Holiday Happenings

By Jenny Perkins

It’s finally that time of year – the holiday season. For most people it is considered to be the ‘most wonderful’ time of the year as the popular song goes, and I happen to be one of those happy-go-lucky holiday season fanatics. With the end of the semester and finals fast approaching a well deserved break is much needed, especially with some holiday cheer. Some of my personal favorites are happening around the cities and are free and easy to reach!

My first recommendation is to visit the 8th floor display in the downtown Minneapolis Macy’s store. For those of you who are unfamiliar with this revered Twin Cities tradition, Macy’s decorates their 8th floor auditorium with animated story line for viewers to come see. In the past some of the favorites have been Harry Potter, the Dance of the Sugarplum Fairy, and other spectacular holiday themed creations. This year, back by popular demand, is “A Day in the Life of an Elf.”

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A New Home? Check.

By Rachel Nichols

I made the decision to study in Shanghai, China during my sophomore year knowing that I would not go abroad until spring of my junior year. It is difficult to find words to describe what being away from home for six months has done to me. Before leaving home I did not know what to expect. Of course I spoke with friends who had studied abroad, but talking with someone can only do so much. The only way to understand is to experience. To experience China is to experience many things. It is to experience a culture that is in many ways a complete 180-degree difference. It is to experience communism and the most welcoming people I have ever encountered. It is to experience the best food on the planet cooked without an oven. Shanghai is a city that is easy to love; the people, the food and the sights are all amazing. Six months abroad in Shanghai opened my eyes to a world that I never imagined I would see and a lifetime of friendships and opportunities. While in Shanghai I had the opportunity to work with a nonprofit organization dealing with migrant families and the education they receive. These families are not official residents of Shanghai and are not privy to the public school education that Shanghai residents obtain. The goal of the organization is, through volunteers, to provide English courses free of charge to these underprivileged children. I was able to visit some of the schools, and in the poor condition that they are, the children are blissfully happy. They are so curious and willing to learn. Seeing their willingness and excitement to learn is an inspiration to anyone. It is an incredible feeling to know that thousands of children are being helped by simply donating a little time each week.

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Atheism – A Clarification

By Ryan Persons

My aim here is simple—to clarify what atheism is exactly. While I think this is something that could be done simply enough with a search engine, I run into quite a few people who have a lot of misunderstandings about what atheism is.

In a very broad sense, atheism means the absence of a belief in deities, or gods. If we wanted to get real specific here, atheism is often more specifically split into strong and weak atheism; strong atheism being those who specifically claim that gods do not exist, and weak atheism being those who don’t believe in gods but also don’t make the outright claim that they don’t exist. There distinction can be a bit confusing, but I believe it is important.

I would say at least half of the people I tend to meet seem to think atheism means a person doesn’t believe in anything. This is really not true; there are many things atheists believe in. For example, I would say many atheists believe in the power of reason and empiricism to craft our view of the world. On a related note, many atheists believe in the power of the human mind. In a philosophical sense, some atheists believe in certain universal truths (one shouldn’t kill without just cause, for example). I could go on and on, but I think the point has been made.

The confusion arises, in my opinion, because when someone asks what an atheist believes in, they often expect some sort of substitute for God, some singular thing that gives meaning to one’s life. Thus, when I answer this question with some of the things I previously listed, it’s not uncommon for me to receive a scoff or indifference. I then need to remind them that “belief” in something does not just mean having some sort of religious faith; it also means, quite simply, to accept something as true or genuine. Even more technically, “belief” is a psychological state in which a person holds a premise or preposition to be true. Both theists and atheists should keep this in mind whenever they engage in a discussion on beliefs.
Dear Death

By Joe Docter

Did you hear the news?
To me, you are dead
Try and try again
But my will, too strong

Occupying a hospital bed
Split, stapled gut
Distorted perception of the present
Painkillers fog mind and body
Wreathing in pain nonetheless
Dreadful scar sure to follow
Tubing like wires to a computer
Nothing distracts but an unforgiving clock
Tick tick; slower, slower
Comfort falling into an eternal abyss
Anxiety coupled with uncertainty
Two new best friends
Can’t wait for time
Need for a way out

Your visits frequent
Your presence presents fright
Behind a comfortless bed
Floating merely inches away
You reach out deliberately
Your hand rests on my shoulder, head
Speaking inaudible words
Invitation to leave this world received
An RSVP never an option
Pleading for your departure
Accepting pain, misery, anxiety
You-not the solution I seek
My demise waits another day

