

A Trip to the Southwest

June 4-13, 2013



This is the story, told as it was unfolding, of a journey by students of The Community School to New Mexico and Arizona. It was unlike any other trip because it provided an opportunity to not only learn but to share the lives and struggles of people from another place with its own unique histories and cultures. This trek would be life changing for those that journeyed and have an impact on those we met. What follows is a daily journal. It does not tell all of the stories or convey all of the impact, but instead is meant to remind us and inform others of what took place in a remarkable 10 days of time for a group on a search for knowledge and new experience.

Southwest Field Trip Journal



New Mexico Day 1 - Good morning from New Mexico! It was the 1st flight for our traveling students and a bumpy ride it was! The stewardess was terrific she made a special announcement over the speaker welcoming the students; everyone on the plane erupted into applause.

After arriving in Albuquerque, we rented our van and went to get settled into our casita in the North Valley. The casita is really great. It's on a small farm and has a cow and a bull, chickens and hogs. The students made fast friends with the young bull, the dog and the cat.

A trip to the grocery store and 2 shopping carts later, we were home and ready to fix some dinner. The students all worked together and made some BBQ chicken on the grill, broccoli, and pasta with butter and parmesan. Yum.



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The exhaustion of not much sleep the night before and from all the travels started to creep over each of us, but then we were joined by some of our old friends from New Mexico who welcomed us. It was so wonderful to see Richard and Sofia, Louis, and my dear old friend Bahati with her grandson Jonah. We all sat out front enjoying the cool evening breeze in the shadow of the Sandia Mountains while laughing, sharing stories and learning a lot about the culture, geography and issues in this state.

All of us were more than ready for bed as the clock was nearing midnight; one by one, the students were dropping off to the dream world.

Waking up for the first time in New Mexico was really different because you do not hear anything at night, just the cows in the yard." Sierra

So now it's morning in New Mexico. Sierra and I are sitting, enjoying some coffee and Matt is in the shower. The others will be waking soon. We'll check in later. Much love to everyone.

Special note to the moms and dads, uncles and aunts, and the grandparents back home - The kids are all fine and having a great time. And yes, they miss you lots.

New Mexico Day 2 - Good morning all! Although we have only been in New Mexico for 2 days, it already feels like we've been here a week. Everyone is having a great time and a meaningful experience.



Southwest Field Trip Journal

We started out the day with an early breakfast at the house and then headed over to **Los Jardines Institute** in the South Valley. The Institute is an environmental justice organization involving some old friends including Richard Moore who welcomed us. Richard explained about the work of their organization. We heard about the **Banned Book Club**, initiated after the Tucson School District banned their students from having access to books dealing with Chicano and Indigenous history and incinerated the books that were on the shelves. The students were shocked that any school could ban books that were about history. The response of the Institute was to set up a library and initiate a book club that meets monthly to read and discuss these books and others that tell the history of the people.



The students learned about organic agriculture as we all joined in and spent the morning hoeing weeds and building a new compost pile with Joseluis and Juan. This was a new experience for some city kids. We found out about a new method for composting and how to grow crops in a desert. We joined in with Olivia, Ryan, and Lourdes to wash, sort, and bundle Swiss chard for distribution. Some of the crop is shared among the workers, some goes to market and some is distributed in the community. As we were working, Olivia shared a poem with us about her home community of Taos and the connection between her culture and traditions and water as a very precious resource in this area of drought and scarcity.

Southwest Field Trip Journal

Our longtime friend Bahati, who lived in Remington for several years, is also a member of the Institute and joined us as well.

In the afternoon Richard took us on a tour of the **Mountain View Community**, the home of his family. It's a really tight knit and wonderful community that has had to deal with some very serious environmental issues. One of the most horrifying was the seepage of nitroglycerin into their water supply from Kirtland Air Force Base and the weapons industry. There was so much nitro in the water they drank and bathed in, that after the community discovered this, neighbors had to be weaned off the drug. Richard told an especially sad story of an infant who nearly died from this. The community organized and was able to hold the guilty parties to account. This is just one of the many environmental issues this neighborhood has had to deal with. Richard encouraged us to take a closer look back home at these kinds of concerns in our own neighborhood.



