

As I sat down to write this speech, it occurred to me how difficult a task this would be. So, I walked around Palazzine dayroom and asked people to help me by giving me one word to describe the UWC of the Adriatic. These are some of the responses I got:

“O god. One word, really?”

“Can I have more than one word?” “

“Mmmm...indescribable...one word?”

“There are no words...”

”I hate this question.”

Luckily, I have more than one word to help me, but its clear that the college is very dynamic. There isn't one word. Or one aspect. Or one type. Or one way. The beautiful thing about these people and about this place is that it's not just one way. It's many words, many languages, many flags, and many ways. Everybody... and every day.

Palazzine dayroom was my continuous savior as I struggled through writing this speech. Unable to find an anecdote to support my overwhelmingly passionate feelings about the college, I asked if anybody had specific stories they would be willing to share with me, and, in the UWC spirit, everybody was willing to drop what they were doing immediately and help me out.

First, Toni, from Bulgaria, struggled with the same thing. She told me she didn't have a particular story and that she simply couldn't do it. But then, she explained, it's about the atmosphere. You can talk to people you don't have anything in common with. There is this sort of raw energy and excitement in everybody- so willing to share and care for one another. As she was reflecting, Toni let out a most beautiful sentence: that she found a kind of soulmate at the college: Amica, from Japan. Without any of the same cultural backgrounds, they found something

profound in each other only really possible with the atmosphere that UWC provides.

Then, Hani told me the story of his experience. He said, he came here because there were some important aspects missing at home in Palestine. When he was here, last year during the war in Gaza, he knew that his family was suffering at home. He said, it got so bad that one day he cried during break time in the school building. But, after that, he told me that it didn't take much to get people motivated - rather, immediately, we did whatever we could to help.

That weekend, I remember so well going to the protest against the war in Gaza. I woke up that morning, as usual, having no idea what the day held for me. But, later we joined together. From Canada. From Italy. From Guatemala. From Palestine. From UWC. All part of a greater cause. That was, in essence, supporting our friend and fellow UWC-er Hani.

That is one of the most wonderful things about the college. This atmosphere, although we don't consciously think about it all the time, pops up in ways, big and small: from being willing to help me on this speech to marching down the streets in Trieste. There simply are no words to describe it. Yet, everybody who has been to a UWC knows exactly what I mean. This year, we have an *incredible* group of people.

Moreover, because here we learn to take off the armor we have gotten so used to wearing, it's the opening of *ourselves*. I predict that when we gather again, after opening ourselves and letting this atmosphere blossom, we will have built something together. And we will build something extraordinary.

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