



Aeqvitas

The Voice of the San Domenico Social Justice Club, named in honor of the Roman goddess of justice & fair dealings.

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Study. Reflect. Act.

Spring 2011

Director Valarie Kaur Inspires San Domenico with Stories and Film

By Alessandra Jurick '12

Over the course of two afternoons in late April, the student body and faculty gathered in the Hall of the Arts to view the award-winning documentary, *Divided We Fall: Americans in the Aftermath*, and to hear a presentation from the director of the film, Valarie Kaur.

The film, which was released in 2008, documents Kaur's journey from her hometown of Fresno, California to the site of the recently destroyed World Trade Center in New York City, exploring American perspectives and assumptions along the way. Kaur and her cousin Sonny, both Indian-Americans and adherents of the Sikh faith, explored the untold story of hate crimes against Sikhs and Muslims in the aftermath of the 9/11



A Sikh man cleans up after his property was vandalized in the wake of 9/11 (excerpted from film).

Americans are sometimes seen as “perpetually foreign and potential terrorists”.

According to Kaur, she was most interested in understanding, “why Americans were targeting fellow Americans.” Kaur, who was just 20-years-old at the time of her road trip across the United States began the journey just a week after the murder of Balbir Singh Sodhi, a Sikh gas station owner in Mesa, Arizona. Sodhi had been targeted because of his traditional turban and beard, which his murderer wrongfully assumed was an indication that he was al Qaeda sympathizer. This would be the first of several hate crimes against Sikhs after 9/11. Kaur's family was all too familiar with this sort of violence—her grandfather after anti-Sikh riots took place throughout India in 1984.

In her presentation to the San Domenico student body, Kaur spoke of how the film has affected her life. “We are more diverse than the categories we have inherited can manage,” Kaur explained of our generation. She told of how she denied her “assigned script” by leaping into “whirlwinds” of truth, justice, and love.

Now a student at Yale Law School, Kaur still continues to tour the country and has spoken in 150 U.S. cities. In addition, she coordinates The

Groundswell Movement, which aims to open the discussion about various multi-faith issues and unity. Kaur asserted that these issues will be especially prominent on the upcoming tenth anniversary of 9/11, and possibly now, following the killing of al Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden in Pakistan last week.

Senior Elle Koagedal, who was instrumental in bringing the film and its director to campus, first met Kaur at the Parliament of World Religions in Sydney, Australia in December 2009. “I wanted Valarie to come to campus because everything

she stands for is so aligned with our school's mission to be socially aware and independent young women,” said Koagedal. “She is a truly admirable person.”



Kaur interviewing Amrik Chawla beside the ruins of the World Trade Center. Chawla had been chased by a mob just after the terrorist attacks in 2001. (excerpted from film)

terrorist attacks. Kaur explained that she and her cousin both experienced prejudices and she mentioned that Sikh



Sister Margaret Deiner, OP, with director Valarie Kaur, senior Elle Koagedal, Sister Gervaise Valpey, O.P.

Kaur's collegiality forged a connection to the student body. “She kept referring to us as ‘sisters’ and she was an inspiring example of a woman leader,” said junior Clo Martin. “She is the type of person who San Domenico students aspire to be.” For Sister Gervaise Valpey, who also travelled to the Parliament of World Religions, Kaur's experiences and message were evocative of social justice leaders of the past. Valpey recalled her favorite quote from the fourteenth-century Saint Catherine of Siena, who devoted her life to serving the poor and sick. “If you do what you are meant to do, you will set the world on fire.”

San Domenico Hosts *Body Talk* World Premiere: By Teens, For Teens

By Abby Costello '11

On Monday April 4, San Domenico hosted the world premiere of *Body Talk*, a new DVD made by The Body Positive, an organization dedicated to challenging the messages that media and society promote about weight, health, and beauty, particularly as they relate to young women.

The event included a reception, a screening of the 26-minute film, and a half-hour question and answer session with the co-founders Connie Sobczak and Elizabeth Scott, and a panel of San Domenico students, consisting of seniors Marea Otter and Allie Simpson, along with sophomores Lynn Falesoga and Olivia Ayanruoh, and freshman Edna Siljdedich, as well as myself.

