

Janet Hohenstein

Assessment of the Skills Learned

MLA

Fall Semester 20073

Dr. Coghill, Director

MLA Program

Assessment of the Skills Learned

Much like my reasoning for pursuing an American Studies Major, I believe the Master of Liberal Arts is an excellent major for those who are looking for a well-rounded or multidisciplinary graduate degree program. It was a perfect choice for me, not really knowing which Master's degree to pursue. I wanted to broaden my knowledge in other areas, and this program has helped my professional development; job advancement; and personal accomplishments along the way.

The Master of Liberal Arts degree:

- **Allowed** me to study in many areas of interest such as history, art/music, literature, etc. without limiting me to classes in only one specific core or subject.
- **Gave** me a broader choice of classes.
- **Allowed** me to take more night and weekend classes here and at other institutions.
- **Removed** those barriers that are placed upon students in other specific masters programs.

My reason for choosing the three selected papers was because of this multi-disciplinary approach the Master of Liberal Arts provides. The three papers I decided to include because of what I see as the merits of the multi-disciplinary approach. Each is from a different semester and from three very different topics, taught by three different professors from entirely different programs. The instructors and topics

are; Dr. Maureen Reed, American Studies, *Memoirs of the American Family* - Fall 2003, Dr. John Sherman, English, *American Folklore* - Fall 2004 and Dr. Konrad Czynski, Philosophy, *Classical Roots Culture* - Fall 2005.

Dr. Maureen Reed, American Studies, *Memoirs of the American Family* - Fall 2003. This class was my first graduate class in the masters program. I wasn't quite done with my bachelor's degree and found that as long as I met the criteria, I could take a graduate level class. The choices in the undergrad classes were slim so I decided to jump right into my masters degree and take *Memoirs of the American Family*.

This class gave me the skills and methodology to open my mind to critical thinking and analysis:

- **We were able to learn** and use our skills from analytical thinking to respond to and evaluate others writings while identifying their skills and structure of writing.

- **We also did a research** assignment improving our skills in using the libraries on-line databases available for research.
- **The project involved analyzing** a book review with the next step being writing our own book review on a book of our choice.

Our final project consisted of writing our own memoir. We were able to use the information learned throughout the semester and in doing so slowly build up to our final piece.

This project helped improve our skills in critical summarizing, creative writing and literature reviews of the other students' final papers. In addition. our class outline for reviewing other student's papers also increased our proficiency and appraisal in conducting a class discussion.

Dr. John Sherman, English, American Folklore - Fall 2004. One of the interesting topics about this class was the

diversity of our reading and the extensive time lines it covered.

- **This class helped me understand the variety of language syntax and forms** that have been used throughout the times from the 1800's to today.
- **We read a variety of books about folklore, myths and urban legends** of our time and past time. It was amazing to see how many of the movies of today have been produced out of past myths or legends.
- **Our class discussions focused on our own reading skills** and how a person interpreted a specific topic or word, and classroom participation and leading a discussion was very important.
- **This participation helped us increase our communication skills, and presentation skills** in front of an audience.

Our final project consisted of a paper and presentation. This presentation was in the form of a power point presentation.

This presentation in turn allowed me to increase my skills and talent in preparing a power point presentation.

Dr. Konrad Czynski, Philosophy, Classical Roots Culture - Fall 2005. This class was very interesting and:

- **Gave us the skills in reading materials from philosophical thinkers** and putting their words, thoughts and objectives into today's topics of concern. Or as Dr. Czynski would say, "It could be thought of as putting their thoughts into recognizable bridges into today's society."
- **This process allowed us to lead class discussions** which were intellectual, communal, open and satisfying.

Compiling information for our final project allowed us to increase our skills in:

- communication
- writing
- researching
- and creativity.

Overall the skills that I have learned while in the Master of Liberal Arts program are still a work in progress. My goal in life is to be a life long learner and educator. My educational foundation began in the New Center or as it is called today the Corrick Center and without that wonderful opportunity my educational skills, experiences and personal growth would not be what it is today. With this wonderful foundation I have been able to build on my skills working through an Associate's degree, to a Bachelor's degree and now a master's degree. All of these phases have been wonderful stepping stones in creating an open mind to rethink and put the items at hand into different perspectives.

These perspectives encompass our cultural and intellectual issues of the world today, which helps a person to use problem solving, critical thinking, researching, and creativity along their lives paths.

Janet Hohenstein

MLA 645

Classical Roots Cultures

Fall Semester 20063

Dr. Czynski

Coliseum-Colosseum

When a person thinks of coliseums they could immediately think of football arenas, sports stadiums, and music concerts. Or they could think of gladiators, slaves, gods, and the events that took place in these colossal structures. But what they don't think of is how the Roman coliseums have influenced the arenas or stadiums of our buildings of today. The purpose of this paper is to impress upon the reader how the buildings at this time and the buildings of ancient times can be consequently so equivalent in status from the builders, to the architecture, to its

utilization. I will compare and contrast the coliseums, arenas, and stadiums of today to the Colosseum of Rome.

Some of the owners, investors, or builders of these coliseums were and are, in my opinion, pompous individuals that had attitudes of some hierarchy royalty, thinking they are a God. During the building and financing of the Ralph Engelstad Arena in Grand Forks, North Dakota, Engelstad's pompous attitude showed up in many of the area newspapers. These articles gave many people the message that Engelstad was an arrogant individual. Engelstad impressed upon the city of Grand Forks that under no uncertainty was his memory going to be removed from the arena. Here is a portion of an article that was printed in The Minnesota Monthly, in the issue of October 2001, on page six.

"The giant message aimed at the sky might be Engelstad's way of saying Ralph Built This, and He Will Call Them the Fighting Sioux If He Wants To.

