1:26:46 PM

I’m teaching my Primary One class how to count to 12. This is not as easy as it sounds. Being the little sponges you’d expect for four-, five-, and six-year-olds, they are able to slowly pick up on the sing-song way I chant from 1 to 12. However, the stumbling block in their absorbent little minds, I realized this afternoon, is that they already know how to count in Khmer. This is unfortunate because a dyslexic monkey could count in Khmer. Simply translated, they count: one, two, three, four, five, five-one, five-two, five-three, five-four, and so on. The notion that there would be an entirely new name for a quantity above five is preposterous. Hence the disconnect. I’m confident we’ll break down this wall eventually, I’m hoping before the test next Friday. Until then, I’ll just keep singing.

On a side note, while I was coloring numbers on copy paper to make my teaching aids for this lesson, one of 4,000 ants with whom I share my workspace crawled on the page. As I was finishing coloring in the seven, it crawled inside the lines and I crushed it with my stubby red crayon. This was no accident. Unlike all the others I’ve exterminated today, and over the past months, this one struggled back onto the white area of the paper and flailed around refusing to die like Mercutio in a middle school Shakespeare presentation. I didn’t want to smash it again and smear guts on my clean white paper, so I flicked it away. I didn’t want to have to watch the painful aftermath of my actions. I’m trying not to read too much into this event, but the fact that it’s haunted me long enough to write about it here is troubling. Why did he drag his mangled ant carcass off the red seven and onto that pure white space? Ominous or inconsequential, I’m fastening my helmet extra tight for the ride home tonight.

Feeding Silkworms in Kampong Chhnang
February 28, 2008 2:07:49 PM

Community health in Cambodia is a huge, intimidating issue. To borrow a metaphor from the Reverend Ann Sutton, it is a mountain, and we are equipped with tablespoons for our daily chip-chip-chipping. Have you ever seen a silkworm eating? It opens its millimeter-mouth, takes an invisibly small bite of the huge leaf, chews for a few weeks, and then takes another. Clean a paper cut here, and there’s a broken leg waiting over there. Give a kid an aspirin, and somewhere else there is a man who had a stroke two years ago and neither him nor his family can explain why he suddenly could no longer walk. Prescribe one woman antibiotics for an infection, then explain to another of the importance of being honest with the gynecologist about how many partners she’s had, regardless of cultural expectations or marital status. I walked a man to the nurse writing hospital referrals for cases our doctors weren’t equipped to treat. His paper suggested he had hepatitis.

Erica Mire (’07) kept a blog throughout the year she spent in Cambodia. The blog entries, she says, “provide moment-by-moment glimpses of the acculturation process: A New Orleanian learning a different kind of laid back, a Tulanian learning the post-college life, and an adventurer learning how big — and small — the world really is.” The following excerpts and accompanying photographs are from her blog.

This new series will feature recent graduates reporting, in their own words, what they’ve done since leaving Tulane.
He was radiant with the excitement of seeing a physician and did not yet understand what his diagnosis meant. For some, it was simply a matter of testing for a pair of reading glasses that would magically cure everything — especially the monotony of day to day life. For others, it was choosing which tooth in the whole rotten bunch was most worthy of being pulled. There was a softball-sized goiter, a face torn up in a moto accident, an elephantitis-something-or-other, and a child with four full fingers and toes. I constantly felt like these doctors were applying one Band-Aid here to discover a larger, gushing wound over there. Folks can be referred for hospital care, but where are the funds to cover the bill? Local doctors can be given updated equipment, but who will train them to use it? At what point are you no longer improving the quality of life, but rather throwing life off track by exposing someone to the reality of the illness they’ve been living with for years but have no hope of ever properly treatment? I spent only a short week and was allowed only a small glimpse at the issues that community health workers spend their careers strategizing to solve. At the end of each day in Kampong Chhnang, these worries were comforted by the small rewarding encounters with old men, young mothers, families who waited patiently, expectantly, and expressed tearful gratitude. They were comforted by watching a group of women proudly comparing their brand new eyeglasses while walking back to their village.

Lessons Yet to Learn And An Afternoon at SOS
May 11, 2008 8:04:13 PM

Today I took my first, and God willing my last, trip to the SOS clinic. A membership with this international health organization helps to cover many scary situations one could potentially stumble into, whether it is contracting malaria, needing a speedy medevac to Bangkok, or going in to labor, they’ve got you covered. I spent much of this rainy Saturday afternoon in their refreshingly sterile office.

