IHouse Acrostics

Acrostics is a kind of writing, most commonly poems, in which the first letter of every line of the text, put together, spell out a word. It’s a writing form that had been respected and highly regarded in many ancient civilizations. But today, it’s too uncool for real poets, and is probably mostly used in cheesy love letters written by high schoolers.

So, a sample by an anonymous high school student spelling out the name of his love interest, Sophia: “S! Sweet and sour Sophia! O! Only you make me come to math class! P! Pi is boring but you’re so interesting! And H! Hotter than the sun…” You get the point.

Anyways, I want us to return, for a moment, to the days when acrostics poems were respected, because I’d like to dedicate my own little love poem to, what else, our home, IHouse. Along each letter I’d like to tell a story or two, recounting the two years I spent in this place. Here we go.

I dedicate the letter I to Idealism. It’s the virtue that this community was founded on. The kind of idealism that undergirds this house is a faith in the idea that people can cross culture, nation, gender, and race to understand each other.

H is for Hope. Hope abounds all over IHouse. It’s in the encouraging remarks that we residents share with each other every day. It’s in the comments like “good luck tomorrow,” “you can do it,” and “break a leg” that I exchange with my floormates while brushing our teeth and smiling at each other in the mirror before we go to bed.
O is for Openness. This is something still hard for me. It’s easy to put people in a box from the little information you have about their life. This spring semester alone, I probably had more heated debates about politics and regional conflicts than for my own wellbeing. But the key, I realized, is not to antagonize people who have opinions different from yours, but to help each other develop the best version of our respective arguments. Only then can we see how complex the world really is.

U is for the Unity that I find in the dining hall. One friend from India talks about how the world might improve through his project on better water purification methods. Another friend from Iran explains more efficient ways to manage big data. Yet another friend from the Turkey chimes in, and turns the conversation into his sturdy on youth poverty in Turkey. Two hours goes by, and our teas have long gone cold. But I come out into the night with my head spinning with water, big data, and low income in Turkey. Is this directly useful to my field of study? Maybe, maybe not. But why does that matter when I am a student of the world? Together we all add to the vision of our ideal world. It has infinite dimensions but is ultimately, and paradoxically, a single vision: a good world.

S is for Superhappy. Like, laugh out loud, warm-gushy-heart happy. I’m thinking of the Ihouse retreat and the coffee hour impromptu dances. At my retreat, we jiggled our glowsticks and danced around the bonfire, and played mafia (it’s a social game) until 3am. Back then, most of us had known one another for a mere 12 hours! At coffee hour every week, I arrive exhausted from my classes but am welcomed by a sea of people dancing to Bollywood tunes and Kpop videos. How can I not feel happier at the end of the day?
E is for **Empathy**. A professor once asked me what the difference between the globe and the world is. I said I didn’t know. Then he said the globe is something that was made by capitalism and economic flows across the planet, but the world is a concept that provides us with an alternative narrative about humanity’s oneness. It’s a really difficult concept. But I understood it this way: building a world is not about being able to eat the same food at McDonalds across the world, but rather, about two people with seemingly nothing in common looking at each other face to face and seek a conversation before turning hostile. Isn’t this what IHouse teaches through its very existence?

So there we have it! The IHouse Acrostics!

- Idealism
- Hope
- Openness
- Unity
- Superhappy
- Empathy

How did IHouse impact me in the past two years? It has not only moved me to write this essay, but has made it possible for me to imagine a world.