The Fighting Sioux nickname and the new Indianhead logo are everywhere in, on, and around the arena. They're on the building's exterior. They're set at regular intervals in the granite floors (meaning, of course, that the Indianhead, with its four eagle feather symbols of honor, will be trod upon by hockey fans). They're at the end of each row of seats. There are hundreds of them, possibly thousands. If Ralph Engelstad is worried that the university might some day try to rub out the nickname, he has made sure it will be a gargantuan task." (<http://www.und.edu/org/bridges/coleman.html>)

Ralph Engelstad has made it a point to emboss his memory and message into every single item within the arena so that he can impress upon the people not to forget his image and or representation of the arena itself. This arrogant attitude is much like that of certain Emperors of Rome.

It was the Emperor Vespasian during 69 AD that dreamed up building an amphitheater to help bring life and culture back to Rome after the fires damaged much of the city's center and he wanted to call it the "Flavian Ampitheatier." However, it was Emperor Domitian Vespasian the son of

Vespasian that was much like Ralph Engelstad. When he was taking over the building of this iconic representation of himself and his family, Domitian wanted to make sure that everyone understood that his family was the builders of this colossal creation. He did not want his people to forget that he was once an Emperor of their country. Domitian had statues placed in and around the structure to remind the people who their "Master and God" was. In the book, The Roman Colosseum, the writers give us a brief understanding of this emperor's attitude. "Officially, the emperor's title was 'princeps' (first citizen) but, by the time the Colosseum was being built, Emperor Domitian (ruled AD 81-96) was demanding to be hailed as 'Master and God'" (page 10). These two very notorious men created an iconic image to represent themselves after their passing in life and it has worked for their tribute. They both constructed two very massive structures that did back then and still do today

take the breath away of the individuals that see these building for the first time.

It is the architectural construction of these buildings that could make a person step back and speculate how such Impressive details, of these structures, could have been built during this early time period. The

History channel describes them as being "an engineering marvel that were two millenniums ahead of their time". They are/were both state-of-the-art playing fields. In

my search for materials on this paper I came across the web site www.deadromans.com. It was this web site that

suggested to me how impressive the Colosseum actually was. "The Colosseum gave the gladiators a permanent, state-of the-art playing field for the games to take on a level of carnage never before seen in the empire's history. The

Roman Colosseum set a new standard for amphitheater design." This standard was set back in 69 AD and is still being imitated today. Yet, today they are still trying to catch

up to the creativity and ingenuity the architects had long ago. It was the retractable roof of the Colosseum that really impressed upon me how far advanced they really were in technology.

The web site www.deadromans.com explains how the retractable roof worked back then. "The Colosseum had a retractable roof operated by sailors from the Roman navy, who were stationed around the top of the arena's arcade. On hot days, an awning called a Velarium was unfurled above the upper deck to shade spectators from the sun. They moved it according to the sun and the wind; subsequently, the Colosseum was amazingly air conditioned and shaded." It is this technology that really impressed me because it took America with all of its technology, knowledge, and ingenuity many years to duplicate this wonderful concept. Even at this time people do not know that retractable roofs existed before. What they believe is that it is an entirely new concept as stated on the web site

www.entertainment.howstuffworks.com. "Today, a new trend in stadiums has led to the demolition of the Kingdome and the likely demise of the Astrodome. The latest trend in sports stadiums is the retractable-roof stadium." The stadiums that have retractable roofs today are: The Skydome in Toronto built in 1989, Bank One Ballpark in Phoenix built in 1998, Safeco Field in Seattle built in 1999, Minute Maid Park in Houston built in 2000, and the Reliant Stadium in Houston built in 2003. However, no matter the time period from 69 AD to 2005 no two retractable roof stadiums are exactly alike. Nevertheless, they all work on the same concept as they did back in 69 AD. They all have a pulley system and miles of cable that help slide, pull or maneuver the panels of material, fiberglass, gypsum, and steel panels. The only difference from then to now is that we have motors that do the work, and they had slaves that did the work.

These state-of-the-art coliseums are/were just as impressive inside as they are/were outside. Both of these

structures were created with several levels and many special rooms for the different statuses of the people that frequented the entertainment held within the walls.

The book, The Roman Colosseum states, "There were different kinds of seats for the different classes of spectators.

The emperor and his friends sat in a splendid marble enclosure beside the arena" (page 28). The History Channel had a program on called The Colosseum, indicating that the seating that was required by the Emperor was this,

"First floor was for the Emperor and VIP in an area that was protected by iron bars, the second floor was for middle class, third floor for lower class and the fourth floor was for the poor, women, and slaves". This special seating status has been carried over to the centuries of today.

It shows that as long as you have money and power you will be catered to.

Much like the Colosseum, the Ralph Englestad Arena also has special seating for the elite. It has forty-eight luxury suites that can accommodate 14 to 29 individuals.

It has two house-suites plus four rental-suites and two club-rooms that are balcony level. Another commonality between the two is that they both contain/ed intricate networks of corridors and staircases that quickly shuffle/ed capacity crowds in and out in record time. It is this magnificent layout that helped the 70,000 spectators of the Colosseum exit without problems and the Ralph Englestad capacity of 11,000 plus exit without consequences. Both of these magnificent buildings were built to seat these staggering numbers of citizens, which is an inconceivable achievement in itself, especially the Colosseum. However, it is the round layout or circular pattern that has been one of the principal characteristics of the arenas. This round pattern is able to seat many more spectators than the half-moon design and the more spectators you have the more money the

Emperors, Ralph Engelstad and Domitian Vespasian and all of the other owners of these structures will make.

These grand structures even take on a similarity of their utilization. The Colosseum was built for purpose of gladiator fights, contact sports, political decisions, religious reasons, theatrical and musical entertainment, much like the arenas of today but in a different perception. Even though the Ralph Engelstad Arena only uses their building for hockey entertainment, the concept is the same. During the gladiator fights of their days, The Roman Colosseum tells us that they utilized the site for honoring the gods. "In ancient Roman times, sports festivals had originally been staged in honor of the gods. Taking part in them, or even just watching, had been a religious act" (page 16.) Many of the athletes today thank, praise and honor God over national television. It used to be that they thanked their mothers, but not anymore, now they feel that they have made it to the top because of God.