It all started around noon. In the aftermath of whirlwind vacations and visitors, I’d gone for a quiet swim at the gym in the morning. According to routine, I followed my shower with a quick ear-cleaning swipe with the q-tips stocked alongside the tissues, cotton balls, and other locker room freebies. Everyday, each of us makes decisions about every single action, be it monumental or mindless. We can chose either the cautious, better-safe-than-sorry so nobody gets hurt way to do it, or we can take risks with hopes for a better outcome. Recently, I’ve been heavy on decisions like the latter. Now I know exactly where a q-tip should go and where it should not. But I had an uncomfortable amount of water in my left ear and I took a risk that I might achieve a release of all that water and escape the negative consequences sticking a q-tip into your ear can entail. I gambled, and I lost. I pulled the q-tip out of my ear to see it no longer had any cotton on the end. Just the naked pink plastic end stared back at me. Crap.

An hour later I was explaining this to the eager Khmer doctor, who in turn explained to me other safer ways to deal with water in your ear. Yes, doctor, I know. There was flashlighting, poking, prodding, tweezing, irrigating, draining, some more flashlighting, then a lot more irrigating and draining. In fact, there was so much more irrigating and draining that the nice male nurse in faux snakeskin shoes who’d taken my vital signs had to come back in and hold the container under my head to catch all the saline solution that had already cycled through my ear canal to flush out any remaining fibers of cotton. A liter of saline and two flashlight batteries later, I was cleaned up and sent home with a rockin’ goodie bag — gauze to catch the last traces of saline, antibiotic ear drops for the next ten days, and the Visa receipt.
Skepticism prevailed among partisans and observers regarding the wisdom of Bienville’s site selection for New Orleans. Among the doubters was Father Pierre François Xavier de Charlevoix, the Jesuit traveler and author of *Histoire de la Nouvelle France*, who arrived to what he sardonically described as “this famous city of Nouvelle Orleans” in January 1722. Only a few weeks earlier, the Company of the Indies (successor to Law’s Company of the West) officially designated New Orleans as capital of Louisiana, though word had not yet reached the struggling outpost. New Orleans, according to Father Charlevoix, bore little semblance to a capital city. Not yet platted, the city comprised “a hundred barracks, placed in no very good order[,] a large ware-house built of timber[,] two or three houses which would be no ornament to a village in France; [and] one half of a sorry ware-house, formerly set apart for divine services.”

A recent census enumerated 283 white men and women (mostly French but some German and Swiss), 171 African slaves, and twenty-one Indian slaves living in New Orleans proper, with another 791 people of all castes nearby. “Imagine to yourself,” Charlevoix wrote two weeks later,

two hundred persons…sent out to a build a city…who have settled on the banks of a great river, thinking upon nothing but upon putting themselves under cover from the injuries of the weather, and in the mean time waiting till a plan is laid out for them, and till they have built houses according to it.

That plan, under development by Adrien de Pauger and his superior, Chief Engineer Le Blond de la Tour, circulated locally and reached Charlevoix’s hands. “Pauger…has just shown me a plan of this own invention; but it will not be so easy to put into execution, as it has been to draw [on] paper.” Pauger’s magnificent design for the capital—preserved in today’s French Quarter—reflected the high expectations that flowed from John Law’s grandiose vision for Louisiana, even in the wake of the scheme’s collapse in 1720.

Charlevoix harbored an ambivalence shared by many regarding New Orleans. At one point, he expounded on the outpost’s potential, which he based on the banks of a navigable river, at the distance of thirty three leagues from the sea, from which a vessel may come up in twenty-four hours; on the fertility of its soil; on the mildness and wholesomeness of the climate…; on the industry of the inhabitants; on its neighbourhood to Mexico, the Havana, the finest islands of America, and lastly, to the English colonies. Can there be any thing more requisite to render a city flourishing?  

Sixteen days in New Orleans changed Charlevoix’s mind. “The country [around] New Orleans, has nothing very remarkable;” he wrote, “nor have I found the situation of this so very advantageous….” He then laid out the dubious advantages alleged by New Orleans’ defenders:

The first is…a small river called le Bayoue de Saint Jean…which, at the end of two leagues, discharges itself into the lake Pontchartrain which has a communication with the sea, [for] trade between the capital Mobile and Biloxi, and with all the other posts we possess near the sea. The second is, that below the city the river makes a very great turning called le detour aux Anglais [English Turn], which is imagined would be of great advantage to prevent a surprize.  

