

SMASHED WINDOWS & MILK JUGS

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When the Los Angeles riots broke in May 1992, my soon-to-be wife and I happened to be travelling into the area to visit relatives. We spent the first day visiting Dawn's cousin in a quiet middle-class neighborhood in Riverside, completely unaware of the carnage an hour away, until later that night when we turned on the television and watched in horror as the neighboring city burned. Despite our fascination with the news coverage, the events still seemed remote until the next morning when we woke to find someone had smashed the window on the driver's side of our Honda Accord.

This one senseless act—nothing else in the neighborhood had been touched, and nothing taken from our car—made the violence personal and immediate. We altered our plans to drive through the city, diverting southward instead, to Escondido and Dawn's grandparents. As we drove along I-15, the wind ripped through the open window, a constant reminder of what had happened and what was still happening in Los Angeles. I gripped tight the steering wheel, aware of the fragile thread that holds society together, and how quickly it can unravel.

That night we watched from another television as the nightmare of Los Angeles continued. The next morning, however, found us at the swimming pool of the local country club. Dawn and I relaxed near the hot tub, while her grandmother and a handful of other retired women bobbed in the shallow end of the pool, lifting and sinking empty milk jugs as part of their aerobic exercise routine. The music lilted through the clear morning air. The women laughed. No one talked about Los Angeles. That pool, its own world of privilege, was perfectly removed from the violence. And so was I, save one smashed window. The swimming pool scene brought back a surreal feeling I had while at BYU just over a year before, when the first bombs began to fall on Baghdad. I heard the news as it broke on the radio, then walked out into the still evening of campus and watched happy couples strolling, hand in hand, completely unfazed that American servicemen were just then delivering bombs, killing people half a world away.

Now, in the wake of September 11th and the increasing cycle of violence in the Holy Land, a new generation is waking up to the complexities of the world. And yet these horrors—packaged and sold, complete with logos and theme music, over cable and internet—are still remote for most of our students, unless by happenstance one of them gets a window smashed. Our culture and geography make it easy to insulate ourselves. We teach our students how to shield themselves from the evils that surround

them, to avoid temptation, to be not of the world. But how well are we preparing them for the other half of that equation—to be in the world, as they must be—and not to simply exist or even survive, but to thrive, to make a difference, to help fashion a new and better world.

The articles and images in this issue of *Perspective* address the difficulty of preparing ourselves and our students to be better citizens. From Robert Worrell’s plea to teach better logic skills to the Service Learning Committee’s forum discussion on preparing students to be active in the community, our contributors discuss the process of living in and improving the world, empowering students to do the same. Even our “open category” section—from Darren Clark’s photographs of the altered landscape to Dianne Forbis’s shattering experience dealing with her late husband’s Alzheimer’s—complements our main theme, describing for us the experiences of real people and concrete transformations in local geography and intimate circumstances. These articles and images are about people living in the world, reacting to and affecting it for better or worse.

Consequently, we invite you into this great conversation. We hope the perspectives expressed in these pages will help as you try to prepare students to move beyond our campus and their limited vision, to move into the world with open eyes, aware of moral complexities and persistent problems, but with faith, hope, and charity, willing to take risks in the effort to find and implement improvement. ☺