Geoff Robson states, "Many athletes seem to treat God as a 'genie in a bottle'. The impression given is that calling on him is not much more than another technique to help them succeed in their chosen field. There is no sense that devotion to God is an end in itself, much more important than a temporal victory." God encouraged them and inspired these athletes to keep going, to make it to the top like the gladiators. If a gladiator made it to the top that meant that they were still alive and to stay alive you had to have God assisting you along the way. And so the gladiators believed that if you did not believe in God, you did not live to see the light of another day.

Many of these grand structures were built very much alike. They both used stone-masons to construct and build these colossal structures. Many of the arenas today are built of brick, stone and iron much like the Romans did. The History Channel's program The Colosseum indicated that they did indeed use the building products that we use today,

such as 300 tons of iron, travertine and tuffa stone - this is equal to our lime stone, marble, brick, and cement. My husband, all of his brothers and our son are stone-masons who learned this artful craft from their fathers. This artwork is something that is handed down from one generation to another over the years. When the Fargo Dome was being built my brother-in-law helped in constructing that structure with his stone-mason skills. The workers of the Fargo Dome were also a part of a builder's guild called a Bricklayers Union. When The Roman Colosseum was being built the Romans there also had a builder's guild. In the book The Roman Colosseum, it states, "Roman workers organized themselves into corporations or guilds, which tried to regulate ages and hours of work" (Page 22). Because of these rules and regulations it helped in maintaining the working order of these individuals to keep them from working too hard and not paying attention to the detail required in engineering such fine structures. The stone-masons of then

and today also use many of the same tools. The workers of the

Colosseum used trowels, plumb bobs, chisels, and scaffolding, much like the stonemasons of today.

So, which Coliseum-Colosseum is most impressive because of its magnificent structure and engineering? Each building has a grandness or greatness about itself.

Nevertheless, this impressiveness is due to the fact of the Romans creativity and ingenuity. The Romans were able to take an idea and make it real without the technology of electricity and tools that we have today. And yet, look at the beautiful architecture that the Romans have created. It is note worthy to think that the Romans and other societies during that era created even more beautiful structures than we do today.

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October 2001.

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Ryan, T.M.M. "Dead Romans." Historical and Architectural

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eum> .

"The Colosseum." Modern Marvels. The History Channel,

September 8, 2005 8:00 pm

** Most pictures are from the book *The Roman Colosseum* except Ralph Engelstad's, which is from UND's website.

Janet Hohenstein

MLA 690

American Folklore

Fall Semester 20053

Dr. Sherman

Cross Cultural Folklore and Urban Legends

What is folklore? Brunvand explains folklore on page 12, *In The Study of American Folklore*; Its content is oral (usually verbal), or custom-related, or material; It is traditional in form and transmission; It exists in different versions; It is usually anonymous; and It tends to become formularized. After interviewing the international students on campus I decided to come up with my own folklore story from combining a few of their comments to show how easy it

is to exaggerate and make ones own folklore story and how it could effect others by orally transmitting their tales.

"Many times I think about this story that my best friend told me that she heard from her cousin who heard it from her best friends boyfriend. It is about this girl who went to America to study at college there. She was from a small country, I think Indonesia but I can't remember exactly. Anyway, she wanted to see what it was like to be away from home and study at another school where everyone is rich. While she was in America she would walk everywhere she needed to go, even at night. One night on her way home from a store she thought she was being followed by a black guy and she had heard that they are very dangerous. Anyway, it was really cold out and this guy kept getting closer and closer to her so she decided to start running. Well, as cold as it was her ears were getting very cold from the wind and running that by the time she got back to her dorm they were so cold they were like frozen so that when she touched her ears they fell off, just like crushed ice."

Brunvand's explanation is a broad description and covers many topics. However, the topics I am going to cover will take you across the borders on a cross-cultural folklore experience. "From observations and records of these materials folklorists hope to reconstruct something of the

unrecorded intellectual life of people of the past and present"
(Brunvand, *The Study of American Folklore* 24).

With the observations and comments from our international students on campus I was able to reconstruct the story above using their comments. Fundamentally, this is what I hope to present in this paper using our international students comments that have decided to study here at Minnesota State University Moorhead (MSUM.)

I started my project by asking Kim Gillette, the international student advisor on campus, if she could help me get some of the international students together. She suggested that I use her Life in the U.S. History class to begin my project. I was invited to join their class and went in with a tape recorder and my question. I told the students about my project and they all seemed willing to help me out. The question I decided to pose to the students was, "Please tell me a story or stories about America that you have heard either prior to coming to America or after arriving in America

concerning anything from people, weather, food clothes etc."

The students started out slow but did open up after awhile.

Kim also put the question out on WebCT for me, and the

students were able to respond a little more privately without

feeling embarrassed with their answers. I received many

great responses from them but my question did not stop

there. I also sent an email out to all the international students

requesting their help and received many great replies. The

last place I went for help was to the International Student

Club president, Max Taha. Max helped me by taking my

question to his club meeting and asked everyone to help me

out by responding to my question. With this last stop I

compiled all of my responses and came up with the topics

that I am covering in this paper, although I certainly could

have selected many more I knew that I should set a limit.

When American students are thinking about

studying abroad, they are asked, "What do you perceive

about other countries?" Or "What do you plan on learning

about other cultures when you are studying abroad?" Some say things like, "I want to know what other cultures think about the United States and how they view my country as well as understanding how they view their own. I will experience a new way of life that will possibly be out of my comfort zone." And "Oh, it would be great! It would be just like being on vacation living with all the kangaroos." These mixed perceptions go both ways especially with the variety of help from technology such as the internet, television and movies. American students think every African walks around barefoot, cooks food over a campfire, and carries all necessary items on his or her head.

They think Australians surf incessantly and play regularly with kangaroos.

