

ming for exams, I traveled home town to get my inst. His family, poor as they w and lodged me, and we ga around his father at night him play the khalam. It's a strument, ukulele-size, a b carved wood covered with skin, with a round neck ex from one end.

Yoro's father held it in hi ing the strings and tapping keep rhythm with one hand other wandered up and dow producing the echoing, time I had heard only on tape. At of the night, he handed me ment to keep.

Khalams weren't so much expensive in Senegal as they were rare. Unlike the djembe drums you could buy in any tourist shop, if you wanted a khalam, you had to find someone willing and

Poor but still able to smile. Although not about India there are places in India just like it.

He has called me over the years, sometimes to ask for money, sometimes for help getting into the United States. Life in Senegal is hard, he says. He'd like to earn a PhD in America; could I help him get a vi-

out those projects we about? cash when I could and in during our telephone s that this country is ex are hard to get, and crash with friends like Senegal. Yoro listens ay much. Once again, he r my explanations with- derstanding them. his father's khalam. It's in ack in my parents' attic, where I keep old photos. I n to play it.

He died abroad during the 1997-1998 academic year through a program organized by the University of Wisconsin. A Post intern this past summer, he now covers the Palestinian territories for the Associated Press. He can be reached at bphubbard@gmail.com.

MY Poor but Cheerful

A day spent on a mountain of trash in the Philippines inspires a young man to ponder the meanings of privilege and deprivation

BY JASPER HU, as told to Robin Rose Parker

MY PROFESSOR, AL FUERTES, RECOMMENDED THAT I GO ON THIS TRIP. He's from the Philippines, and he said it was going to be life-changing. I really did it for the [academic] credit. It was a six-credit study-abroad class over the summer called: "Philippines: Grass-Roots Peace-Building, History and Culture." When [Fuertes] told me about the Philippines, I was thinking about taking some classes, maybe go to the beach or something.

During our first week, we went to a place in Manila called Smokey Mountain. Smokey Mountain is home to, I think, a little over 1,000 families. It's literally a landfill. They were actually living on the landfill. The bus

ride there was so quiet. It was sort of like when you watch a scary movie, and you know something bad is gonna happen. But it was so much worse than what we thought. Even before we set foot on Smokey Mountain, we could smell it. There are hundreds of flies. There's rotting sewage on the side. You couldn't see dirt because we were just stepping on trash. It's garbage upon garbage. Some families were living in, like, little Wal-Mart tents that you'd buy for 30 bucks for a camping trip; some built huts from metal containers and sheets. Whatever they found, they took over and used. The kids were dirty; everyone was barefoot. But when we got there, we were greeted by hundreds of warm

faces. They were like: "Hi, where are you guys from? What are you guys doing here?" Our professor was like: "We're from George Mason. We're from America. We're here to interact with the community for a day."

The interesting thing is, no matter how poor they are or how bad the conditions, they always had a smile on their faces. It wasn't even like they'd see us and they'd smile; before they'd even notice us — when they were with their friends and neighbors — you could see them laugh, you could see the kids playing. They were having a good time. They were oblivious to what was out there.

When we were walking, we found a small, one-room elementary school.

It was sort of in the middle of the landfill. Everyone else was inside playing with the kids, and in the distance I noticed a basketball court. Well, not really a basketball court, more like one hoop that was kind of dilapidated and old. But I said, "Hey, guys, you want to play basketball?" Two of my other friends came out. There were four or five kids; they were, like, ages 7 to 9, and we were like, "Can we play?" We were having a good time. Then I noticed how all the kids were only giving us the ball. The hospitality is so deep; it's almost innate with the Filipino people.

people in the background, the older people, were just cheering. It's raining; there are puddles everywhere. I'm wearing jeans; they're getting soaked; my shoes are filled with mud, but I didn't care. At that point, I couldn't smell anything.

In the midst of all this happiness, a dump truck drove by very slowly. Three out of five kids stopped playing and ran and jumped into the back of the dump truck. The teacher in me wanted to hold them back 'cause it seemed unsafe. I was wondering, *What are they doing?* But then I thought about it: How do they make a living?

coming out barefoot, looking through the trash for things they could recycle for money. The other two kids were looking at us as if they didn't want to leave us 'cause they wanted to play. When the second truck came, the kids didn't say anything, but the look in their eyes was like, "Sorry, I gotta do this."

Now we're standing there, the three of us, holding a basketball in the middle of the rain in this landfill. We were like, *This is so unreal.* It was really hard to see this. It was a wonderful experience, but at the same time it was hard to see. I grew up in New York; I've



PHOTOGRAPH OF MANILA'S SMOKEY MOUNTAIN BY JOANNA CRAIG

I said: "We're here to have fun with you guys. We're not here to have fun for ourselves." We gave the ball back to them, and they started shooting, but even if they missed, the other kids would just cheer. It was so different. We started cheering them; they started cheering us. We were all taking shots. I was like, let's pick up the kids and let them dunk. Now the

Recyclables. So then the dump truck would be the best place, 'cause it's first pick before it's even dumped out. Other trucks drove up, and people nearby heard the braking, and out of tents, out of cardboard boxes, out of these little shacks, they just came out with little sticks and stuff, like poking sticks. So they could pick through trash. You'd see hundreds of them

been to rough areas before. That was nothing compared to Smokey Mountain. I've got nothing to complain about now that I've been there.

Jasper Hu spent a month abroad last summer. He is a senior at George Mason University majoring in integrated studies, with a concentration in elementary education. He can be reached at jdmfanatic@gmail.com.