Charlevoix dismissed both arguments, and was equally unimpressed with the marshy soils downriver from the city, whose “depth continues to diminish all the way to the sea.” “I have nothing to add,” he wrote dismissively, “about the present state of New Orleans.”
Charlevoix’s conflicting feelings reflected a high-stakes debate that had raged across colonial Louisiana for years. Where should the capital of the colony — the Company’s primary counter and port — be located? Suggestions ranged from as far east as Mobile and even Pensacola, to as far inland as Natchez and Natchitoches. The worthiest rival to Bienville’s site was Bayou Manchac, the Mississippi River distributary south of Baton Rouge explored by Iberville two decades earlier. Manchac also boasted a shortcut to the Gulf Coast, and suffered few of the environmental problems of Bienville’s site. Bienville himself, the eventual victor in the debate, expressed doubts years earlier in a February 1708 letter written to Minister Pontchartrain. “This last summer, I examined… all the lands in the vicinity of [the Mississippi] river. I did not find any at all that are not flooded in the spring.” After calling for more agriculturists to settle the land, Bienville promised, “As soon as these settlers arrived at Lake Pontchartrain and at the Mississippi River they would be transported to the neighborhood of the Bayagoulas,” a site located far upriver from the site he would eventually select for New Orleans. “Those are the best lands in the world.”

Bienville’s stance evolved over the years to favor strongly the French Quarter site. That he received substantial land concessions in that area probably influenced this advocacy. Bienville succeeded finally when the Company, apparently convinced of the strategic superiority of a river site over a coastal position and impressed with Pauger’s new city plan, designated New Orleans as capital of Louisiana on December 23, 1721. “His Royal Highness having thought it advisable to make the principal establishment of the colony at New Orleans on the Mississippi River,” beamed a satisfied Bienville to the Council, “we have accordingly transported here all the goods that were at Biloxi,” the previous capital. He then lavished praise on his superiors: “It appears to me that a better decision could not have been made in view of the good quality of the soil along the river [and the] considerable advantage for… the unloading of the vessels.”

That historic — and fateful — decision derived largely from rational and carefully weighted geographical reasons of accessibility, defendability, riverine position, arability, and natural resources, plus a lack of better alternatives. Here is Bienville in his own words on the siting of New Orleans:

> [T]he capital city…is advantageously situated in the center of the French plantations, near enough to receive [their] assistance… and reciprocally to furnish the settlers with the things they need… from its warehouses. Bayou St. John which is behind the city is of such great convenience because of the communication which it affords with Lake Pontchartrain and consequently with the sea that it cannot be esteemed too highly.

What Bienville failed to mention was that personal gain (he owned vast land holdings here and thus stood to benefit if the settlement progressed), bureaucratic inertia, momentum, and pure luck also played roles in the decision. Ever since, second-guessing Bienville’s geographical wisdom in his handling of the siting dilemma has become a favorite topic of local punditry. Bienville himself never recorded open regret about his New Orleans decision, but occasionally betrayed second thoughts in words that would resonate with later generations of New Orleanians:

> The river has been very high for three months and has overflowed in several places above New Orleans. It has destroyed several levees so that more than half of the lands of the inhabitants are submerged….
> This country is subject to such great vicissitude… Now there is too much drought, now too much rain. Besides the winds are so violent…

When the surges of hurricanes Katrina and Rita submerged those lands in August-September 2005, observers worldwide pondered how a major city could have been founded on so precarious a site. Some saw no future for the metropolis, save for its relocation to higher ground. In essence, the circa-1700s debate of the French colonials about where to locate Louisiana’s primary city raged again — under very different circumstances, but with similar factors at play.

Indeed, this is a challenging site for a major city. Yet Bienville acted wisely in selecting it in
1718, because he knew what makes a city great is not its site, but its situation. “Site” refers to the city’s actual physical footing; “situation” means its regional context and how it connects with the world.

A strategic situation near the mouth of North America’s greatest river allowed French colonials to exploit and protect their vast Louisiana claim effectively from a single point.

Had Bienville located New Orleans farther upriver (such as at Bayou Manchac or Natchez), the city would have been too inconvenient for coastal traffic and unable to answer enemy incursions. In other words: good sites, but bad situations.

Had he located it farther east, such as at Mobile or Biloxi, he would have relinquished the critical Mississippi River advantage and still suffered flooding problems. Ditto for locations to the west: bad sites, bad situations.

Had he located the city farther downriver, the site would have been that much more vulnerable and precarious. The site he finally selected, today’s French Quarter, represented the best available site within a fantastic geographical situation. French observer François Marie Perrin Du Lac captured succinctly in 1807 the horns of Bienville’s dilemma:

[T]here is not for a great distance a finer, more elevated, or healthier position [for New Orleans]. If higher, it would be too distant from the sea; if lower, subject to inundations.”

