

OPEN EYES

• HANNAH WILLIS

There was something about the baby that caused a stir within me like the flies buzzing around my face and on my skin. Was it the statistics playing in my head reminding me that she had a 20 percent chance of dying before her fifth birthday? My thoughts moiled like the Indus River — slow in places and fast in others, but always churning the muddy heart away from the pristine Himalayan Mountains.

I motioned for her to come to me, and she came neither shyly nor boldly. As I held her, I noticed that her deep-olive skin was covered with dirty red scabs of which she seemed to be unaware. She stared at me for a long time without smiling or making any noise. My teammates also stared at me — I suppose they were wondering how I could hold this diseased baby without a diaper so close to me.

Four years later, as I hear daily newscasts about the contentions that plague the Pakistani people, I am held captive to the memory of the baby with the blue-green eyes. That memory, along with the memories of all my other experiences, is something I will truly never be able to reconcile with my white, American, Christian, educated, capitalist, feminist, hedonist background. I didn't have a voice to ask questions at the time, and even now I'm not sure what my questions would be. Immersing myself in endless cultural studies seems only to emphasize the fact that I will never be able to understand and fully grasp all of the complexities of a different culture and of my experiences with that culture.

Regardless of my preparation, I was bombarded with the blunt unfamiliarity of the very things I had been studying for months. Maybe it is not my place to fully understand, but rather to celebrate the beauty that I have seen and never forget the people with whom I have shared the sky.

• **HANNAH WILLIS** traveled to Pakistan in the summer of 1998, before starting college at the University of New Mexico. After three years, she transferred to the UW and is now a senior English major.