Many of the topics we have discussed in class have also come up during my interviews and questioning of the international student population here on the campus of MSUM, such as fear of the unknown. These questions

concerned their perceptions of the American culture and surroundings prior to coming to the United States and were reinforced when coming here. I will be covering folklore in cultural misperceptions, racism, television, personal contact, economic status, weather and the educational system.

Cultural misperception comes in many shapes and sizes.

Every culture creates stereotypes of other cultures and people they don't fully understand. Making generalizations about people who are different from you is a common yet problematic reaction to the fear of the unknown. International students that are thinking about studying in America have heard many stories about what it is like to study and live here. Some of these stories could be true, but for the most part they are lore, similar to many of the folklore stories we have studied. "Yet each form of folklore conveys a different perspective and represents the important ways we give life meaning beyond the immediate present" (Zeitlin, Kotkin, and

Cutting Baker 8). These folklore stories or misperceptions are transmitted down from a friend to a friend about one of these many topics. "Language gave him oral tradition; now he had the ability to tell another person what happened to him in a story of reminiscence" (Zeitlin, Kotkin, and Cutling Baker 6). This topic of cultural misperception through reminiscing with the international students will cover the folklore concerning individual personalities, television, personal space and economic status. "We may investigate in artifacts, as well as in texts of verbal lore or descriptions of customs, the kinds of things that are transmitted in repeated but varying forms casually by word of mouth or by demonstrations" (Brunvand, *The Study of American Folklore* 520).

International students have heard that Americans are very loud, rude and obnoxious. "The assumption that underlies all research in folklore is that, since nothing

in culture is meaningless or random, folklore - as a part of culture - inevitably has some function or meaning for those who create it and transmit it" (Brunvand, The Study of American Folklore 25). Below are just a few of the transmitted folktales of cultural misperceptions from our international students here on the campus of MSUM.

- **Australia**, "Many of my friends told me that Americans typically have a reputation of being loud and what I call pushy."

- **Latvia**, "I was told that, the young people are so rude - they burp and think that an "excuse me" helps. They put their feet on everything possible! And the worst thing is they don't think that either of these things is rude at all."

- **Kenya**, "Before I came here I heard so many stories about people here in the United States. Some people told me that the Americans are really outspoken and they sometimes say things that can hurt you and not realize it. They are not confidential and to avoid telling them everything about myself because they will tell everyone else and they don't care about anyone else apart from themselves."

These are just a few of the folktales about American's personalities that have been told within the varying cultures

of International students. There were many more to choose from and many that were the same but the consensus by international students prior to coming here was that Americans are rude. This validation has even been printed in study abroad magazines and brochures. In a brochure called *Australia Beyond the Outback*, Americans were seen as being, "crass and unsophisticated; and jokes about loud Americans and ugly Americans." However, it is important to understand that stereotypes are often untrue and they interfere with our ability to really understand a new culture and new people. What is true is that not everyone conforms to the stereotype.

International students have also heard horror stories about Americans being racist by others in their own country. These horror stories can fall into the category of urban legends. These urban legends have only increased since 9/11 and the war on terrorism. Many of the international students had heard from peers that because of their color or

the clothes they were wearing they would be followed in the stores and on the streets after 9/11. After sitting in class and talking about urban legends and the stories from the *Vanishing Hitchhiker* we have found antagonists in all of the stories. Our international students at times see some Americans as the racial antagonists; yet decide to come to America to study. "But the legends are truly national, often international, and the number of examples and variety of details could easily be expanded at least tenfold by the addition of the legend texts stored in other folklore archives and private collections" (Brunvand, *The Vanishing Hitchhiker* xiii). Some of our international students from Minnesota State University Moorhead shared a few of their racist urban legends with me, they are listed below:

- **Kenya**, "I was told that there is a lot of racism against international students. I was told to be careful of who I was to associate with because many young Americans take drugs, especially African Americans."

- **Japan**, "Before coming to America I was told that American people don't like to talk to foreign students."

- **Sri Lanka**, "Many of my friends told me that there is a lot of racial discrimination in America and to be aware of black people cause they are very dangerous."

Television is another medium of where lore can be transmitted, "A specific mass-cultural school, for instance, may develop out of the work of several American folklorists studying interrelations of oral and customary traditions with the mass media and advertising" (Brunvand, *The Study of American Folklore* 38). I believe what they are implying here is that mass media tends to reinforce stereotypes. Therefore, foreigners may develop their misperceptions because of the media. American television is very popular across the international borders. International students learn about America's culture, personal space, economic status, and appearances through this mode of transmission. They are filled with a varying origin of folklore that is misrepresented to them through the media.

- **Sri Lanka**, "What you see in TV and in movie programs will be exactly how the USA and people will be. I thought everything was like Beverly Hills and Melrose Place. Yet, when I came to Moorhead, it was like where are the Beverly Hills, type people..."

- **Sri Lanka**, "Everyone told me Americans are very hard to understand. They said before I go to America I should watch American movies."

- **Anonymous**, "I thought that all the women would look like the Baywatch babes from television."

Physical contact and social space will vary from culture to culture and we as Americans have a difficult time with our personal space. Americans do not like others to stand or come within their personal boundaries, which is approximately two feet while conversing. On the other hand, some international students are used to being very close in proximity and open with their relations. While to some cultures a warm hug is an appropriate form of greeting, others will be uncomfortable with anything more than a reserved handshake or small bow. Also, it is not uncommon

for girls to hold hands while walking in public in other cultures or in African nations for men to hold hands.

However, when they arrive in America they find that they cannot do this without being degraded.

- **Nepal**, "Don't walk with your girl friend hand in hand, people will think that you are a lesbian."

- **Anonymous**, "It is very common for us to kiss the same sex on the cheek during a greeting. However, here in America people will think you are weird or different, if you know what I mean."

It is sad that people cannot be themselves when going to another country. However, this is the case. Every person, no matter where this person is has to watch what they say, how they react, and their every move, however, what is most important for anyone traveling abroad is that they should do research about the country's culture they are going to be visiting. Many Americans feel that everyone should be like Americans, and that is so arrogant.