We ended the day with a community dinner back at Los Jardines. We shared some tasty local food, songs, storytelling, and poetry together. The students and each person there went around the room talking about their lives and the issues that concern them. Ashley, Ryan, Charles, Sierra and Matt were so wonderful. They represented themselves, their families and the community

Southwest Field Trip Journal

well and we should all be very proud of them. Old bonds were renewed and many new ones were made.

It is safe to say that this journey is off to a great start and the days ahead are full of the same promise. Best to everyone back home. We'll keep you posted.

New Mexico Day 3 - Woke up to another morning of bright sunshine here in the Land of Enchantment. Just outside the window is the vista of the Sandia Mountains.

After a delicious breakfast made with the help of all, we drove to the crest of the mountains. It was a very steep and windy climb to an elevation over 10,600 feet. We stopped along the way to do a little hiking, but our schedule for the day wouldn't let us wander too long. When we finally arrived at the top, we were in awe at the view. The whole city of Albuquerque was laid out in front of us, and I'm not sure how many miles were in our view, but it seemed to go on forever. On the other side of the crest, we could see the mountain range stretching out in all its beauty.



After basking in this moment, we met some retired men who were biking in the mountains, an amazing feat considering the steepness. They told us about two major fires in surrounding mountains. The long periods without rain have turned much of the woods into a tinder box. One of the men said that we

Southwest Field Trip Journal

were lucky to have seen the crest because next week the government would be closing the road to the top because of the sequester deal that has cut budgets across the country and limited funds to fight fires.

In the afternoon, we went to visit our friends at **SWOP**, the South West Organizing Project. Louis Head reminded us of when our young people visited SWOP 25 years ago and then he introduced us to staff members Rodrigo, Mike, and Aurea. They shared with us the work of this organization that has been around nearly as long as The Community School. Like many of the folks and organizations we have come to know in Albuquerque, the group also works on environmental justice issues and garden projects. A big part of their effort goes to building the voice and the participation of people who are often overlooked in the state and making sure that their issues and concerns are addressed and lives are improved.



Rodrigo gave us some seeds for our greenhouse including some very old and special ones from Northern New Mexico. There were 3 seeds in the jar that have special significance - corn, beans and squash. These are all native plants here and planted together each aids the other. As the corn stalk grows, it provides a structure for the beans to climb. The beans put nutrients in the soil allowing the squash to thrive, which in turn provides shade for the soil to retain moisture for all the plants. They call this the 3 sisters. Eaten together these 3 crops also provide a complete protein equal to that of eating meat.

Southwest Field Trip Journal

We were honored to then attend a SWOP Youth Meeting. This was particularly exciting for our young people because they were able to meet many their own age. After introductions around the room, Emma, the youth organizer did a history presentation on youth in the social change movement. A discussion followed about the kinds of concerns and issues the young people thought their parents faced. Everyone wrote on a piece of paper their own concerns.

This was very meaningful as stories were shared about familiar issues like drugs and violence, but also we heard new issues like what it is like to be a kid and grow up as an undocumented person, without papers to be legally in this country. Many of these young people came over with their families so young that they don't know any other country but this. Often they don't even find out until they are older that they are not here legally and face deportation to a country and place that they have never known. The fear is very hard to live with for a young person and this affected our students as they sat across the table from others their same age facing this crisis. It is easy for many removed from this reality to judge and make proclamations of their hardened positions, but when the reality hits you that this is about real human beings who share the same life and dreams as you do, it is different. We want to learn more about this.



We ended the long day back in our casita, cooked a good dinner of hot Italian sausage sandwiches and rice and reflected on the day. What a remarkable adventure this has been and its only day 3!

Southwest Field Trip Journal

New Mexico Day 4 – Today was another amazing day with the focus on the Native People of New Mexico. We woke up early and headed over to Los Jardines to meet Richard, Bahati, Lourdes, and Ryan. We all went together to **Acoma Pueblo**, one of the 23 Indian tribes in New Mexico. The ride to the Pueblo was astounding, winding along Route 40 through the vast desert. The rock formations were like nothing the students had ever seen before.

