

# International Friends

Tucson, Arizona

IFRIENDSTUCSON.ORG

# CONNECTIONS

SPRING 2020

EVERY STUDENT NEEDS A SENSE OF HOME, WHEREVER THEY ARE FROM.



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### INTERNATIONAL FRIENDS BOARD MEMBERS

Patricia Gilman, Co-Chair

Randy Spalding, Co-Chair

Pam Obando, Secretary

Robert Woerner, Treasurer

Gaurav Deshpande, Community Member

Jody Friend, Community Member

Luann Haley, Community Member

Pamela Harlan, Community Member

Rachel Ivanyi, Community Member

Michelle Morden, Community Member

Momoka Sugimura, Student Representative

Francisco Villegas, Student Representative

Siyu Wang, Student Representative

Youhao Wei, Technical Advisor

Sylvia Ahanonu, ISS Liason

Cover Photo:  
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celebrating "International  
Grandma", Patsy Spalding



Foxes of Wondering Nights  
Digital drawing  
Imad Guemmah

# INTERNATIONAL GRANDMA CELEBRATES INTERNATIONAL FRIENDS

by Randy Spalding, IF Board Co-Chair and host

I reluctantly joined International Friends as a host over four years ago. I had retired from a wonderful teaching career, but readily became just as busy with volunteer commitments, travel, community classes, making music, and other boards' responsibilities. How could I possibly spend time with an international student, albeit once a month, even just for coffee? Curiosity overcame reluctance and join, I did, meeting Siyu from China for the first time over breakfast. Within about five minutes, I knew that this relationship would be both special and easy. We readily connected, and I now count Siyu among my closest of friends. I cannot imagine even a week going by without seeing or speaking to him. Our rich friendship then led me to "matching" the next school year with another two students, Anault from Ghana and Shubham from India. The following year, Birkam from Turkey joined us, and now, Rodolpho from Brazil is the newest member of our family.

My interest in other cultures was nurtured throughout my youth by my mother, whose curiosity, sense of wonder, and love of adventure are incredible gifts to me. In 1988, she and I, along with my father, began exploring the world, and have now visited many countries on all continents except Antarctica. Today, for me, one of the many great joys of International Friends is being able to "share" my students with friends and family. My 94-year old mother, Patsy Spalding, warmly welcomes all of



From the left: Mengtian Lui, Patsy Spalding, Juliet Juan, Siyu Wang, Randy Spalding, Anault Allihien, Valerie Pfeifer, Michelle Morden, and Susana Shohdy

*"My 94-year old mother, Patsy Spalding, warmly welcomes all of the students to her home and eagerly celebrates birthdays, holidays, graduations, and any other opportunity just to get together."*

# MY TIME WITH INTERNATIONAL FRIENDS – MORE FUN THAN I COULD HAVE IMAGINED

by Pat Gilman, IF Board Co-Chair and host

Five-and-a-half years ago, I saw an article in *Desert Leaf* about International Friends, and I thought I would really like to spend time with an international student. My husband, Paul Minnis, agreed, and we chose our first student. He is from Malaysia and is earning his PhD in Planetary Science. He will graduate this spring or next year, and we've been friends for five years.

Our first student was so interesting and so much fun that we couldn't stop with just one. We currently have five students and several former students in our International Friends family. We have a student from Mumbai who graduated a year ago with his Master's in MIS (Management Information Systems), and he now has a good job here in Tucson. We have another student from Tamil Nadu in India who is a Ph.D. student in Cell Biology doing ALS research for her dissertation. Our student from northeastern China is in Anthropology/East Asian Studies, and she will marry a man in the Optical Sciences Ph.D. program this summer. We will probably go to their wedding in China. Our newest student is a freshman architecture major from Kazakhstan, and she just stayed with us for three days between the time her dorm closed and her flight back home for the holidays. Delightful!

Having five students may make it seem that doing activities with them takes a lot of time, but it doesn't, and anyway, we always enjoy our times with them. They are smart, hardworking, interesting people and interested in us and life in the United States. We have also met many of their parents and other family members when they come to visit, which is fun, too, and I visited our Mumbai student's mother when I was in India in November.