Another classification of transmitted folklore in relation to our international student population is about Americans economic status. Americans tend to be very careless with their finances, especially when abroad and people of that country can see this type of behavior. The natives see tourists buying items that they themselves would call junk. However, this "junk" helps the natives bring money into their home economy by selling these products. Nevertheless, because Americans buy these goods many international students think Americans are rich.

- **Sri Lanka**, "Many people told me that American people are very rich. They buy fancy things like cars and waste their money."

- **Sri Lanka**, "I was told that there are no beggars in America because everyone is rich. I was shocked when I saw them down the road, asking for money."

- **Sri Lanka**, "Many of my friends and relatives said, 'Don't ask for money from anyone even if they are a real good friend, because people in America are really concerned about their money.'"

- **Japan**, "A majority of Asians believe that America is rich and arrogant and that it want's to impose its will on the rest of the world."

Cold weather is one of the biggest fears that international students face before entering the United States. "The lore that circulates from person to person by word of mouth includes most traditions originally associated with the term folklore" (Brunvand, The Study of American Folklore 71). Numerous international students have been told by friends and families scary folkloric stories about how cold the weather gets in some parts of the United States. Of course, it does get cold here but locals are used to the temperatures and students unfamiliar with the cold temperatures can only compare them to what they know or the stories that they hear. The following stories come from students from many different cultures and a variety of climates. For example,

-Indonesia, "I had heard that it gets so cold here that your ears could freeze and fall off if you touch these parts of your body during the winter"

- **Azerbaijan**, "I was told that it is much colder in America than it is in Siberia! And it is."

- **Japan**, "If you move to America you have to wear five layers of clothing or more in the winter."

- **Japan**, "I heard from a student in KUIS about the coldness in Minnesota, However I have never experienced such a cold winter, I am really afraid of it. A few days ago (October), it was so cold and I cannot believe that it is gonna get much colder than that."

Another one of our students related this story to me, even after spending a winter here. "This is not a funny story, just a light tragedy of my first impressions. When I arrived to Moorhead (in winter) I felt like a frozen food in a huge freezer! It was extremely cold!" Stories like these are brought back home or transmitted to other students from their country which gives them the impression that it is like an iceberg here and that anything can happen to you in the cold such as your ears falling off.

Folklore in the education system runs the gamut. This folklore is in the form of printed materials from magazines to our textbooks we have used in class. "The folklore of schooling extends to virtually every topic that a student encounters, from academic fields and teachers to school lunches and organized sports" (Brunvand, *The Study of American Folklore* 55). The educational folklore has also been verbally transmitted from one friend that has studied in America in the past to another friend that is thinking about studying in America. These topics can range from the ease of classes to the complexity of classes, mandatory attendance to no attendance at all.

- **Latvia**, "Studying here is so easy and people still complain about how much they have to do for the classes! They should try a European school or university- they would not survive! People are very unappreciative of their teachers/professors in America."

- **Kenya**, "I imagined that the class room would be big class rooms and there would be many students and the professor to be strict."

- **Japan**, "I imagined that we would have a lot of assignments and reading textbooks would be a daily thing and it is." "I had heard that student would have much homework and classes are very hard, and they were right."
- **Sri Lanka**, "I had heard that the classrooms would be small on the average of 25 - 30 students and the professors would be available if help was needed."
- **Armenia**, "I was scared I would not be strong enough to keep up with other classmates. I was planning to work day and night at my homework to manage. If I missed a class in my home country it was OK. However, I would not like to miss any here."

The classroom environment may seem relaxed and informal, compared to their home country. International students need to realize that they can ask questions in the class room here unlike in some of their home countries and that group work is encouraged.

It is disheartening to think that so many of our International students believe all of the misconceptions and folklore stories that they have been told. Nevertheless, this is the reason for going to college and expanding our minds and knowledge of other topics.

It is this knowledge that I have learned through questions asked to the International students about their previous knowledge of Americans. "It is not the purpose of folklore study to debunk oral traditions although it may seem to those whom may have asked a folklorist..." (Brunvand, *The Vanishing Hitchhiker* xii). We are not here to debunk these Oral lore's but we, as Americans should try to make the people realize that others see Americans as being uninformed.

Cross cultural and urban folklore was a very difficult topic and I had to keep convincing myself that most everything that the international students had to say was folklore, folklife or an urban legend in one form or another. The stories were definitely an oral transmission of their misconceptions of life in America prior to coming here. The other reason for my reluctance to this topic was that it was on international folklore and the title of the class was American Folklore. However, the folklore was about

American culture and American topics. "We would love to have collected and included the stories of the new immigrants, and the many groups from other parts of the country whose experiences are not represented here"

(Zeitlin, Kotkin, and Cutting Baker Introduction).

Although our international students are not immigrants they certainly could be. There are numerous misconceptions by foreigners about the United States and Americans. Sadly, the people who have not visited or studied in America initiate much of this misinformation. It is very important that these misconceptions are fully understood by all so that we can help discourage international students from obtaining the wrong information. We need to reach out more and not less when encouraging students to study there or abroad. As a student told me from Pakistan, "It is very important for us to have a cross cultural education. We learn from others and others learn from us as long as questions are asked."

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Janet Hohenstein

MLA 690

Memoirs of the American Family

Fall Semester 20043

Dr. Reed

A Letter to my Birth Date

Dear Savanna,

Sometimes when you wish someone a happy birthday they say, "what is so happy about it?" Well, one of the things that makes me happy is the thought that I have lived another year with my family and the other is receiving you for a birthday present. Let me tell you how the family story goes.

Every year my family would go to our trailer on Star Lake for the summer, but one summer was special. This was the summer I met your Grandpa Danny.

