

## ULTIMATELY WORTHWHILE

By Maija Saulitis '05

During my years at St. Olaf I always strived to do well in my classes, and, in most cases, thrived, but graduating with a 4.0 wasn't in the cards for me; my priority was experiencing and seeking venues that would ultimately prove enlightening to both my inner-self and well being while I was on the Hill. Do I have any regrets that I spent a few too many late nights in Dittmann at dance rehearsals when I had a mid-term due the following morning or about the times I volunteered at the animal shelter in Faribault when that time could've been spent studying in Rolvaag? Not really. College for me was so much more than simply obtaining the necessary skills to become a successful working adult; it was about growth, inquisition, and the betterment of my whole person.

I have always admired my parent's nontraditional, gypsy-like lifestyle: they were ski bums in Vail, Colorado, in the early 1970s, and later on took trans-continental road trips, living out of the back of their van. Consequently, our familial priorities are steeped in living life wholeheartedly, and, ultimately, finding the value in the experiences that surface along the way. While at St. Olaf I was a tour guide; studied Spanish culture and language in Costa Rica; was a teaching assistant in the English Department; was a member of Companydance, the campus' performing dance ensemble; lived in an honor house in which my housemates and I served at a homeless shelter in downtown, Minneapolis; did sunrise yoga with dance faculty and students behind Old Main; went tray sledding down Thorson hill; attended chapel when I found myself struggling with my mother's cancer diagnosis, and wrote my grandmother's memoir under the guidance of a professor. I found all of these experiences equally as valuable as sitting in any given lecture in the classroom.

I am in my second year with AmeriCorps, where I am a reading specialist for children in grades first through third at a fine arts school in the west side of St. Paul. I began my job last September with the mentality that I would teach these children how to read; I was going to educate and "save" these struggling children. I was instantly put in my place and realized that I would learn more from these children than they would ever learn from me; stories of parents who abused alcohol and drugs pulled at my heart, as did stories of children who couldn't read a sentence but were able to differentiate between jail and prison. I've consoled students whose parents have been shot. My lesson plans are temporarily pushed aside. I often play the role of counselor before educator, and while this was frustrating at first because I felt that I was failing at my job as a reading teacher, I realized that it didn't matter. Life is all about looking at the larger picture, seeing what you can offer and what life has to offer you. Mine is a life worthwhile.