Because I like focusing on details in activities that I do, I volunteered to help International Friends with matching hosts and students. That snowballed into my becoming the Match Coordinator, joining the Board, and becoming co-chair of the Board with Randy Spalding. It has been especially satisfying to help guide International Friends with Randy because it is such a great organization for bringing people from around the world together.



From the left – Suvitha from India, Pat (host), Jiahong (Siwei's mother), Gaurav from India, Ben from Malaysia, Ben from Colorado, Siwei/Alice from China

# MY TIME WITH INTERNATIONAL FRIENDS

by Momoko Sugimura, IF Board member and student



Hi! I'm Momoka from Tokyo, Japan. I'm pursuing my bachelor's degree in Optical Sciences at the University of Arizona with an aspiration to become an engineer who works globally towards developing eco-friendly technology.

Coming to Tucson by myself was exciting but frightening even though I had the experience of living in the US for a year as a high school exchange student. In the first few weeks in Tucson, I was randomly attending events around the campus area, hoping to make friends. Then, I got to know that there would be an event that includes free food close to campus, which happened to be the welcome luncheon for International Friends. I went there without really knowing what that is for. But going there and getting involved with International Friends was one of the best decisions I made since I came to Tucson. At the luncheon, I met many wonderful welcoming hosts and also international students who were just like me, trying to create a network in Tucson. But, most importantly, I met my host (Jack and Virginia Wyly). They always make sure that we feel welcomed and never lonely. Especially during the holiday seasons, they invite us over to their house and have dinner together. It is very heartwarming to have someone and a place you feel welcomed, especially in a place far from your actual home.

I'm glad that I joined International Friends and met many people along the way. I hope other international students will feel the same way, too.

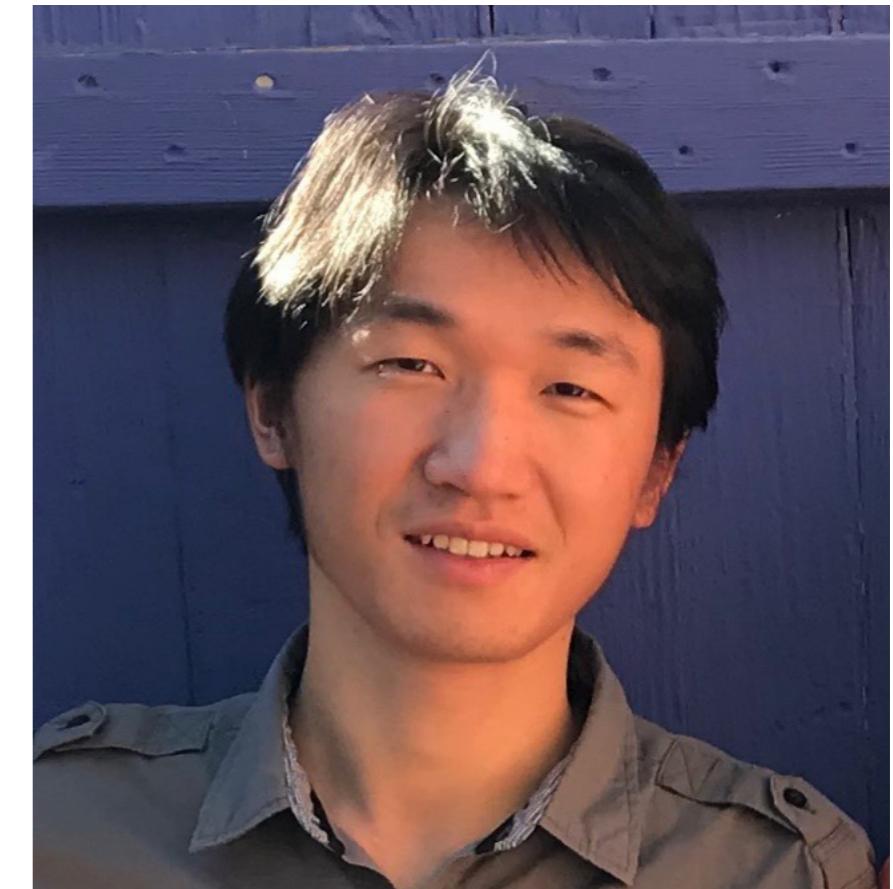
## WHAT INTERNATIONAL FRIENDS MEANS TO ME

by Siyu Wang, IF Board member and student

*"If you are really really fortunate like me, you are not just getting a buddy to hang out with, you are getting a precious friend for a lifetime."*

Hello! My name is Siyu Wang, I come from China and I'd like to share with you my experience with International Friends. I am currently a fifth year PhD student in Psychology. Five years ago when I just arrived, it was my first time living in a foreign country, I signed up for International friends luncheon simply to meet people and practice my English, but that completely changed my Tucson experience in the past 5 years.