The year was 1975 and I was fourteen years old. I remember walking up to Rockey's Resort to get a snack. It was a small store and restaurant combined into one. Out in

the parking lot by the front door I found my twin brother Jeff talking to this really cute guy. He had long, curly hair, a mustache and the most beautiful blue eyes you could imagine. Jeff finally introduced me to your Grandpa and they asked me if I wanted to go for a ride in his friend's car. We drove around the countryside and finally ended up parking in a wayside rest by Round Lake. Jeff and his friend stayed in the car with the radio blaring; your Grandpa and I stood outside by the back of the car. The moon shone across the lake with just a few ripples from the slight breeze. It was very romantic. I even remember the song that was playing on the radio; it was *Sweet Pea* by Tommy Roe. This was our first real encounter and the start of our relationship.

As time went on the summer flew by. Grandpa and I would go on picnics together to Phelp's Mill; we spent countless hours together sitting by the waterfall, walking through the mill and pitching rocks into the river. We knew

that our summer would soon be over. I would have to go back to Moorhead, to school and Grandpa would stay at the lakes and work with your Great Grandpa Hohenstein. We were not sure how we would see each other over the winter, but we knew that we would work it out; we were in love. That dreadful day finally came and my family moved back to Moorhead. We said our good byes and Danny said he would call and come to visit me. It seemed like it took forever for the weekend, but it finally arrived. I was up in my bedroom cleaning and my Grandma Johnson was there visiting. I heard the doorbell ring and Grandma came to find me. She told me that there was a handsome young gentleman to see me. I flew down the steps two at a time to find Grandpa standing in the front door. We went outside to be alone where we hugged, talked and planned our weekend.

Throughout the winter months Grandpa would come to Moorhead almost every other weekend; sometimes he would even come early and pick me up at school. Everyone would

hang out of the school bus and cheer when I climbed into his car. Sometimes I would go down to the lakes and spend the weekend with him. To get away from home, I would tell my mom that I was going to spend the weekend at a friend's house and she would let me go, no questions asked. During the week, he would call me, and we would talk for hours about our times together and how we missed each other. After a while my parents, Great Grandma and Grandpa Stedje, invited Grandpa into the house, and they would let him spend the nights on the couch in the basement. They said that there was no reason for him to be staying elsewhere when he could just as well stay in the house. I remember one night we sat at Great Grandma and Grandpa's house watching television and talked about the day that we could get married. I know that this is hard to believe, me being 14 and Grandpa being 21, but we did. We could not wait to spend our lives together. However, we both knew that this idea would be almost impossible with my age,

and our parents probably would not allow it. Little did we know that it was going to happen sooner than we thought.

Savanna, this is where your whole life could have been changed. Savanna, just think, if we had accepted the advice of the doctors and others in our lives, where would you have been? Your Daddy would never have been born and, in turn, you, our first joyful granddaughter would never have blessed our lives. The tale that follows is a brief description into your Grandma and Grandpa's experience of life, love and determination.

It seemed like only a couple of weeks after Grandpa Danny and I talked about marriage that Auntie Jayne came to me in the kitchen.

Jayne asked, "Janet are you pregnant? Mom has noticed that you have not been using the tampons like you should be."

I got very nervous and scared: "Jayne, I'm not sure if I'm pregnant or not. I haven't had my period in a couple of months."

In the back of my mind I thought I was, but I knew that the longer I waited to find out the less likely I would be made to have an abortion.

Jayne said, "I'll call and make a doctor's appointment for you at Clay County Health."

I said, "Ok, just tell me when it is and I'll go."

The day I went to the doctor to find out if I was pregnant was very emotional. It seemed as though I could not stop crying and my stomach was doing summersaults.

Grandpa and I went up to the clinic. I remember entering the doctor's office at Clay County Health upstairs in the Moorhead Center Mall. Grandpa stayed downstairs waiting by the elevator for me until I was done. I had never been to a doctor for the type of examination I would be going through, and I had no idea of what was going to happen. The most

information that I had received about sex was from your Great Grandpa Stedje. Sitting in his usual spot by the lake with a drink in his hand (vodka and lemonade) he said to me, "Janet, you are getting older now and the boys will be after you. Just make sure they don't touch." I thought to myself, "a little late, Dad," smiled at him and walked away.

I remember having sex education in school but they didn't really cover as much as they should have. I know now that parents don't want it taught to their children in school but often those are the same parents that will not talk to their children about sex education and life. In school, we were taught about the body and how it worked; the boys in one room and the girls in another. We were taught about staying clean, our body changing and how menstruation works, not enough information for a child going through puberty and wanting unanswered questions answered.

While sitting in the waiting room, many things were going through my mind especially the outcome of everything:

Grandpa, this baby, school, how we would do it all and how people were going to react. Finally the nurse called my name and I went into the cold, sterile room. The nurse ordered me to undress, put on a gown and climb up on the examination table. I did as she requested. While I lay on the table, legs spread apart for the world to see everything, my modesty lost, the Doctor started asking me questions. The questions were something like, "How old are you? Do you plan on keeping this baby? How do you plan on taking care of it?" While he asked these questions, I just remember getting more and more upset and started crying. He made me feel so miserable. How could he be so nasty and uncaring?

When the doctor's examination was over, he said, "Well, I don't know if this is what you want to hear or not, but you are pregnant. I highly recommend you get an abortion." I couldn't believe that a doctor would tell me that I should abort my baby. I was devastated. He also told me that I would not have much time to make this decision, because I was almost

three months along. After that, the risks associated with an abortion increase. We had ultimately a week to decide if we were going to keep the baby or not. In my mind, there was no question.] was going to keep this baby no matter what.

Shortly after we found out I was pregnant, Grandpa and I went shopping and he said, "Let's look at engagement rings." I didn't know it at the time, but later on he went back to the store and bought one for me. Later that day we were at my house when he said, "Lets go for a ride." I put my coat on and we went out to the car. When I put my hands in my pocket to get my mittens out, there was the engagement ring box. I took it out and started crying. Grandpa said, 'Will you marry me?' I said, "YES." We talked about what we were going to do and how we would tell our parents, but decided to wait for awhile. It took a couple of weeks before my mom and dad saw the ring on my finger.

