The Personal Face of Islam

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Two Linfield alumni found a new way of looking at life after living and working in Japan for a year.

It’s been nearly a decade since their experience, but Dave and Anastacia (Sims) Dillon, both ’89, agree their lives have been enriched by the pricelessness connections they made while serving as assistant English teachers at high schools in Hitachi-Ota, Japan, through the Japan Exchange Training program in 1995.

“There’s a great connection between living abroad and the value of long-learning that Linfield works so diligently to instill in its students,” said Dave, a Linfield College trustee and executive vice president of the Oregon Farm Bureau.

Even before their marriage in 1990, Dave and Anastacia discussed the importance of living abroad.

So they jumped at the opportunity with JET. Dave resigned from his position as press and community liaison for former U.S. Sen. Bob Packwood and Anastacia took a leave of absence from her post as assistant director of financial aid at Linfield.

Although Dave said he expected to learn new things, make new friends and have new experiences in Japan, he did not anticipate the change of perspective.

“As a Linfield student, Anastacia took four years of Japanese and studied abroad in Japan twice. Dave had little Japanese language training prior to their departure, but carefully observed the cues around him in Japan. “Paying attention to how things are done is as important as vocabulary,” he said. “Often, what is not said, but what is intimated or gestured, is more important than the actual words that are said.”

Anastasia often draws upon skills she acquired in Japan in her current job as associate director of student financial services at Lewis and Clark College, where she occasionally works with students preparing to study abroad and international students studying in Portland.

“I can relate to the confusion international students sometimes experience,” she said. “They can come to me for help.”

The Dillons returned to Japan in 2003 with their son, Nathan, and visited Tsutomu (Ben) Kusama Yamaguchi, a Kanto Gakuin University student whom they hosted at Linfield in 1993. Ben and his wife, Megumi, have a three-year-old daughter, whom they refer to as Nathan’s Japanese sister.

Both Dave and Anastacia agree travel will remain a priority for their family.

“We’re happily infected with the travel bug,” Anastasia said. “Once you’ve done something that’s outside your regular comfort zone, it makes other barriers look smaller.” — Laura Davis

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“At a time when the world is mired in fear, violence, distrust and misconceptions, we are fortunate to have this opportunity to engage in conversation about faces and cultures that are different from ours,” Ismail said. “Dr. Chishti gave us a glimpse of some of the misconceptions of Islam and allowed our community to ask questions, to explore and to comprehend.” — Laura Davis

Saadah Khawar Khan Chishti helped put a personal face on Islam this fall.

Chishti, a visiting Islamic scholar from Pakistan, captivated Linfield community members when she served as a scholar-in-residence through the Understanding Contemporary Islam (UCI) program, jointly sponsored by the American University of Beirut in Lebanon and the Council for International Exchange of Scholars in Washington, D.C. She took part in classes and spoke on a variety of topics, both at Linfield and in the McMinnville community.

Clothed in flowing, traditional shalwar-kameez-dupattah/chador suits, Chishti spoke earnestly and often with students, faculty and community members, dispelling stereotypes about Islam. Her soft-spoken demeanor enhanced her ability to relate ties between Islam and Christianity and to explain her religion in a way that sparked interest and dialogue in the community. She emphasized that Islam, an Abrahamic tradition, believes in dialogue and co-existence.

“When things become familiar, there’s a tendency to stop examining them. Being punched out of that familiar setting was a chance to see things new again.” — Laura Davis

Saadah Khawar Khan Chishti, visiting Islamic scholar from Pakistan, spent much of her semester at Linfield engaged in conversation with students. She is pictured here with Emily Cleve ’06, left, and Kristen Hevenor ’08.