Driving up to the Pueblo, we were in awe at the huge mesa called Sky City - the oldest continuously inhabited community in North America. We were taken up the mesa by Robert Lukee, a member of the Pueblo. Robert explained about Acoma history, traditions, and culture, even inviting us to his home on the mesa during Feast Day celebrations. There are always at least 5 families living on the mesa at all times and they live in the traditional way without all the modern conveniences like electricity and plumbing.



Robert showed us the homes built along the steep rock formations that rise as high as 367 feet. It is easy to understand why this is called Sky City because you feel as though you are above the rest of the Earth. He explained the brutality of the Spanish toward the Pueblo including the maiming, murder, and enslavement of the people. There is a huge Catholic church that towers

Southwest Field Trip Journal

over the village that was built with the slave labor of the Pueblo. From the top of the mesa, the students could see Mount Taylor in the distance and this is where the Indians were forced to carry huge trees on their backs for a distance of over 30 miles and then straight up the mesa walls to build the roof of the church. Although the people are very proud, this is a very sad and brutal part of their history.

On the way down the mesa, Ryan and Matt climbed the traditional stairs carved into the mesa walls. Everyone was astounded at what they had seen and heard and we talked about it the whole ride back to Albuquerque. Back in town, we went to have lunch at Ryan's mom's restaurant. Ryan is one of the youth interns at **La Plazita**, an organization that primarily works with young gang members and youth in trouble with the law. Her mom runs a restaurant that she started just 4 years ago selling burritos out of her car and now has a catering contract to cook 5,000 meals for students a week and a small restaurant on the side.

"We have been from the depths of city struggles with SWOP to the peak of Sky City. Everyday is a new and amazing experience and I can't wait to see what lies ahead." Matt

We wrapped up the day on the other side of the Sandia at the home of old friends, Arnett Lewis and Esther Yahzee. Arnett was born and raised in rural Mississippi where he was a leader in the African-American community and an active part of the Civil Rights struggle. He married Esther, a Navajo, 17 years ago and they settled on land of the **Sandia Pueblo** east of Albuquerque. Esther is a recognized linguist in the Navajo language and has been recognized by the Smithsonian Institution for her efforts to preserve and translate her native language. It was so good to see these old friends who invited us into their home for a feast with extended family and friends.

Just like back home at our Pot Luck dinners, great stories and food were shared among the students and our hosts. This was followed by a rare and remarkable opportunity. We were invited to go into a hogan – a Navajo traditional home. There we sat in a circle and each went around talking about our lives and our journeys. Esther spoke about our work and our long relations together. Milton Chee, a Navajo elder and spiritual leader who came over to visit from Northwest Arizona, then shared the Navajo creation story and worldview. He then took us out to gaze at the vast star-studded sky,

Southwest Field Trip Journal

pointing out the North Star and the constellations. He went on to show us the traditional sweat lodge they are building, explaining its significance in deep detail. This was an amazing honor for us and left each of us deeply enriched by this encounter.

“Yesterday we went to see Arnett and Esther. We ate dinner and they had a Native guy teach us about the religion of the Navajo. It was really cool ; it all added up to real life science.” Ashley

No doubt the students dreamt about this experience as they slept in the car on the long ride back to the casita. We arrived around midnight and went straight to bed to restore our energy for yet another day of unique and meaningful experiences.

We are all well and miss everyone back home. We heard you are dealing with torrential downpours. In this parched desert, that would be most welcome. Take care. We'll check in tomorrow.

New Mexico Day 5 – We were off on an early start to Santa Fe, though I think everyone would have preferred to stay in bed a bit longer. Our guide for the day was a new friend of ours, Miguel Acosta, a longtime education and civil rights activist and former member of the Albuquerque School Board. Miguel now lives in the Santa Fe area and is especially familiar with youth work.



Southwest Field Trip Journal

After some coffee and introductions, we took a driving tour of the central part of Santa Fe. Miguel explained the history of the native and Spanish settlement of this area. The Pueblo are indigenous to Santa Fe and the Spanish conquistadors waged war against them and settled here before the Pilgrims arrived at Plymouth Rock. He shared the story of the Spanish land grant system with lots stretching to the Santa Fe River. The homes in the land grants were all clustered around their own small plazas that served as the communal areas.