I was so fearful as to what they were going to say. I

remember that I didn't hide the fact that I was wearing it; I

just went about my daily routine. One day, my mom grabbed my hand and said, "What the hell is this?" I said, "Danny and I are getting married." I remember her saying something to me like, "You're too young to get married. You don't know what you are talking about." I remember telling her that if we couldn't get married, I would run away and never return or talk to them again. Over the next few months, Great Grandma tried many things to discourage us from getting married. She had us meet with counselors, ministers, and some of her friends who tried to talk us out of our decision. Then one day she said, 'We should go and talk to Danny's parents and see how they feel about this whole thing.' Oh my god I thought I was going to be sick, my stomach turned into knots.

We arrived at the house, and Great Grandma Hohenstein was in the kitchen. Great Grandpa was sitting on the chair in the living room. There were a few formalities, introductions, etc. because they had never met my mom,

Great Grandma Stedje. Then the accusations started flying. My mom started in, "What do you think should be done about this? They are too young to get married. How could you let this happen? Didn't you see what was going on? In my opinion Janet should have an abortion." Grandpa's parents were coming back with the same accusations. Tears in my eyes, sobbing, I kept saying that it takes two to do what happened and it was my choice just as much as his. You know what strong Catholics Great Grandma and Grandpa Hohenstein are. They would never believe in an abortion, so at least this was on my side. The rest of the day seems foggy to me except that the confrontation was finally over. Grandpa and I remained as stubborn and determined as ever. I was going to marry your Grandpa no matter what anyone said!

It seemed as though it took forever, but the two families finally gave in, none of them very happy about the whole ordeal. Therefore, the wedding plans finally went into effect.

The day was picked; July 23, 1976. We couldn't do it any sooner because we had to wait until after my fifteenth birthday. I could not get married in Moorhead, Minnesota at the age of fifteen, but I could in North Dakota with my parents' consent. Grandpa found out that he had to become a resident of North Dakota to be able to marry me, so he obtained a post office box in Wahpeton. We drove to St. John's Hospital in Fargo, and had blood tests done in order for us to get a marriage license. Great Grandma and Great Auntie Jayne worked out the other details: food and cake for the reception, and everything else that goes along with a wedding, preparing the house, yard, and announcements, etc.

A wedding day is presumed to be the happiest day of a person's life. It should be a day of new and joyous beginnings. Grandma's and Grandpa's wasn't. Ours was one of the worst days of our lives. We were going to the Justice of the Peace in Wahpeton, North Dakota to exchange vows.

The families all piled into the cars and drove the forty-five miles to Wahpeton. Once there we met up with Great Grandma Hohenstein and all of Grandpa's brothers and sisters. Great Grandpa Hohenstein did not come because he said he had to work. (He worked for himself and I never did forgive him for not coming!) When we got to the Justice of the Peace, we found out that his office was closed because he was out fishing. Grandma Steed suggested we go back to Moorhead and ask our minister at Trinity Lutheran to marry us. Grandpa Danny and Great Grandma Hohenstein argued outside by his car.

Great Grandma said, "if you marry outside the Catholic Church you will be kicked out."

Grandpa said, "But the Catholic Church won't marry us right away without the marriage classes and the acknowledgment of the rings. You don't want the baby born out of wedlock. What else is there to do?"

"I guess you're right. Although I don't approve but as long as you make it right at some point, I will go along with it."

Grandpa and I stayed out by the car for a while, hugging and crying hoping this would all be over soon. After Great Grandma Stedje made several calls, we finally had a back-up plan. We all drove over to First Lutheran in Fargo by St. Lukes Hospital and Pastor Twedt meet us there. Pastor Twedt was a wonderful old minister with a heart of gold. It was a very small service with just the immediate family in attendance. Pastor Twedt officiated our wedding vows and had some kind words to say after the ceremony.

He said, "It does not matter what church you attend as long as you believe in God and have the love in your heart." The wedding was finally over and we all went back to Great Grandma and Grandpa Stedje's house for the reception. The reception was held in the backyard, with tables for the gifts and food spread out. We took pictures by the poplar trees of

the wedding party. The attendance was small, there were a few people there mainly Jayne's friends and some family members, but at least it was over. No more fighting and arguing with each other. We were finally free to start our own lives together.

Two months after the wedding, your daddy, Joseph was added to our family. He decided to join us on September 3, 1976. I remember the night I went into labor. It all started about 10:00 p.m. but didn't get hard until 6:00 a.m. I sent Grandpa to work because it was payday and we needed the money. Great Auntie Jayne came over to our apartment in Moorhead, and I remember her trying to get ready for work in our bathroom. I was pacing around the apartment walking from the kitchen to the living room and back. She was in the bathroom curling her hair when she asked me how far apart the contractions were. I said, "I think about three minutes." She decided we'd better go, so we piled into her little red Vega and off to the hospital we went. Jayne always had a

dream that she would end up taking me to the hospital and we would meet a train. Well, guess what happened? On our way to St. Ansgard's hospital, we met a train. I think we both thought we were going to have this baby right then and there. Finally the train passed and we were able to get to the hospital. We walked through the doors and the receptionist got a wheelchair for me, wheeled me up to the labor room and checked me over. I was ready to deliver at any minute. They had put a call into the doctor and Great Auntie Jayne called Great Grandma to have her try to get in contact with Grandpa at work. With no cell phones in the 70's, this was no easy task.

Great Grandma called the General Contractor he was working for and they had to send a person out to the job site to tell him about the news. In the meantime, I was ready to have this baby.

When the nurse came into the room, she checked to see how far I had dilated and said that they did not have time

to prep me for delivery. She told Great Auntie Jayne to come in and make me breathe to relax me.

Jayne said, "Breathe, one, two, three. Breathe, one, two, three."

Each time she did this I would scream. I wouldn't say bad words I would just scream as if I was in excruciating pain. I didn't want her there or anybody else. I was going to do this by myself. I didn't need anybody's help.