I signed up on the student list, and not long after, I received an email from Randy, a stranger then who now has become my family now. He invited me out for breakfast, and 2 days later, I was invited to a family gathering when I was welcomed by all of his wonderful family members. Since then, Randy and I met almost every week and he exposed me to a world of culture experiences, real Mexican food, chamber music concerts, Thanksgiving, Easter, All Soul's procession, Gem Show, this list can go endless. Beyond all this, my host Randy is just an amazing human being who appreciates and celebrates every moment of life, I can't tell you



how much he has shaped me into a better person.

If you are really really fortunate like me, you are not just getting a buddy to hang out with, you are getting a precious friend for a lifetime. Randy embraced me as family, so does his mum, his partner and all the other members in his extended family. I now feel Tucson is my second home.

Over the years, through International Friends, Randy and the family welcomed four new students like me, they are from Ghana, India, Turkey and Brazil respectively, it is just so much fun to hang out with them and exchange our cultures and stories, and they have become brothers to me. Once in a while when taking an Uber, the driver would ask me, "How do you like Tucson?" All the answer I can think of is that I love Tucson and I love the people I met in Tucson. I don't know if my answer would be different if I hadn't met Randy, I just felt so fortunate and grateful

that I did sign up to connect to someone as wonderful as Randy five years ago.

I sincerely hope whoever is reading this will share the same experience and enjoy Tucson as much as I do. I can only tell you that you will thank yourself for signing up with International Friends five years from now.

# MY JOURNEY WITH INTERNATIONAL FRIENDS

by Francisco Villegas,  
IF Board member and  
student

Hola! My name is Francisco Villegas. My journey with International Friends started five years ago when I arrived from Mexico to Tucson, and the USA, for the first time to pursue my PhD in Civil Engineering. Despite coming from a neighboring country, it was surprising to discover a whole new culture with customs so different to my own roots.

My experience with International Friends has been fantastic since the beginning. Coming from a non-English speaking country it was a bit scary during the first week. After all it was a completely new adventure for me. I remember being a little bit worried during the first few days. Eventually, that feeling faded away and International Friends (IF) contributed to accelerate such process.

I found out about IF during the UA Orientation. IF is a very noble and non-profit organization integrated by many wonderful people. It is because of its friendly members that I felt welcomed since the start. I am very thankful to have met each one of them. After the Welcome Lunch, I was paired with Pamela Obando, at that time, my "future" host for a year. Surprisingly, that lovely lady from Minnesota became a very close friend of mine. We still find the time to catch up with our lives while enjoying some fish tacos at Rubio's.

Originally, I signed up to IF for two main reasons: 1) To learn more about the American culture, and 2) To practice my English.

To my surprise, I ran into so many great people from all over the world along the way. During my first year of being part of IF, I shared my cultural heritage with a German



*"To be honest, joining IF gave me an exceptional opportunity to create many strong friendships. For that, I will be forever thankful."*

student and a Chinese student that were also matched with my assigned host. Curiously, that practice made me value and realize even more about my own culture, as many interesting cultural discussions took place. Partly, that also triggered my interest to learn the German language, which I really hope I can master someday.

In addition, being part of IF is a great opportunity to admire the vast diversity of cultural folklore. I am so grateful to myself that I took the right decision five years ago. Besides learning some interesting facts about other cultures, another attractive advantage that comes into the picture is networking. In the globalized world that we live in nowadays, making the right connections can make the difference. IF provides a friendly environment for meeting new people of different backgrounds.

Wonderful friendships can start after a brief talk about your culture or research projects/interests.