Respectfully,

Yours Truly
When Time Doesn’t Matter

By: Joe Docter

Eyes close, head rests
Today turning to tomorrow
Body shuts off
Mind stretches, begins to wander
Embarking on an unconscious journey

If the wind blows, let it
There is little you can do
When they appear, meet them
Your favorite place
Adventures with your favorite face
Control over everything yet nothing
Like the life left behind that waits before you
Remember if you can,
Soon it will be through

Time becomes anxious at your feet
Wanting to exist once more
Same places, same routines
Yet all hope is not lost
Dreams became reality times before
A new day lingers in the hours
Savor the last moments of comfort
Slipping out of a natural numb
Sounding is the dreadful hum

Sounding is the dreadful hum.
Going Green?

By Paul Armstrong

Being “environmentally conscious” and “going green” are notions increasingly popular and could even be called clichés. And rightfully so; indeed, the impact of industrialized nations on the environment is tremendous, and could have far-reaching future consequences if not reversed. However, even at our own university, ecological friendliness is increasingly used as an excuse for cutting costs, especially for hardcopy print resources.

The business office refusal to print refund checks, instead requiring students to set up direct deposit for any and all refunds from UST, is perhaps the latest example of this trend. This very publication has also faced a reduction in print copies since fall 2008. And perhaps most noticeably, The Aquin was discontinued during this school year; in all three cases, both financial and ecological reasons were cited as to why the respective services were discontinued.

On the other hand, UST forwent spending additional funds in order to acquire LEED certification for the new Andersen Athletic Complex. This certification is given to buildings which meet certain criteria as to their “sustainable sites, water efficiency, energy and atmosphere, materials and resources and indoor environmental quality.” (www.nrdc.org)

Thus, one can see somewhat of a schizophrenic trend concerning “green” issues here at UST. If a broadly understood environmentally beneficial action will also cut costs, it is lauded as being eco-friendly; if “going green” requires spending additional funds, the issue at hand will be neglected. Granted, there is nothing wrong with saving money, or cutting perhaps unnecessary costs; however, environmental rhetoric should not purely be used to justify reducing expenditures. In effect, this dilutes legitimate environmental concerns, since decisions such as those mentioned above are all motivated by cost-reduction, not by environmental qualms. Thus, questions of environmentalism continue to be marginalized, and only brought up as additional support for other, “more pressing issues”, proving that even though “going green” may be a popular buzz-phrase, actual concern for decreasing negative impact on the environment is still minimal.
Even though this is the same theme as last year, Macy’s promises there are many new and exciting features virtually making it a whole new creation! The good news is there is no admission to get in! Just hop on the shuttle down to Minneapolis campus, and if it’s cold out take the skyways until you reach Macy’s. As this is a popular event I recommend going at a strange time during the day to get in without waiting in line! It’s open from now until December 30th!

While you’re downtown visiting the Macy’s display you and your friends can hang around and watch the Holidazzle parade! This is yet another well-known Twin Cities tradition that you will not regret. For all of you parade-goers out there, this is the event for you. All the floats feature extravagant light displays as well as children’s story themed floats, including the traditional Santa Clause sleigh! For those of you who are brave you can sit on the curb and watch it from there with a variety of warm treats from street vendors. If you want to stay warm, look around for the skyways over Nicollet Mall where you can watch the parade while still staying warm! The parade starts at 6:30pm every Thursday through Sunday from now until December 20th!

So if you find yourself in need of a well-deserved break after all of your studying and hard work look into heading downtown for some free holiday cheer! Maybe I’ll even see you there! Happy Holidays!

A New Home, continued from page 2

There are so many facets to the culture that fascinate me; I could go on forever. The city is huge and the lights are bright, and it was easy to feel at home; the Chinese have so much to offer. Their culture is an old and fascinating one that holds onto history while continuously making forward progress. Their language, although difficult, is worth the patience it takes to learn it. I never would have imagined that I would be able to communicate with the Chinese…in Chinese. A year ago if someone would have asked me where I wanted to be after graduation, my answer would not have been, “on the other side of the world.” Now, well, that’s a different story.
What do these mean?

TEMPERATURE  PAR 2  CHANCE

HEART  COLLAR HOT  THE HEAD SAND

Write your answers in the space provided and submit them along with your name and mailbox number to:
Paul Armstrong
Mail 7142

And you could win a giftcard to the UST bookstore!
(Deadline: December 10th)