The doctor came in to the labor room, right off the delivery room and broke my water. It seemed as though it just exploded or gushed out of me. Once this was done, they hurried me into the delivery room. It was a very cold and sterile room. They had mirrors up in the corners of the room so you could watch the baby being born. But, how could I watch when with each contraction I was bearing down with my eyes closed. Fifteen minutes later your daddy was born. If Grandpa and I had not been so persistent and determined, your daddy might not have been born at all.

Our life had now changed dramatically. Instead of two mouths to feed, we now had three. We had the responsibility of raising this baby together with no help from anyone but each other. I remember my mom, and your Great Grandma Stedje telling me, "You got yourself into this mess and you will have to take care of any problems that will arise. Don't even think of calling me when you don't know what to do when the baby is crying!" My thoughts after this conversation was, fine I won't bother you. My determination even stronger, I was going to make this work.

With winter months coming on work was getting limited for Grandpa and being self-employed, he could not receive unemployment. Nobody had informed us of the programs that were available out there such as WIC, food stamps and commodities for those in need. We finally decided we could no longer afford the apartment we were living in and moved into one of Great Grandma and Grandpa's cabins: the old house.

Savanna, you have seen this house and even played in it. However, the one you have played in is much bigger than the one your Grandpa, Grandma and daddy lived in. It is still the same house but it was much smaller then. It had a fuel oil space heater in the living room that heated the entire structure. There was one bedroom, a living room, a kitchen and a bathroom (sink, toilet, and shower) on the first floor and the upstairs was just one big room, the attic. The steps leading up to this room were very steep, and you had to be careful in climbing them. The floor in the upstairs had a vent cut into it so that when the heat would rise it would heat the upstairs too. This was a summer rental cabin, built in the 1920's. There was no insulation in the walls and the windows were all single panes, very cold in the winter. I remember many mornings we would wake up and see our breath. Your dad's little hands would almost be purple because they were so cold. It was hard to keep the covers on him as he got older, because he could kick them off. In the winter right

after Christmas, the water in our cabin would always freeze up in the pipes and would not thaw out until around Easter. Every year we tried to prevent this from happening by leaving the water run just a trickle every night with the doors under the sink open to keep the pipes warm, but, never fail, they would still freeze. During these years, times were tough. I recently came across a tax form from H&R Block when we moved recently and in 1977, Grandpa had made \$3,000 for the entire year. Since I was only 15 years old there was no way that I could get a job to help financially. Therefore, we would let the bills pile up in the wintertime and try to pay them off in the summer. At least we didn't have a telephone so I wouldn't have to put up with the bill collectors calling and wanting their money.

After living in poverty for almost 12 years, it was time to change. Your Grandpa came home one day and said lets move. I remember asking him repeatedly if this is what he really wanted and he always said yes. We did and it was the

best decision we made. We now have our own house, telephone, car, etc etc. Not that material items are important but they sure make life a little bit easier. We have many things we never dreamed of having. Remembering this past life seems at times an eternity ago and yet it seems as though it was just yesterday when my children were being born and now they are having children themselves; beautiful, wonderful children like you, Savanna.

I will never forget the day your mom and dad told me I was going to be a Grandma for the first time. It was right before Christmas and they came to the house and said that they were trying to figure out what to get me for Christmas but they knew what they were giving me for my birthday. I said, "Just give me what you were going to give me for my birthday." They looked at each other with a quizzical look and Auntie Missy looked at them and started laughing and crying at the same time. She already knew about you. It finally dawned on me that they were going to give me a

grandchild on my birthday, God willing. I was so excited. I couldn't believe it, my first grandchild.

The wait seemed long but in the process, I was able to buy you all kinds of wonderful items. I was not going to let my grandchildren go without as my own children had done. You were going to have everything possible without being spoiled. Spoiling was not an option (well maybe a little,) but loving you dearly was. I started knitting you a blanket that was universal in color. It was a variegated yarn of yellows, blues, purples, pinks and greens. I decided that once the you were born I would finish it off in either blue or pink, just to give it that final touch. Even though the doctor said you would be a girl there had been so many stories of families planning for a girl and it was born a boy, or visa versa, I was not going to take that chance.

On the day I turned 37, you were born. What a wonderful birthday present. Our Birth Date. I couldn't believe it, I was going to be a grandma, how wonderful. All along, I

told your mom that if she was going to have this baby on my birthday, it had to be after 5:00 p.m. because I was so busy at work during this time of year. Of course, what were the chances that you would be born on my birthday? Well, guess what? I received a call at work about 10:00 a.m. saying that the wonderful event was starting and they would keep me posted. Finally, after receiving calls and updates throughout the day I received the final call at 2:00 p.m. that she was ready to go. I was in the auditorium at Northwest Technical College and we had a full house.

We were conducting orientation and registration with the new freshman so most of the audience was well aware as to what was going on in my life. When they saw our receptionist come into the auditorium and she gave me the word they all clapped and wished me well and off I went to the hospital.

When I arrived at Dakota Hospital, Auntie Missy was waiting by the door for me. We rushed up to your hospital

room arriving just in time. The nurse let me in the hospital room after receiving an OK from your mom and dad. Your mom was just starting to deliver. Your Dad was sitting on the chair beside her afraid that he might faint while watching the birth of his child. They didn't need to end up having two in the hospital. At one of your mom's checkups, your dad ended up fainting, (your daddy the big brave hunter.) Your head was just crowning when I got into the room. Once your head came out and your face was turned up to see everyone, you were so sweet. It did not take much time at all and within minutes you were born, a beautiful baby girl, Savanna Jo. The nurses took you and cleaned you up, took your vitals and measured you. They made sure that all your body parts were working fine. At the same time, the doctor was attending your mom making sure she was fine. It was such a moving moment that there were tears in everyone's eyes for this beautiful event, the event of a child being born.

This was such a memorable moment, watching the birth of my first grandchild on my birthday. Well, I guess it is our birthday now. Your birth was a wonderful birthday present. Thank you, for the best Birth Date ever.

Love, Grandma Hohenstein