To be honest, joining IF gave me an exceptional opportunity to create many strong friendships. For that, I will be forever thankful. Moreover, IF's members shared wholeheartedly their own cultures. I really appreciate and admire their attention and passion.

I hope my story inspires you to embark on a similar journey. I am sure you will have no regrets at the end of the ride.

# JOINING INTERNATIONAL FRIENDS- ONE OF MY BEST DECISIONS

Hi Everyone! I'm Gaurav Deshpande. I joined International Friends more than two years ago when I joined The University of Arizona to pursue a Masters degree in Management Information Systems. Since then my hosts, Paul & Pat, and all the other friends I made at International Friends, have become an important and fun part of this new life that I am building here in the United States.

The first time I heard about International Friends was during the orientation in my first week in Tucson. The promise of a chance to meet people from other cultures & backgrounds and free food drove me to attend the Welcome Lunch the following weekend. I remember being surprised by how friendly and welcoming everyone was, and how genuinely curious they were to know more about my country. I generally tend to stick to interacting with people I already know, but I made it a point to not do that and picked a table that had no one from my program. Fortunately for me, that's where I met Paul, who just happened to be in the early stages of planning a trip to India later the same year. The trip was going to take him to Rajasthan, which is one of my favorite places to visit, and we hit it off as he picked my brain about all the things to see and do there.

Since then, it's been a fantastic journey with Paul & Pat as my hosts and the other students that they are hosting. I've made some good friends who come not only from different countries but also from completely different areas of study! Every time we meet, I can always count on having an exciting and interesting conversation with all the different perspectives in the room, that go on for hours over good food and desserts. The trips we've taken around Tucson, to various events, parks, and places to visit have been a highlight of my time here and have given me a better sense of living in this city and experiencing it, as opposed to just attending the University and not knowing what it's like. They've also been a large part of some of the milestones of my time here, from advising me when I was going to buy my first car here, to attending my graduation with my family from India, and helping me move from my university apartment.

In hindsight, the thing that I love most about International Friends is that it provides us, as students from different countries and cultures, with an informal and comfortable space to ask questions about American culture and ways of doing things we don't understand and haven't experienced before, or that may seem too silly to ask a peer or faculty at the University.



by Gaurav Deshpande, IF Board member and former student, Class of 2018

When we join the University of Arizona, for most of us, it's the first time that we are living in another country and for some, it can even be the first time that they are living away from their family and friends. The hosts are one of the best resources we have for support during this period of transition. It's also one of the best places to meet and interact with people outside of our field of study, from different countries, with different backgrounds and unique perspectives.

Joining International Friends has been one of the best decisions that I've made. It has not only given me great friends for life but has also made my experience here richer and a lot more fun. I look forward to many more fun conversations, good food, and milestones together.

# ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

**Imad Guemmah**  
Content Creator and  
Educator  
IG @IGamma

## THE DESERT OF PERU

I see a nation in a cave  
After rain's perish;  
They look for light  
When dark is all they see.  
Some deserts are so arid  
Vegetation — you'll find not.  
What of the throne of sweetness?  
Haven't you worn it with pride?  
As if you were Time with his  
Past and future  
And the present the suture  
That held all together?  
Why would you fear the swords of men  
Like a fawn's mother frozen by terror  
Shaken till her face with fear whitened...  
Got stilled... so rocks from  
Her shade darkened.

My dear nation,  
My dear deer in a cave  
Whose steps have shrunk  
In all the globe's parts...  
Her mind filled  
With the night of crusades  
And the stars:  
False witnesses in towers.  
Her mind filled  
With the night watch  
Where soldiers laugh  
For no reason...

And she sees their shades  
On rocks  
So, she cries:  
"This is it. This is where I die.  
No green here for sure.  
Barren lands are all I'll become."

Hush, my sweet doe! Come this minute and  
See.

It's a little kid, and  
In his hands he holds water holes.  
So sweet is the taste... So fresh.  
Storm out of that cave, and  
See.

For you're free to be  
A bee that flee a barren land,  
Or to grow a tree, then  
Turn it to sand pens, and  
Write who you are.  
How were your days ahead?  
What was death to you:  
The most stupid town,  
Is it not?  
Gives and robs you from  
All that you desire:  
Blessed fruits in your  
Blessed baskets.