We then went on a walking history tour of the plaza in the center of town and saw the old church, Governor's office and the huge homes of the wealthy land grant families. There were many stores around the plaza that had many beautiful things, and a long road full of shops with art and sculptures. It was like Rodeo Drive in Beverly Hills but with a Southwestern flavor, certainly none of it was within our means!

We took a drive to the other side of town that was full of trailers and more modest homes where the people who used to live closer to the heart of the city were pushed to live. Housing costs are very high and there is a lot of gentrification causing neighborhoods that were once affordable to now be out of reach for a lot of the people. It reminded us of what is going on in our area. The one thing that they have is a higher minimum wage that does help the people somewhat, but still doesn't keep up with the housing costs.



Southwest Field Trip Journal

We then met with a young man who is a leader in the Dreamers Movement of young undocumented immigrants organizing for educational access and against discrimination. His name is Juan Carlos Deoses and he is with **New Mexico Dreamers in Action**. Juan Carlos and the students shared their respective experiences. He promised to visit the students when he comes to the area in July and the students pledged to support his effort in Washington D.C. at the same time.

From there we went to an innovative youth arts program called **Warehouse 21**. This program is in a huge warehouse with large pockets of space for many activities: an internet café, performing arts space, concert venue, recording studio, fashion design room, film editing, and more. The space was covered in art produced by the young people that use it. The students were very excited as they saw this space and they expressed a desire to repeat parts of it back home.



We all gave our profound thanks to Miguel for sharing his knowledge and day with us, and then we began the drive back down to Albuquerque. We decided that some down time was needed and spent the rest of the evening around the casita, playing games, relaxing and eating. We turned in a little earlier than we have been able to so far with another full day behind us.

Southwest Field Trip Journal

New Mexico Day 6 – We decided to get another early start because we would be doing a lot of walking in the desert sun today. We drove to the **Indian Pueblo Cultural Center** in Albuquerque to meet another old friend Laurie Weahkee. Laurie is a Pueblo and Navajo who has long worked around Native American rights issues, particularly protection of sacred sights and community empowerment.



Laurie took us to **Petroglyphs National Monument**, a sacred area for Native People, particularly the Pueblo and the Navajo. This was especially meaningful because not only is this a holy site for her and her family, but also because she was a leader of a many year struggle to stop the building of a road through the petroglyphs. This was the first time that Laurie had been back to the site since the battle was lost.

“It was hard for her to return due to the fact that they were destroying it, but she did it for us and we are more than grateful.” Charles

The word petroglyph means a carving on a rock, but there is so much more to this story. There are an estimated 24,000 petroglyphs along a 17 mile escarpment that winds like a snake on the west side of Albuquerque. This escarpment was caused by 5 dormant volcanoes long ago and is lined with lava rock from tiny pieces to gigantic boulders.

Southwest Field Trip Journal

As we walked through the Boca Negra Canyon, Laurie pointed out many carvings, some of which could only be seen when the sun's rays hit at a certain angle. Climbing the escarpment to the top, the vista opened up and the vastness of this monument could then be understood.

Laurie explained that the Petroglyphs have deep spiritual significance. Native people would walk through the desert for many miles to get to this site and following ritual would carve the drawings into the rock. Each drawing represents a prayer and today the area is still used as a holy area whose continual use stretches back into antiquity.



Refusing to consider other reasonable choices researched and presented by the Native People, the Albuquerque City Government insisted on building a road, Paseo Del Norte, through the Petroglyphs, destroying and relocating these carefully placed holy objects. Laurie shared the long struggle that was first led by her father who passed away during the conflict and carried on by her and many other young Native People. To the indigenous people, it was the equivalent of building a highway through the Vatican or Mecca.

Although it was a sad story, it was also inspiring. The young people had stood up and added meaning to their lives. They learned many skills and built their capacity to take on new encroachments of their land and rights. Laurie is now using what she had learned in a new endeavor called the **Native American**

Southwest Field Trip Journal

Voters Alliance – an effort to not only encourage voting by Native People, but also to develop and use the skills gained in the effort to save the Petroglyphs.

Laurie then took us to the Indian Pueblo Cultural Center where the students were able to see a number of exhibits that explained Pueblo culture and history, but nothing compared to the unique experience that we had on the escarpment with her. Before we parted ways, Laurie presented us with a flag that had been carried on a run that stretched from the Petroglyphs to California to raise awareness. We will hang it in the school and share it with everyone when we get home.