Bienville’s wisdom became apparent around the time of Du Lac’s visit, as New Orleans emerged as one of the most important cities in America. It was shown again after Hurricane Katrina, when the French Quarter and other historical areas all evaded flooding.

Why, then, is a major American city located in this problematic site? Because it made perfect, rational sense at the time of its founding—a time when man depended heavily on waterborne transportation, and when this particular site offered the best waterborne access to what proved to be the richest valley on earth.

German geographer Friedrich Ratzel contemplated New Orleans’ site-versus-situation dilemma in his 1870s assessment of urban America. “New Orleans,” he judged, “is just as poorly located as a city, or more precisely as a dwelling place, as it is excellently located as a commercial site.” He then added: “This last-mentioned advantage has made up for all disadvantages.”

NOTES

2 Charles R. Maduell Jr., The Census Tables for the French Colony of Louisiana from 1699 to 1732 (Baltimore, MD, 1972), 16-22.
4 Ibid., 289-90.
5 Ibid., 271-73.
6 Letter, Bienville to Pontchartrain, February 25, 1708, Mississippi Provincial Archives 1704-1743: French Dominion, Volume III, eds. Dunbar Rowland and Albert Godfrey Sanders (Jackson, MS, 1932), 122.
7 Like many employees on the heels of a workplace success, Bienville then asked for a promotion: “I entreat the Council very humbly to remember that I have thirty-three years of service in the navy twenty-five of which as commandant in this province, without having obtained any of those marks of distinction that are granted to persons who have been in an office for a long time…” Letter, Bienville to the Council, February 1, 1723, Mississippi Provincial Archives 1704-1743: French Dominion, Volume III, eds. Dunbar Rowland and Albert Godfrey Sanders (Jackson, MS, 1932), 343-44.
8 Memoir on Louisiana [by Bienville], 1726, Mississippi Provincial Archives 1704-1743: French Dominion, Volume III, eds. Dunbar Rowland and Albert Godfrey Sanders (Jackson, MS, 1932), 515-16.
9 Letter, Bienville and Salmon to Maurepas (emphasis added), March 20, 1734, Mississippi Provincial Archives 1704-1743: French Dominion, Volume III, eds. Dunbar Rowland and Albert Godfrey Sanders (Jackson, MS, 1932), 637-38.
10 M. Perrin Du Lac, Travels Through the Two Louisianas...in 1801, 1802, & 1803 (London, 1807), 87-88 plus asterisked footnote. Despite his appreciation for New Orleans’ challenges, Du Lac was not particularly impressed with the city. “New Orleans,” he wrote, “does not merit a favourable description….”
THE ONE CERTAIN THING

A day will come I’ll watch you reading this.
I’ll look up from these words I’m writing now—
this line I’m standing on, I’ll be right here,
avive again. I’ll breathe on you this breath.
Touch this word now, that one. Warm, isn’t it?

You are the person come to clean my room;
you are whichever of my three children
opens the drawer here where this poem will go
in a few minutes when I’ve had my say.

These are the words from immortality.
No one stands between us now except Death:
I enter it entirely writing this.
I have to tell you I am not alone.
Watching you read, Eternity’s with me.
We like to watch you read. Read us again.

FIRST LIGHT MEDITATION

Beethoven in his deafness, the great sea
awakening in him, high tides breaking up
the shore, and then a new horizon standing there
when he stares: sea and sky meet, seamless.

Dickinson in her room: the afternoon
snow against her window, pain discs of snow
and diadems and doges surrendering.
She lifts the glass: Weather, my blood, come in.

Namesake, Peter, I must include you now?
You were no hero like the other two
but took, like me, multiple instances
to accept the divine made new each day
we open ourselves. So for you, for me,
there had to be a cock crowing three times
and then my tears, waiting years to appear,
took bodily form as sound, metaphor.
I found, still find, I can cry each morning
I go out to find the sun beside me,
companion not yet risen at world’s end
to sun’s new body as I’ll rise to mine.
It’s just light, the light of the world.
And I’m just my own Peter, taking it all down.

