Chasing Creativity
Creativity In Unexpected Places

Emily Bowdle

My time at the Asian Rural Institute (ARI) has been a big learning experience and a crazy adventure. Although my work keeps me busy, there’s still plenty of time for being creative and trying new activities. For instance, after dinner, many people sing songs or play instruments. Other times, people dye clothes with onion peels, bake breads and cakes, smoke bacon from pork raised at ARI, and knit socks. Personally, I enjoy hand sewing, crocheting, and dancing with friends. There is no shortage of creativity on the ARI campus, as the atmosphere itself is a source of inspiration.

For many ARI members, English is their second language, so accents, speed, and vocabulary all play a role in how well we can understand each other. While the language barrier has been a challenge, it has also caused me to think of creative word choices, explanations, and gestures.

Language becomes an even greater obstacle when leaving ARI and going into town. One day, while I was jogging, I got caught in the rain and found shelter under a gazebo in a park where another woman was already waiting. Since we were stuck together for 20 minutes, we had a whole conversation even though we didn’t know each other’s languages. We “talked” about the fish in the pond and how she forgot her umbrella, and we laughed about getting drenched by the rain. After performing crazy charades to get our points across, we sat down together and watched the raindrops fall into the pond. This was a very meaningful moment for me because I realized how much joy can be found in having an interaction with a stranger, and, better yet, with someone who doesn’t speak my language. With patience and creativity, we could enjoy that fleeting, stormy instance without understanding a word.
Joining BVS was probably the most creative thing I’ve done. After years of pursuing goals within my career field, I finally decided to just go for it. When looking through projects, I was drawn to the international projects. Once I started chatting with the BVS coordinator in Europe, things moved rather quickly, and I knew I was accepted at my project in L’Arche Dublin two weeks later. When I arrived in Ireland, I found it just as I expected to. The sky is usually gray and gloomy (although I’ve taken far more sunrise/sunset pictures than I expected to). The people are usually smiling and greeting me as I pass them on the footpath. What I was not expecting to find, however, are wildly colorful doors. Beautiful bright doors, demure pastel doors, and fun neon doors line the streets in Dublin and the surrounding towns. There are many theories as to why the doors are brightly colored (spanning rebellion against England to helping a drunk author find his way home). My theory is that this is how people combat some of the weather’s dreariness— with a burst of color.

Sometimes my life gets a bit dreary, because life doesn’t always go as planned. Creativity is a burst of color in our lives to combat the dreariness. There is a huge movement to integrate creativity into school, work, and general everyday life. Creativity looks different for everyone. Maybe creativity is forming a piece of art, baking, or finding beauty in creation. Maybe creativity is planning a game night, visiting the theatre or symphony, or taking a long walk to somewhere you’ve never been. Or maybe creativity is having a conversation with someone about a topic that you’re not familiar with. Creativity breaks up the monotony of life. Creativity is feeling free to find your burst of color on a dreary day.

May Our Hands Tell Our Stories

Claire Horrell

Marta’s hands caressed and took attention to each plant, not ignoring any small detail. I was infatuated at not only this routine task, but the form of her hands. The hands of Marta and many other elders in El Salvador told much different stories than those of my own grandparents. They were strong and almost squashy—weathered and with little sensation to heat. After passing time in a coffee shop one afternoon, I met a woman in her 90’s. I was immediately drawn to her hands, and she asked if she could share her story with me. It was not important that I fully understood Spanish because, as she recounted her life, she wept. I held her hands and could feel the life lived in them. This moment inspired me in document not only her hands, but also the hands of others who spent their lives working the land, battling loss, raising kids, and sheltering their families from war.

With my experience in photography and videography, I have started to create videos and collections of photos displaying the hands and stories of these people. This was not in the description that I read about for my project site, nor was it something listed as a need. However, I believe this to be absolutely necessary. I will never fully understand the lives of other people—especially those that have gone through war. But I can tell, at the least, show them how beautiful and strong they are through this creative outlet.

Here at Centro Arte para la Paz, the mission is to help aid in the restoration of peace and healing of the trauma that individuals have undergone. My videos and photos will be presented and archived at the center for future tourists, students, and citizens of the area to learn a bit more of the history of the people. My vision is for others to take away from these videos the experiences that I have had through encounters with people such as Marta and the lady in the coffee shop. Chasing creativity is, in itself, chasing after God’s will for ourselves. Through artistic methods we learn more about Him, ourselves, and the people around us. May our hands forever tell our stories.

A Burst of Color

LeRae Wilson

My first project was in L’Arche. Two weeks later, I was accepted and started a project in Ireland. Once I arrived, I found the city to be as I expected it to be. The sky is usually gray and gloomy (although I’ve taken far more sunrise/sunset pictures than I expected to). The people are usually smiling and greeting me as I pass them on the footpath. What I was not expecting to find, however, are wildly colorful doors. Beautiful bright doors, demure pastel doors, and fun neon doors line the streets in Dublin and the surrounding towns. There are many theories as to why the doors are brightly colored (spanning rebellion against England to helping a drunk author find his way home). My theory is that this is how people combat some of the weather’s dreariness— with a burst of color.

Perhaps the most rewarding way to be creative, is to look for creativity in relationships. There is no doubt that Keith, opening his home to so many, has created several new and valuable relationships in his life. His life is full of diversity thanks to all the people he got to know and the stories they have to tell. While I don’t have a home to offer people right now, I reflect on what I do have to share. I can only hope to pursue a fraction of the creativity in relationships that Keith does in his.

A Generous Host

Lydia DeMoss

In May of 2016, I arrived in Ireland and ended up at L’Arche Dublin. I was taken care of by a friendly woman named Maria who opened her home to me. While I was living at L’Arche, a new man arrived named Keith. I was told that Keith was a great guy and he opened his home to me and so many people. Keith is now a regular part of my life. I informed him of the project I was working on and asked if he would be a part of it. He said yes, and has been a huge help since then.

Through the project, I was able to learn about Keith’s life and how he has made a huge impact in his community. Keith has created several new and valuable relationships in his life. His life is full of diversity thanks to all the people he got to know and the stories they have to tell. While I don’t have a home to offer people right now, I reflect on what I do have to share. I can only hope to pursue a fraction of the creativity in relationships that Keith does in his.