Around 200 people attended, including students from other schools, such as the Branson School, as well as students from other middle schools. Several counselors from other area independent high school were also in attendance.

Reflecting on the event, Kathy Laughlin, Director of Counseling for the High School, noted that the panel was the highlight. "Having high school girls talking to middle school girls and parents about loving themselves and how that has changed their lives was inspiring," said Laughlin. "I think it was effective because any time we can get that many people in a room talking about positive body image is revolutionary."



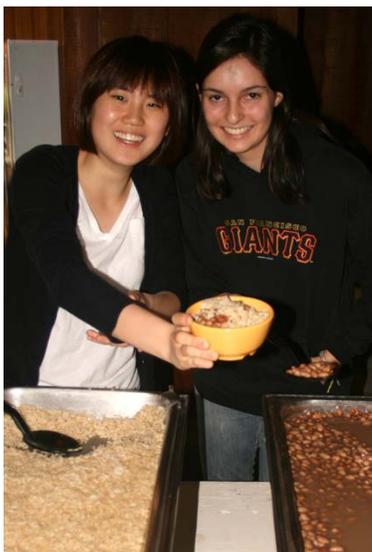
Senior Christina Crittenden, junior Cailin Dornbush, and freshman Edna Siljdedich were panelists at the *Body Talk* premiere event.

The Body Positive was founded by Sobczak and Scott in 1996. Laughlin, along with Resident Director Emily Sveen, brought the program to San Domenico two years ago, hosting a workshop for student leaders ready to spread the Body Positive message. The original group, featured in the video, started with about ten girls ranging from freshmen to seniors and has now grown to about 20, and the group holds regular drop-in sessions. In recent months, the student members have reached out to the Middle School, as well as presented at a local Girl Scouts' meeting and in a freshmen health class.

Freshman member Edna Siljdedich noted that the values of the program are resonating with San Domenico's student body. "Hosting the film and panel discussion was a powerful and a great way to introduce how San Domenico embraces the Body Positive message and introducing it to our community," said Siljdedich.

2011 OxfamHunger Banquet: Breaching the Gap Between Local and Global

By Libby Reyff '12



Sophomore Melody Seo and junior Libby Reyff serve rice and beans at the annual Oxfam Hunger banquet last month.

On March 9, in conjunction with the beginning of Lent as well as International Women's Day, the San Domenico Social Justice Club hosted the annual Hunger Banquet to benefit Oxfam America, an organization focused on finding solutions for poverty and injustice through local and global outreach. The banquet consisted of a modest meal of rice and beans, served to both the students and faculty members of the high school. By limiting the lunch options for the day, the school was able to save approximately \$250, which was then sent as a donation to Oxfam, an organization that works to address hunger issues around the globe.

In addition to fundraising, the event also gave students the chance to hear from representatives from Ambassadors of Hope and Opportunity, a local organization that provides assistance to the homeless youth of Marin County. Founder Zara Babitzke and organization representative Mario Rangel educated the students about the unseen issue of youth homelessness both in Marin County, and in California as a whole. This Hunger Banquet was especially powerful due to the connection forged between local and global poverty issues.

The banquet inspired much thought and reflection among the high school students. "The Hunger Banquet showed that while reaching out to people in other parts of the world," said junior Caitlin Gowdy. "Our school still doesn't forget about local people who need our help." Junior Cailin Dornbush agreed. "I think it's important for us to learn about youth homelessness because they're in our generation," said Dornbush. "We need to be in solidarity with our peers who aren't as lucky as we are."

Spring Discovery in Washington, DC: A Week of History, Politics, and Fun

By Elle Koagedal '11

During Spring Discovery week last month, eleven students—six seniors and five juniors—joined history teachers Amanda Tredinnick and Justin Suran, as well as retired English teacher Shelagh Smith for a week full of history, politics, and fun in our country's capital.

The group visited important government buildings, including the Supreme Court, the Library of Congress, and the Capitol. In fact, the students were even able to meet with California's own US Senator Barbara Boxer as well as Joe Sheehy, a legislative aid to Congresswoman Grace Napolitano from Southern California. The students learned of the complex, busy world



Students with Holocaust survivor Henry Greenbaum at the US Holocaust Museum inside the capitol building and the large impact a legislative aid can have on decisions made by their boss.