These two poems are from Divine Margins, Peter Cooley’s eighth and most recent book of poems, published in 2009 by Carnegie Mellon University Press.
He told her that he caught a taxi to work every day. He told her that he caught a taxi home. Taxis in Shanghai were cheap and fast. Nobody had a car, he told her, but everywhere Sylvia went there were thousands of cars, roaring down avenues and around corners, intent on mowing her down. The lights at pedestrian crossings beeped, flashing numbers at her, counting down seconds. If she didn’t make it across the road in time, she would be killed. At one intersection, a motorcycle drove onto the footpath and almost ran over her foot. She stepped out of the way, into the path of someone spitting. Everyone spits here, he told her. That’s why she had to take her shoes off and leave them just inside the front door. He told her she wasn’t to track China into the apartment.

Her son had a lot to tell her. He worked in some sheer gleaming tower in Pudong, the other side of the big river, where just a few years ago it was all rice paddies and hovels. Now everyone lined up on this side of the river to gaze across at this shiny new city.

Crowds of gawkers, Chinese and foreign, stood with their backs to the grand old British banks and trading companies lining the Bund. These buildings were restaurants and bars and shops selling luxury goods now. Big business had crossed the river, he told her.

“You’ll have to come over and see my office,” he said. “I’m on the fifty-sixth floor. You can catch the train that goes under the river if you like – it goes through this psychedelic tunnel. Maybe Ros can bring you over one day.”

But her daughter-in-law said she never went to Justin’s office.

“Never invited,” she told Sylvia. “If he really wanted you over there, he’d take you himself.”

Ros’s idea of a day out was a trip to the huge IKEA or a shopping expedition to the City Market near the Portman Ritz, in search of crème fraîche or organic coffee. She was as tall and polished as the office towers across the river – slender, hard-edged, platinum. When she and Sylvia went out shopping, they always dropped into a Starbucks for a latte and a slice of dry cake. They always caught a taxi home.

Sylvia preferred going out alone, despite the perils of walking. On her first day out in Shanghai, she learned to respond to noises – the whistles of the crossing guards, the horn of a car turning right on red, the urgent trill of bicycle bells. In a market, she flattened herself against a display of small, snowy cauliflowers at the sound of a moped purring past down the narrow aisle. Walking home in the late afternoon darkness, she listened for bicycles and their bells because none of them, she discovered, had lights.

After a week in Shanghai, Sylvia was missing Roy, her husband; since his heart operation, he didn’t like traveling such long distances. She wished Justin would come home more often, but she didn’t like to say anything to him about it. He was very busy at work, she knew, and when he traveled it was for business. Last weekend, just before Sylvia arrived, he’d been in Hong Kong. Ros hadn’t gone with him, though she talked about the shops in Hong Kong as though they were some kind of paradise.

Sylvia spent the day wandering, then returned, feet aching, to the sparsely furnished white apartment. Ros wanted to know what she’d seen, so Sylvia listed a few landmarks. Most clear in her memory were people – the girl in a fur shrug walking her beagle, the dog pulling at its Burberry leash; the tiny woman in rough clothes, prostrating herself on the footpath, her forehead hitting the concrete over and over. And some of the English signs she’d seen were perplexing as well, so she’d written them down. Outside the market, a banner read: “Construct a consumer environment of rest assured is a common duty of whole society”. On the boards of photographs depicting the history of the Nanjing Road, she’d learned that “the street is strongly characterized with the fresh concept of a combinational fascination”. The caption for a photograph of the Nanjing Road at night, illuminated and multicolored, read simply: “Splendid and Gorgeous”. Splendid and gorgeous, she’d been repeating silently all day.

None of this she told Ros. Instead Sylvia produced the things she’d bought that day: a book of postcards, a small pink tin filled with inedible sweets, a blue-and-white porcelain dish from the bird market, a bag of mandarins. Ros frowned at all these foreign objects and told her
the things she should be buying, like fabric and knock-off designer bags.

When Justin got home, later than expected, they sat down for dinner. His job was very, very demanding, he said.

“You seem to have plenty of time for karaoke bars,” Ros said.

“You know that’s business.”

“You mother’s barely seen you. She’s out wandering the streets while you’re drinking whiskey and singing ‘Born to be Wild’ with some teenage hostess.”

“It’s a business thing,” Justin told Sylvia. “I’m taking Friday afternoon off so we can go around the Old Town together.”

“A half day! You should be honored, Sylvia.”

Sylvia didn’t like the way they spoke to each other. She didn’t remember this from Auckland, but she never stayed with them in Auckland. Ros was serving dinner now; Justin was talking about expanding markets. Sylvia’s wine glass was empty already, and when Justin leaned over to fill it he kept talking, looking her straight in the eye. She was amazed he didn’t spill any.