We hope everyone is well back home. Much love.

New Mexico Day 7 – In preparation for our long drive to the Grand Canyon tomorrow, the students slept in this morning. Last night everyone stayed up pretty late, laughing with each other, texting to friends and family back home, and bike riding around the compound where we are staying. Charles learned how to ride a bike with the careful assistance of Matt and Ryan. There are many new experiences happening on this journey.



Since the students have never ridden a train before, we decided to go back up to Santa Fe on the Road Runner Express, a commuter train that links the two cities and the Pueblos in between. It was a very scenic ride through the countryside and the view from the top level of the train was especially good. It was also the most affordable transportation that we have used this whole trip – the student rate for an all day pass to ride the entire 96 mile length from below Albuquerque up to Santa Fe is only \$7. We walked around Santa Fe for a couple of hours before returning on the train back to Albuquerque. Planes, trains & automobiles!

Southwest Field Trip Journal

The afternoon was spent cleaning up and packing for our early morning departure to Arizona. The casita that we have lived in for the past month has become our home and will be hard to leave. The family that hosted us could not have been any nicer, and the accommodations could not have been any better. The students will miss the farm animals, especially Lucy, the bull (don't ask), dogs, cats, bikes, zip line and all.

By late afternoon, we were busily preparing a feast for our last night at the house. Our friends from Los Jardines were coming over to enjoy one last night of food and fellowship. Charles was in charge of the grill and made some delicious barbeque chicken and Italian sausage, Sierra made chocolate chip cookies, Ashley prepared all of the set ups while Ryan and Matt gathered all of the outdoor furniture around to the back of the house to set up for the party. It was a wonderful example of the way our young people take charge and work together.

Our friends then arrived by the carload. Time was spent telling stories of our adventures, laughing, playing, and breaking bread together. Joaquin introduced a movie that he had put together about a national youth gathering that they had hosted at Los Jardines. Inspiring stories about finding new meaning in their lives were told as well as the desire to help bring about positive change in their own communities. We'll show the video to you all when we return.

"..we had a cookout with some amazing people and I got to hang out with the two most wonderful people that mean everything to me. Also had fun talking to new people too." Sierra

This was followed by a poem from our new good friend, Olivia, and a retelling of a creation story from Ryan of Los Jardines, who grew so close to our group that we wanted to take her with us. Presentations of thanks were given around the room and a pledge was made by all to stay in touch with invitations to visit again and our desire to welcome them all to our community as well. It was a very long goodbye with no one wanting to part. In such a short time, we have all grown so close through shared experiences, stories and work. They have helped to make this trip not just a memorable one but a transforming one as well.

Southwest Field Trip Journal

It is now 6 AM New Mexico time, everyone is stirring, ready to travel again. Adios New Mexico! Bienvenido Arizona!

New Mexico/Arizona Day 8 - We were up with the sun this morning to get an early start for a long day ahead. With bleary eyes, we packed the car, finished cleaning the house, said goodbye to our casita and were off to Arizona and the Grand Canyon.



The drive along Route 40 was nothing short of amazing though what we were to see by the end of the day would times that by ten. The vast open desert, the mesas, the rock formations, mountains, all have left an indelible imprint in our minds. Along the way some of us talked about a novel we had read together in class, *The Grapes of Wrath*, and what it must have been like for Tom Joad and his family to travel this same path – Route 66 – during the dust bowl. Like all of our journey it was a mix of the present and the past as we imagined days gone by for the many people who had lived and struggled here, because without that understanding we couldn't fully comprehend the dynamics of life here now.

We decided to take a side journey through the Painted Desert in Arizona. This 28 mile ride with countless stops through a national monument park was full of wonder and beauty. It is a site hard to explain with the many rock formations and colors both stark and subtle. Inside this park is also an area called the Petrified Forest with trees that lived and grew so many years ago

Southwest Field Trip Journal

that they had turned to rock in this arid climate. Laying across the desert floor, from a distance they certainly looked like trees that had fallen and broken apart, but the closer we came to them we could see that they were rocks in texture and color. Just one more visual complexity for our minds to contemplate on this journey.