Other activities on the agenda included visiting the Newseum, a museum dedicated entirely to the media and its coverage of global events, and the National Mall with its numerous monuments, such as the Abraham Lincoln Memorial, where the words of the Gettysburg Address are engraved on the wall. They also walked along the reflective black stone wall of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, designed by Chinese-American sculptor Maya



Four-term US Senator from California Barbara Boxer met with San Domenico students and teachers at the US Capitol in Washington DC.

Lin, where relatives rubbed the names of loved ones killed or missing in the Vietnam War.

For many students, like senior Emma Feshbach, visiting Holocaust Museum was particularly poignant. "Seeing the exhibit really connected me emotionally to the individual victims and the persecution they endured," said Feshbach. "I left the museum feeling enraged that such an atrocity could be overlooked." The exhibit included family portraits of victims, a clay model of the Auschwitz death camp, and mounds of

leather shoes that remained after victims were gassed. The students met with Polish-born Auschwitz survivor Henry Greenbaum and in a spirit representative of San Domenico's values in social justice, signed a pledge to fight against injustices.

Tredinnick, who teaches American history and served as the primary coordinator of the trip, considered it a success.

"Washington DC is one of the most

dynamic and exciting places to learn," said Tredinnick. "As a US History teacher, it was extremely important for me that the students feel the history come alive before them. Experiencing DC through their eyes was one of the most rewarding experiences of my teaching career." In just one week the students and chaperones experienced many facets of our history and capital, and experienced the workings American government beyond what could be learned in a book or classroom.



Senior Kira Kull in front of the US Capitol building in Washington DC.

Back to Berkeley with San Domenico's Model UN Delegation

By Kita Gayle '11

During the first weekend of March, San Domenico's Model United Nations delegation returned to the Berkeley Model United Nations Conference for the sixth consecutive year. With 21 students from all four grades, San Domenico's delegates, along with faculty moderators Ian Sethre and Amanda Tredinnick, joined more than 1,600 other students from around the United States and the world to debate topics ranging from nuclear proliferation to organ smuggling.

In preparation for the conference, the delegates spent weeks researching topics and their assigned countries, which included Bosnia-Herzegovina and Madagascar on several larger General Assembly committees, and representations of Comoros, and Argentina on smaller committees dealing with issues such as international sex trafficking. Each debate, lasting up to three days, was supposed to work towards establishment of comprised international resolutions. The ultimate goal would be to incorporate regulations from the world's most powerful



Freshman Cameron Mine and sophomore Joyce Kwan representing Bosnia on the General Assembly's Social, Cultural, and Humanitarian Committee at the Berkeley Model United Nations.

countries, while including accommodations that support developing countries. For example, the committee discussing the topic of cyberterrorism settled on a resolution consisting of a compromise between censorship and freedom of speech, while including a clause dedicated to releasing technological information to emergent countries.

Like her fellow delegates, senior Abby Costello has enjoyed the opportunity to expand her knowledge on controversial political topics, as well as

enhance her public speaking and debate skills. "While debating gender rights in the Middle East, I had to speak up in front of a bunch of strangers, knowing full well that many would disagree with my country's position," said Costello, a veteran of three Model UN conferences. "It's scary but inspiring at the same time."

San Domenico's delegation is the largest of any independent school in Marin and it is the only one to consistently participate in both Stanford and Berkeley conferences. San Domenico's Model UN delegation will participate in the Stanford conference next fall.



The members and faculty moderators of the 2010-2011 Social Justice Club with Zara Babitske and Mario Rangel from Ambassadors of Hope following the annual Oxfam Hunger Banquet.



2011-2012 Social Justice Club Student Leadership

- **Club Co-coordinator/Service Coordinator:** Erica Lee
- **Club Co-coordinator/Aeqvitas Co-editor:** Alessandra Jurick
- **Aeqvitas Co-editor:** Edna Siljdedich
- **Secretary:** Hanna Kim

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The San Domenico Social Justice Club is committed to creating awareness among ourselves and our community concerning social injustices, both locally and globally. We act upon this knowledge in solidarity with the global community in order to positively impact the world. As a group of young women, we are dedicated to fostering respect and equality, and we strive to create equal opportunities for all.