Ros had made pasta for dinner, with a sauce of olives and tomatoes and anchovies. For most of the meal, Justin talked about his Chinese employees and what a problem they were. At school they learned everything by rote and now they couldn’t use their initiative. In Chinese companies, the general manager was like a god, and everyone was expected to follow his instructions. They didn’t know how to question things, how to innovate. They were too reactive.

“You two don’t seem very happy here,” Sylvia suggested. She’d had two glasses of wine. It was the first time all week that she’d expressed a definite opinion.

“What are you talking about, Mum?” Justin seemed angry. He was broad-shouldered like Roy, but otherwise he didn’t resemble either of his parents much. Justin looked like her grandfather, stern and dissatisfied. “We love it here. We love the lifestyle.”

“I’ve never seen the stars at night,” Ros said, taking another long slug of wine. “It’s smoggy all the time.”

“You can see the stars tonight,” Justin told her. “Just look out the bloody window!”

“All I can see is scaffolding and cranes.”

“The smog used to be bad,” Justin said to Sylvia. “But a lot of the factories were pushed out of the city. In Beijing it’s much worse. And everyone’s really aggressive up there.”

“Because they can’t see the sky,” said Ros. “And they don’t know what grass is.”

Sylvia was still wondering about the word “lifestyle.” In New Zealand, people talked about owning lifestyle blocks, and this seemed to mean having a few acres of land in the country where you could grow some carrots or keep a horse. But Sylvia never gave much thought to her own lifestyle. It involved driving to the supermarket, she supposed, and Sky TV.

“What is your lifestyle?” she asked Justin. He gave her a hard look. “Do you mean catching taxis?”

“I’m here to make my fortune,” he told her quietly. “We’re riding the crest. Shanghai is the number two port in the world – did you know that? Bigger than Rotterdam and knocking on Singapore’s door. Lots of opportunities. Very open-minded, of course.”

“I thought we’d go to Yin for dinner tomorrow night,” said Ros, collecting their bowls and carrying them to the small kitchen. It all looked very flash, but there wasn’t an oven, and the stove only had two elements. Ros would leave the dishes piled in the sink for the ayi to wash tomorrow morning. “They have live jazz there. Unless you’d prefer Indian or Thai or something.”

Sylvia told them she was easy – whatever they wanted. Later, in her little bedroom on the street-side of the apartment, she raised the blind and looked out the window. Ros was right. She couldn’t see a single star in the sky.

He told her not to give money to beggars. He told her that if someone approached her saying they’d lost all their money, it was a scam. He told her that the scruffy men on bicycles who clanged heavy school bells were collecting rubbish. They were migrant men, he said, and not to be trusted, though Shanghai was a safe city for foreigners.

For all its crowds, the city did feel safe, and perhaps that was why Sylvia let the girl walk into the building with her. She’d caught a taxi back from the museum, as instructed. Ros had given her a piece of paper with the address written in Chinese characters, and this she’d presented to the taxi driver. He’d understood it, and driven her home quickly through lurching traffic, but getting out of the cab Sylvia felt flustered, as though she was late. This was her last full day here: she and Ros had been out yesterday to the fabric market, and today Justin was coming home early from work to take her around the bazaar in the Old Town. She dropped her package from the museum shop – more postcard books, a T-shirt for her nephew – onto the ground. The girl stepped forward to help her. And then they were walking up the steps together; the security guard was
opening the door and they were both inside the marble-floored lobby.

“You live here?” Sylvia asked the girl. She didn’t want to be rude, but she hadn’t seen any Chinese people in here at all, apart from the guards and the maids.

“I’m visiting friend,” said the girl, smiling. She spoke American-inflected English to Sylvia. To the guard she spoke swift sing-song Chinese, pointing at Sylvia and towards the lift. “Ros Fullerton.”

“You know Ros?” Sylvia was pleased. Ros seemed to have very few friends here, apart from a group of American expatriates she met up with for lunch in Xintiandi once a month. Ros referred to them as The Wives. She told Sylvia that they all sat around complaining about Shanghai.

The girl nodded. She was a pretty thing, slight and rosy cheeked. She wore her long hair loose, the way Ros used to do years ago. Her skirt was very short and the bag hiked onto one shoulder was very large. The spiky heels of her boots clicked across the floor. At the lift she hesitated.

“You Ros’s mother?” she asked.

“Mother-in-law,” Sylvia explained.

“Ah!” The girls smiled again, nodding when Sylvia pressed the button for the sixth floor. “I am Emily.”

