A Young Man’s Car...

About a year ago the MFIS office received an unusual request. Henry, a student from Finland on a one-year engineering course at the UW, planned to buy a car. He had the money, but not the know-how. Fuel is expensive in Finland, so he had not spent much time around cars. His plan was to buy a popular car – a “young man’s car” – in the U.S., travel to the West Coast, and then return to Finland. His plan was ambitious, and it would take a special MFIS Connection to make it succeed.

Bob Nellis, an MFIS guy who, he says, “has more time than money,” rose to the challenge. Henry’s dream car was a Dodge Charger RT – a model not sold in Finland, and a car beyond cool in a certain cohort. Bob and Henry did their homework, and Henry purchased the 2009 model in Whitewater. The car was just the thing for a classic American road trip along Route 66 for Henry and his friends Jaakko, Risto and Janne when they finished their studies in Madison.

But Bob was able to help Henry and his friends in another way. They wanted to take a trip to Nicaragua. The only problem? They knew almost nothing about their new destination. Once again, Bob came to the rescue. He had been to Nicaragua about 20 times, in a range of volunteer capacities. He had done hearing assessments for orphans, delivered used medical equipment, and helped with uniforms for a soccer team organized by his friend, Ricardo. Ricardo used to live in Madison; in fact, he was a U.W. alumnus. Voila! Henry, Jaakko and Risto had a contact in Nicaragua!

Once again: the MFIS connection in action!
Food and Friends
by Hannah Pinkerton

When I think about my times with international students, I think of food. So many of my favorite experiences have involved holidays, meals, and cooking. A good meal makes everyone happy, and it gives us chances to learn about what makes us alike, and what makes us different.

Every year, I look forward to Thanksgiving, when I get to share a classic American feast with new friends from around the world. Students from Thailand, Malaysia, Japan, and even Germany thrill at their first taste of turkey. Sure, some of the dishes seem strange at first. I also need a little finesse to explain “dressing” or “stuffing,” and why we would eat anything called that. A student from China was particularly intrigued by cranberry, a totally foreign fruit to him. But in the end, everyone is happy and well fed.

Thanksgiving meals are not just for showing off our culture, however. I always get a chance to learn about other cultures and holidays as well. My new friends are happy to tell about their favorite holidays and dishes. Sometimes the biggest delight is learning what we have in common, like when the girl from India and the boy from Pakistan discovered how many dishes they both liked. And we always find time for pictures, showing off our families and homes.

I have had other culinary adventures with my international friends, as well. One year, we hosted two Chinese students. The two young women moved into an apartment, and we helped them pick out the necessary kitchen equipment. We did not entirely agree about what was necessary; a rice cooker seemed to me like something they would want. But they assured me they knew how to cook. One week passed, then the women called to concede defeat: every night they burned the rice, and they needed a rice cooker. Luckily, a neighbor of mine had an unused cooker, which gave the students a year of reliable rice-cooking service. They returned it at the end of the year with much gratitude, and we have made sure to pass on the lucky rice cooker to students ever since.

Food – an important part of the MFIS connection.

The Snowball Effect
What started as a chance connection became a long-term love affair with another culture

The snowball began in 1994. Really, it was more of a flake at the time. But a snowball starts with just a few flakes, building in size.

The Fayrams were really busy and had decided not to host a student for the Temporary Home Stay program. Luckily, they relented when the desperate call came through. Soon after, Giuseppe, the first of The Italians, arrived. Consequently, Marilyn decided to turn away from learning Spanish at night at the local high school and toward learning Italian. After Giuseppe left the Fayrams, he had friends who needed a warm welcome, too. Arturo, then Gianmarco, showed up. The snowball grew in size, with students making a second visit, then a third. Frederico, Stefania, Alessandro – more Italians.

The snowball grows larger; students leave and return, and the lovely Italian language has a convert. Marilyn studies diligently

Marilyn and Giuseppe on the waterfront in Monopoli di Bari. Giuseppe was the first Italian student that Marilyn and her husband hosted.

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and practices in the warmth of her kitchen with these young students, these young friends. They gather at the Union with David, to talk politics and culture over beer and bad wine. They make trips to Devil’s Lake and dance to the Saturday night bands at the lake’s edge. They hike across a frozen Lake Mendota. The Fayrams take trips to Italy – The Italians are getting married and Italian needs to be spoken. American and Italian families celebrate together. How many weddings? Six and counting. How many times to Italy? Nine and counting.

The snowball gathers all the flakes together, and it changes the Fayrams in the process. The MFIS connection works.

You are invited to the MFIS Annual Meeting on April 30

The Wisconsin Institutes of Discovery (WID) is the site of the dessert, cheese, and fruit buffet event. This is the time our members celebrate together our past year’s service and gather steam for our next season.

Tours of the beautiful new public/private facility at Orchard and the 1300 block of University Avenue will be offered before the event. Have you seen WID’s new building? This is a great opportunity to do so. See old MFIS friends and make new ones. Bring new volunteers for a reduced price.

Put it on your calendar and watch for a flyer with more details (parking, etc.) and how to register. Or register now at our website www.iss.wisc.edu/mfis or call 263-4010.

The registration deadline is April 23.

Cost is $15 for members; $10 for new members; $5 for children.

Donations for MFIS programs always welcome and appreciated.

WID and MFIS - get the connection April 30.
Volunteers Needed
Volunteers are needed for the following positions:

- Temporary Home Stay coordinator
- Coordinator for Thanksgiving Hospitality
- English as a Second Language instructor
- Publicity
- Recruitment
- Global Friends conversation partners
- Office volunteer
- Tabling some Saturdays at the Dane County Farmer’s Market
- Newsletter Editor

To learn more about a position, see our website or call Sherry at 608-279-7437. To volunteer, please e-mail info@mfismadison.org or call 608-263-4010.

Have a look at the new and improved MFIS website: www.iss.wisc.edu/mfis

Find us on Facebook, too!

Madison Friends of International Students
Room 223, UW Red Gym
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Madison, WI 53706-1400