Everyone was hungry from the quick start and long ride so as we passed through Holbrook, Arizona, we decided to eat at a small diner. In the parking lot were dozens of motorcycles and inside we were surprised to see a motorcycle gang from Norway who annually travel across Route 66. Another incongruity in a day full of them. Once we ate to our fill, the sojourn continued up through the mountains outside of Flagstaff on our way to the Grand Canyon.

Around 8 hours after our driving day had begun, crossing one more time zone, our day's expedition had reached its goal. Before us was a site that left us without words to describe it, one of the Seven Wonders of the World – the Grand Canyon! Gazing at its vastness and range of shapes, sizes, textures, colors – it's grandness – our language falls short of the ability to paint a picture for you of what lay before us. We have all seen photos of this site as

Southwest Field Trip Journal

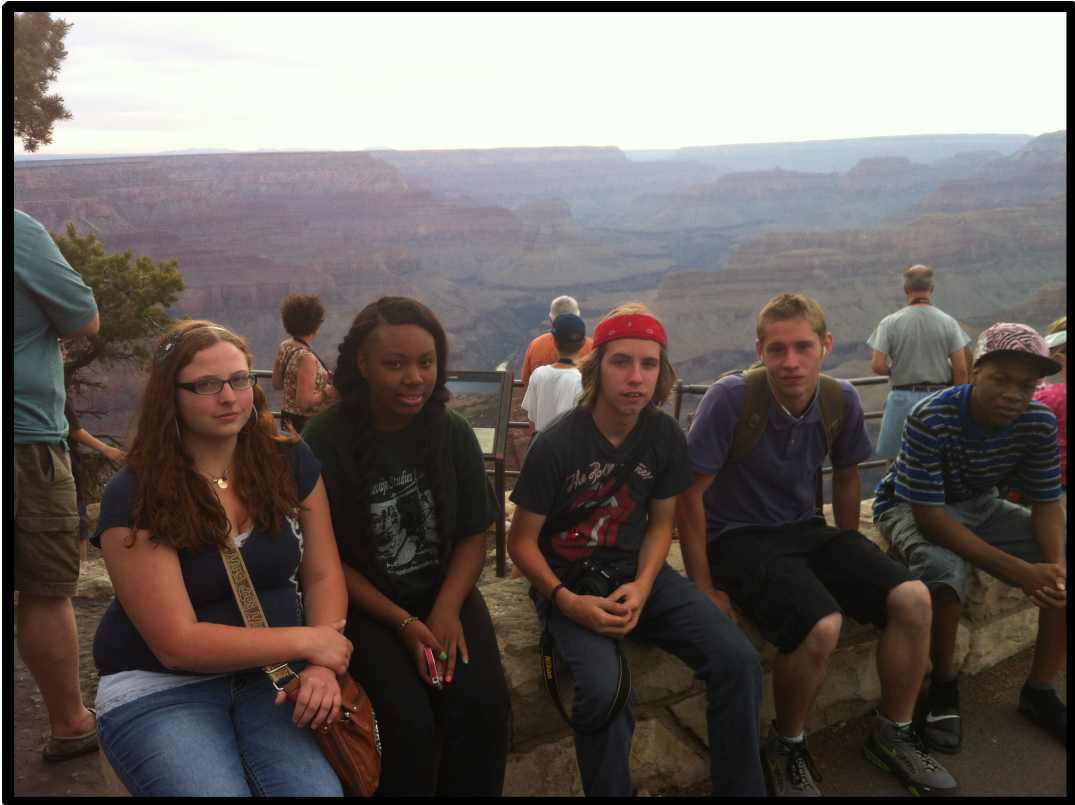
children and would seem familiar then with what we were seeing, but nothing could prepare us for the majesty and beauty our eyes were beholding!



“We came here to see the 4320 million year old canyon. We saw it. It was beautiful and in some ways, it’s indescribable. Think of it as the world has just begun.” Charles

To see more of the canyon, we took a sunset bus tour around the South Rim. The driver/guide taught us the history and geology of the canyon explaining the formations that took 2 billion years to form. Can we even begin to grasp that length of time? Long before the dinosaurs, this geography was unfolding and developing into what we saw today. Our final vista for this most incredible of days was the sun setting over the rim, casting shadows and rays across miles of canyon as the sky lit in colors of yellow, orange, blue and red. It was a sight we can never forget.