“It’s nice to meet you, Emily.” Ros hadn’t mentioned that a friend was coming to visit her this afternoon. Inside the apartment, while Sylvia slid her shoes off, Ros didn’t get up from the dining table, where she sat flicking through the Shanghai Daily. She looked over at Emily, and Emily – bag still shouldered, boots still on – looked at her. That was when Sylvia realized they didn’t know each other at all.

“Ros,” said Emily. She wasn’t smiling now. Her voice shook. “I am Emily Chin. I am lover of your husband, Justin. We went Hong Kong together last weekend. This not first time.”

Sylvia was still standing on the doormat, its stubby bristles prickling through her stockings. She didn’t dare move. Ros was still holding a page of the newspaper, about to turn it. There was no expression on her face – not surprise, not anger. She was looking at Emily the way Sylvia looked at paintings in a gallery, pausing to take everything in, half-conscious of her own reflection.

“I am his girlfriend,” Emily went on, her voice a little louder. “For six months. He loves me, and wants to tell you, but the time is not right.”

Ros said nothing. Sylvia didn’t know what to do. She should never have let Emily walk in with her. She should have asked the security guard to call Ros from reception, except the guard didn’t seem to speak English, and maybe Emily would have made her little speech anyway, over the phone.

The front door opened, cracking Sylvia on the elbow. She stepped off the mat, making way for Justin. Now there were four of them in the room, and nobody was speaking. Everyone was expressionless. If this were a soap opera, Sylvia thought, Emily would be trembling and defiant. Ros would be distraught, possibly enraged, clutching the newspaper to her. She, Sylvia, would be aghast, clasp her bosom, or maybe suffering palpitations. Justin would be looking perturbed at the very least, glancing from his wife to his mistress and back. In real life, they were all frozen. It was awkward. Justin looked a little shiftly and uncomfortable, the way he looked when he was a child when he’d eaten too many plums, but he didn’t move. Ros was still sitting down; everyone else faced her. Nobody knew what to do, Sylvia thought. All the soap operas in the world couldn’t prepare you for this.

“I think you should go home,” Justin said quietly and for a moment Sylvia thought he was talking to her. Then Emily’s mouth quivered, and she started to cry. He reached out a hand to touch her sleeve. It was a gentle gesture, out of character for Justin – or out of character, at least, for the person he’d become. He cared about this girl.

“You bought me the same bag.” Ros was speaking at last. She didn’t sound bitter. She sounded sad, though her face was still neutral, almost dreamy.

“Really,” Justin said to Emily. “Take a taxi. Have you got enough money for a cab?”

Emily, whimpering, shook her head. Sylvia still had the change from her taxi ride, strange notes stuffed into the pocket of her coat. She reached for the messy bundle and held it out.

“Here,” she said. Justin took the wad of money and handed it to Emily. Ros snorted, half under her breath. Swallowing a sob, Emily clicked out of the apartment and closed the door behind her. The three of them were left, still in place, Sylvia and Justin still in their coats. Sylvia shook her head, trying to waken herself out of the stupor: she had to leave as well. She bent down to pick up her shoes, and the movement seemed loud and theatrical, even though it wasn’t; the moment was broken.

“It’s your mother’s last day,” Ros told Justin. “You have to take her to the Old Town.”

“No, no,” said Sylvia, struggling to slide on her shoes. “I’ll go out. You two stay here and ... and talk.”
“I’ve got nothing to say,” said Ros. She closed the newspaper. “Have you?”

“Ros,” said Justin. He was an immovable lump, in the way like a discarded bag of groceries. “Don’t… don’t do anything.”

“Like what?” Ros was brisk, standing up, pushing back her chair. “Like don’t book myself a ticket home on Sylvia’s flight tomorrow? Wouldn’t that make it easier for you?”

Justin shook his head slowly. He looked as though someone had slapped him across the face. “Don’t go,” he said, so softly Sylvia could barely hear him.

“Take him to the Old Town, please,” Ros said to Sylvia. “Get him out of here. And one other thing.”

She marched into the big bedroom. Sylvia waited, breath held, listening to sounds of scuffling through the closet. When Ros returned, she was holding a brown shoulderbag, the twin of the bag Emily had carried. She emptied it upside down over the table. The only thing that fell out was half a torn packet of throat lozenges, followed by a fluttering of receipts.

“Throw this out, will you?” Ros thrust the bag at Sylvia. “Just chuck it out in the street.”

Sylvia took the bag, and told her that she would.

He’d told her that Beijing was the place to go for historic buildings and temples, but there was one place in the middle of the bazaar, the Temple of the City God, that sounded promising in the guide book.

