

I used to consider myself a warrior who could overcome all kinds of challenges; however, I doubted myself, just for a second, when facing the Buffalo winter. Born and raised in Beijing and settled in Pacific Northwest for a year and a half, I'd wondered whether I could survive a freaky Buffalo snowstorm just after I arrived at SEM in January 2017. I have survived because fortunately, there has been constant warmth inside the SEM community from a supportive sisterhood.

At SEM, I have shared my room for the first time. Jiani Lu '18, my sophomore year roommate and first roommate ever, talked about sports all day long at Oishei House. She is always so vital, so full of life and energy. When I heard her grinding her teeth at night, I just imagine she probably just fights in her dreams.

Spring is a time for a change and new beginnings. Spring of 2017, on the second floor of Wendt House, I met my second roommate Mikang Kim, who was one of the graduating seniors of the Class of 2017. I remember neither of us was completely asleep nor completely awake during those final days of the school year. In the middle of the night when she rubbed her eyes and mumbled something in Korean that I didn't understand, I still figured that she was asking me about the time as she tapped her wrist with her pointer finger. Whatever different languages we speak, roommates' minds are in sync with time.

Returning SEM as a junior, I secretly delighted at how lucky I was to get in a single room this year. I thought this little area would ideally create a productive study environment, but it was only for weekdays. With the ongoing parties of the weekends, I named it a new common room of Niscah House rather than a personal sleeping space.

As one of my high school achievements, I became a "house mom" with a sympathetic ear and supported my peers by sharing our experiences. It's interesting to watch people come and go, leaving a memory behind them.

SEM is a place that connects girls from all over. When exchange students from France or a Latin American country come, I get to learn about different cultures. Two Guatemalan girls: Maria "Ale" DeLeon Quiñónez and Ana "Isabel" Franco Ordoñez and I have kept up strong friendships founded when they stayed in Niscah House in the fall of 2017. We went trick-or-treating together on Halloween, practiced our non-native languages in writing and speaking, and understood Starbucks as a regular part of American culture, while a luxury brand in both China and Guatemala. Our communication broadens each other's horizons - while rooted in our SEM experience.

Living at SEM, there is a variety of house activities and faculty-led weekend activities for students. Instead of grinding away at our homework, we can get off the campus and socialize with our friends at an indoor climbing party in Niagara Falls or taking a Jetboat ride in Lewiston. This winter, first time snowshoeing was an unforgettable weekend experience.. With the lead of Nurse Nancy and Mrs. Bernecki, we put on those large, flat shoes that allowed us to float atop the snow. While trying out a new way of walking through the woods, I felt the need to compact the snow into a snowball and launch an attack...

SEM is a bridge that connects me to my academic goals while also exploring global cultures. Every time my friends in China greet me with a winterlike joke, I usually chuckle with a heart full of secrets. I tell them the secrets of surviving Buffalo winters were not only just about heat and instant ramen, but the warmth of sisterhood and compassion that is the SEM community. I have survived twice with all those supports - one more year to go.

Fall Picnic

1. Residential students went on a picnic at Delaware Park on a sunny afternoon in September.

Halloween

2. Ale Quiñónez, Ana "Isabel" Franco Ordoñez, Xiting "Cindy" Huang, Liheng "Helen" Wu and Jiaxuan "Jocelyn" Yang Trick-or-Treating in the neighborhood.

3. Chenlei "Amy" Li and Jing "Lexi" Bian showed real skills at pumpkin carving!

Lunar New Year Feast

4. Zeyun "Zoey" Liu, Zhe "Susan" Su, Mingting "Spencer" Xu, and Yixuan "Rebecca" Li made a Lunar New Year feast at Niscah House in February.

Indoor Rock-Climbing

5. Huaze "Shannon" Shao '19 climbs the jagged indoor rocks during our weekend activity with teachers Kyle and Doug Hopkins at the Niagara Rock Climbing Center in February, 2018.