Southwest Field Trip Journal



Along the way on this day we met so many interesting people - a couple from England who were making their third pilgrimage to this American monument, a school teacher from back east, a couple traveling across the Southwest to introduce their grandchild to this country. It was as if everyone was rendered humble by the earth before them and struggled for connection with their fellow human beings to find security in this new world that had opened up.

Exhaustion is also too light a word to use for how we felt as we fell into our beds. It was a day like no other and a time for our bodies to rest and to allow our brains to process the images of the day.

New Mexico/Arizona Day 9 - How amazing is it to wake up in the Grand Canyon! The students slowly opened their eyes one by one like the rays of the sun slowly peeking over the horizon. After gathering our belongings, we drove around the rim of the canyon, stopping at several sites to see the morning sun reflecting off the canyon walls. Though we took loads of pictures, to really fathom what we encountered would take more than one sense, mere photos alone can't explain what we experienced.

Southwest Field Trip Journal



The long ride back to New Mexico took us through the majestic San Francisco Peaks – down through Arizona Route 64 and US Route 180. Though the temperatures were in the hundreds, Humphrey’s Peak at over 12,000 feet above sea level still had large expanses of snow near its ridge. We continued to be impressed by the natural beauty of the landscape that we have witnessed throughout this journey.

On the way home, we took a quick side trip to Meteor Crater, near Winslow, Arizona. A meteor traveling at an estimated 26,000 miles per hour struck the ground 50,000 years ago, with nearly half of it vaporizing upon impact. It created a crater that is 2.4 miles in circumference and 550 feet deep. It was another extraordinary site to see - a hole this big created by an encounter with an object from outer space.

The students seemed to take turns sleeping through the rest of the ride back to Albuquerque, though we did listen to some great music courtesy of our homegrown DJ, Ryan.

Southwest Field Trip Journal

The planned stop at Acomita to lay flowers on the grave of an old friend, Diana Ortiz, an Acoma Pueblo, did not happen. Just before the planned meeting with her son, we found out that his brother had passed away unexpectedly that morning. This sad news affected us and the stares out the window in silence left us to our private thoughts.

We arrived back in Albuquerque, landed at the hotel near the airport and prepared for one final visit with our friends from Los Jardines Institute. They hosted us at **El Chante: Casa de Cultura** in the heart of the city. This is a cultural space promoting Chicano, Indigenous, and New Mexico culture. It is a place where artists can exhibit, promote and sell their creative work and where folks can gather. We toured their facility and saw some great creative works of art



We were welcomed by Bianca, the director of El Chante, who explained the work of this organization. Our last gathering together was at times both sad and joyful, but the overriding emotion was one of connection and hope. Everyone around the room shared how they felt about this encounter and the relationships between our two organizations and people over these last 10 days. Richard opened it up, followed by Joseluis, Olivia, Juan, Nessa, Joaquin, Ryan, and Juan and then each of our group spoke from their hearts expressing

Southwest Field Trip Journal

the impact of this visit on their lives. Bahati wrapped us up with a deeply moving rendition of Amazing Grace and then Jimmy shared a prayer. The long goodbye spilled outside onto the porch and then the parking lot. Pledges were made by all to stay in touch as we invited our friends to come to Baltimore so we could share our work and community with them as they had done with us.



Our last night in New Mexico was one of mixed emotions, not wanting to end this journey, but eager to see everyone back home and share what we have learned and experienced. We had left Baltimore just nine days ago, though it seems like it has been so much longer. Each day of this journey has been full of meaningful encounters and opportunities for growth.

“I have always been a guy who looked at the world with wide eyes, but I never could have imagined that a trip would have such an impact on my life. It was a life-changing experience meeting everyone and seeing the world through this view.” Matt

Southwest Field Trip Journal

New Mexico/Arizona Day 10 – Waiting at the airport now, a bit concerned about the severe weather that is hovering over the Mid-Atlantic Region. We have word back home of torrential downpours, lightening, hail, and threats of tornados. Richard called to wish us well, but also let us know that if we are delayed that the people of Los Jardines will pick us up and take care of us until we can catch a flight home. The kindness of the many folks we shared time with has been very heartwarming.