They crossed the outer courtyard, hurrying through the smoke of the burning braziers, passing tables piled with packets of incense, and islands of discarded shopping bags and wrapping paper. The stone-flagged corridor linking the temple’s courtyards was walled with glass cases housing dozens of small statues. A gaggle of old women, all dressed in bright blue tunics, all so miniscule they made Sylvia feel Amazonian, kowtowed before these cases. Each ceiling panel depicted a green-winged heron, and Sylvia wanted to ask Justin lots of questions – the significance of the heron, the names of the mini gods, the meaning of the piles of fruit interspersed with the statues.

But he’d said almost nothing on the taxi ride here or while they were walking through the thronged cobbled streets of the bazaar. She’d told him again in the taxi that he didn’t have to come out with her, but he’d just shaken his head and looked stricken. Sylvia wasn’t sure what she was meant to do in a situation like this – commiserate with him or chastise him. Perhaps Ros would leave him; perhaps she wouldn’t. Perhaps Justin wanted her to leave him; perhaps he didn’t. Perhaps he loved this young girl, Emily; perhaps not. Other people’s marriages were their business, too untidy and complicated for anyone else to navigate. All Sylvia really wanted to do was to go home, where things were easier to understand.

It was quiet here in the temple – that is, quiet until the tiny women crowded into the inner courtyard and began to sing, accompanying their discordant song with small percussive instruments. Sylvia drifted from one English sign to another, trying to make sense of the place, wishing she’d remembered to bring the guide book: she’d left the apartment carrying Ros’s unwanted bag, but not her own. From the signs she learned that one room was the Hall of the God of Wealth and that the one opposite was the Hall of the Goddess of Mercy with her delicate blue headdress, platters of brown apples at her feet. A man sat at a rickety desk, playing the flute, a sheaf of music spread out next to his plastic cup. The cup had a lid; it was like something a baby would drink from.

Justin had wandered on to the room of the City God himself, and Sylvia followed him. The City God was small, much smaller than she’d expected. Compared with the giant statue of a general they’d come across in the first room, the City God was almost a disappointment. Everything was red – the fake candles in tall stands, the letters in the “No Fire in the Hall” signs, the boxes for offerings by each altar, and the broad lacquered face of the City God himself. He sat glowering behind his gold curtains like a performer in a puppet show. A young couple kowtowed before him, asking his advice, no doubt. This was why he sat here, she remembered from the guide book: to hear questions on business or personal matters, and dispense some kind of mute advice.

Sylvia stood near the doorway, not wanting to disturb their prayers. In the courtyard, the tiny women in blue had finished singing. Now they were arguing, clutching each other’s wrists, pointing in different directions. One of them started singing again in a thin, wavering voice, until the others talked over her, making her stop. They sounded so passionate and so conflicted that Sylvia couldn’t help herself: she tapped Justin on the shoulder and asked him, in a whisper, what he thought they were arguing about. He glanced down at her, red-eyed and surprised, as though he’d forgotten that she was there, and told her he didn’t know.
NEWCOMB-TULANE COLLEGE is the academic home for all of Tulane’s undergraduate students, who are taught by faculty in the School of Architecture, the A. B. Freeman School of Business, the School of Liberal Arts, the School of Public Health, and the School of Science and Engineering. Newcomb-Tulane College comprises several student-service offices: the Academic Advising Center, the Center for International Studies, Co-curricular and First-year Programs, the Honors Program, ROTC, Teacher Preparation and Certification, and the Office of the Dean.

Newcomb-Tulane College’s main offices are located in Robert C. Cudd Hall on the historic St. Charles campus. Built in 1901, the distinctive Dutch Gothic (or Italian Renaissance Revival, according to some sources) building originally served as the university refectory, or dining commons. Since then, the building has served in a variety of capacities, providing classroom and office space and acting as the home for several different departments. Over the years, a number of piecemeal additions and adaptations obscured most of the building’s architectural interest. In the 1990s a group of donors provided the funds to restore the building and remodel the interior as the home for Tulane College, formerly the men’s undergraduate liberal arts college. The building was reopened and placed on the National Registry of Historic Places in 1999. In 2006, following the university’s post-Katrina restructuring, Robert C. Cudd Hall became the administrative home of the newly created Newcomb-Tulane College, housing the Office of the Dean and the Office of Co-curricular Programs.

In the more than 150 years since its founding, Tulane University has subscribed to a few basic principles: a belief in the enduring value of liberal arts and professional education, a conviction about the importance of extracurricular activities and accomplishments, and a justifiable pride in the achievements of its talented students, dedicated faculty, and distinguished alumni.