

It's my pleasure to introduce Zahra Chittalia, whose essay "Memories of Mae Hong Son," written for Sam Pittman's section of ENGCMP 1510 - Writing with Style, won an honorable mention from our committee.

On first reading Zahra's first-person essay about a service trip to a small town in Thailand, I was struck by her use of descriptive language in depicting the mountainous and forested landscape, the areas she traveled through, and the interactions she had with the people she met there. But I was further impressed when, later in the essay, she revealed a rich theme: the permeability of memory.

Deftly weaving the narrative of her time in Thailand with insights from scientific research on the cognitive aspects of memory and her own reflections years later, she creates a portrait not only of an encounter with strangers living very different lives than her own, but also of the impermanence and fallibility of memory. In her essay, she interrogates her own narrative, asking how much faith we can have in our own imperfect perceptions of places and events as they are filtered through the layers of our mind, first in the preconceptions with which we initially interpret them, and then in the distortions that our own brains create as we recall them years later.

I'm very pleased to invite Zahra to share an excerpt of her essay with you this afternoon.