Like the rest of the journey, the skies welcomed us. We flew through large areas of blue skies and the clouds we did encounter weren't menacing. The anticipation of seeing family and friends was building with each hour that passed.

A person would have to work very hard to not be impacted and transformed by the experience we have encountered these last 10 days. For each of us, this was a major life event and the days, weeks, and months ahead will reveal how this is so.

Our deepest thanks goes first to the many family and friends, businesses and organizations that made this trip possible through your kindness, generosity, and encouragement. To all of those who hosted us and generously opened up your homes and lives to us, we are profoundly grateful. Much like the bonds that were made decades ago and renewed on this trek, new relationships were formed that will be just as enduring.

It is now our responsibility to share what we have learned with those who sent us, and to forge links between our community and the one who we lived among for the last 10 days. It is the end of this journey, but a new beginning for all of us. Gracias y adios.

Southwest Field Trip Journal

Report Back

On Saturday, June 15th, less than 48 hours after our return to Baltimore, A Community Pot Luck Dinner was held for us to report back to our community on what we saw, learned, and did on this journey. To paraphrase a Navajo spiritual leader we met along the way, “It was a time to think, talk, and act.”

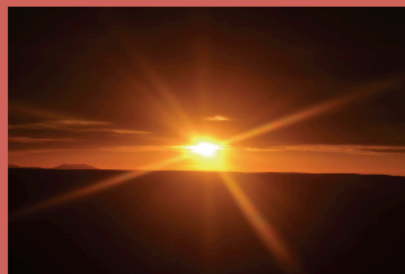
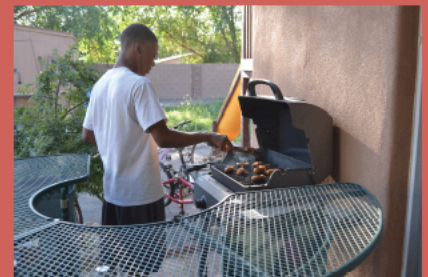


A transformative experience, and none of us would ever be the same.





Great Memories



Gratitude

We have an Honor Code in our community that guides us in our relations. There are two values at the heart of this code and they are Respect and Gratitude.

We have deep respect and gratitude for all of the people whom we met and shared time with in New Mexico and Arizona. We appreciate how you opened up your lives, homes, and communities to us. You shared your stories with us and you shared your food, each nurtured us in different ways. We will always be grateful to you.

Thank you Arnett, Aurea, Bahati, Bianca, Dane, Elliot, Emma, Esther, Jay, Javier, Jimmy, Jonah, Joseluis, Joaquin, Juan, Juan Carlos, Laurie, Louis, Lourdes, Lucy, Miguel, Mike, Milton, Nessa, Olivia, Richard, Rodrigo, Ryan, Sofia, Vernon and all of those we met along the way.

We are also grateful for all of those back home who worked so hard to send us on this trip. You baked and planted, gave and sold – whatever it would take to help us make this dream a reality.

Thank you for sending us: Alex, Amanda, Barbara, Bill, Bill Jr., Blue Ridge Sports Cars, Brenda, CJ, Carol, Chris, Dan, Dave, Dawn, Deb, Debbie, Don, Ed, Falkenhan's, Frasier's, Giant Foods, Gina, Good Shepherd United Methodist Church, Jaguar Land Rover Hunt Valley, Jarrod, Jason, Jean, John & Debbie, Justin, Latroya, Linda & Bill, Lisa & Ed, Mary Pat, Margaret, Maya, Kim, Patricia, Peggy, Ruth, Ryan, Sharon, Shirley, Sonny, Tasha, Tina, Tom, United Methodist Women, Zack and all those who supported the fundraisers and who support the school.

This booklet is dedicated to Zack who was such an important part of this class and worked so hard to make this trip possible, but who could not be with us, and to the memory of Diana Ortiz, an Acoma Pueblo, who introduced our organization to this part of the country nearly 30 years ago. Both were with us in spirit.

- Ashley, Charles, Matt, Ryan, Sierra & Tom

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