And since, dear deer,  
Death is set on making  
Your world dry,  
It, on your war, shall not cease.  
And it thinks that just since  
It's got planes and cranes  
Your fruit it will drain?

Oh no! Even though your plants dormant  
For what seems to be forever,  
Forever is a long time,  
And we're here now.  
Patience is your rainy cloud,  
Your song is your thunder,  
And soon again the doctor  
Will get a heartbeat...  
And when it's green again,  
What once seemed to be a fool's dream  
Will soon become a land of opportunity.

Imad Guemmah



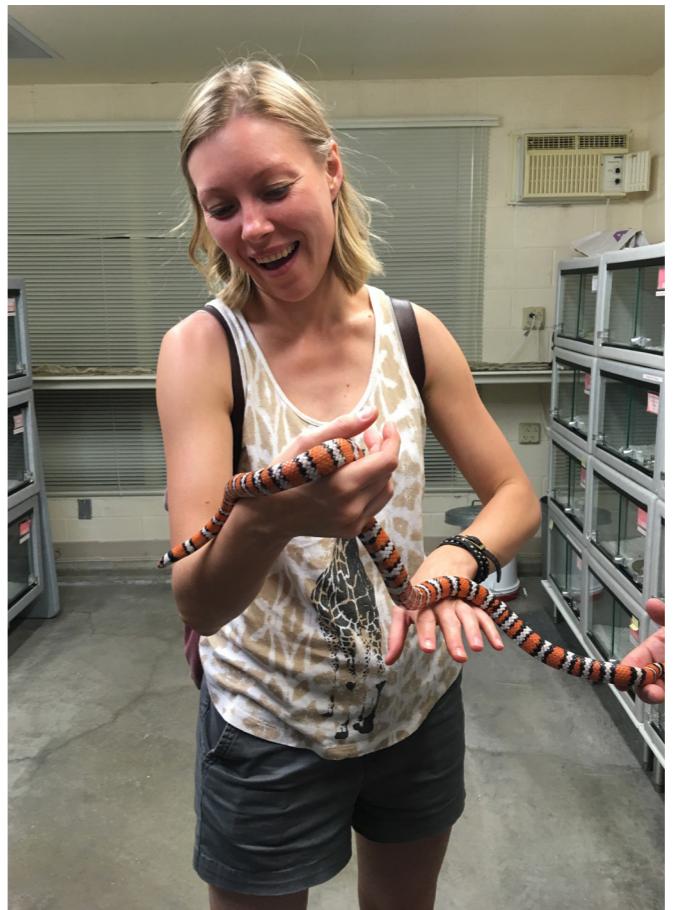
**Lupus Spiritus**  
Digital drawing  
Imad Guemmah

## About Imad Guemmah

Imad is a fulbright FLTA at the University of Arizona who teaches Arabic and the Moroccan Culture. He is also designing a curriculum for the Moroccan dialect. As a student, he is in a non-degree, grad-level program studying Art and Visual Culture Education, North African History, and Project Management.

*"I create content for a living. Then I teach it."*

# HIGHLIGHTS FROM PAST EVENTS



*The next IF Fall Welcome Luncheon is scheduled for Saturday, August 22*



Above: Fall 2019 Picnic

Far Left: Biosphere tour

Left: Fall 2019 picnic  
Left below:  
Biosphere tour

Below: Rodeo Picnic 2020





Fall Picnic 2019

## SUPPORT INTERNATIONAL FRIENDS

**International Friends recently added a SUPPORT button to our website.**

While the University of Arizona grants an annual modest stipend to IF, this amount does not cover all of our expenses. Our board...all volunteers...contribute both time and money to help sustain our organization. Last year, we made an end-of-the-year appeal and received generous donations from many current and former hosts. Notably, Deb and Jim McLaughlin made their donation in honor of long-time board member and former board chair LuAnn Hawley in recognition of "all that she has done for the community."

What does IF need money for? Generally, most of our expenses are annual ones, but

## DONATIONS

to International Friends currently fund the following:

- **Food and supplies** for IF events such as Welcome Lunch, Welcome Brunch, picnics.
- **Brochures**, guidelines, business cards, banners, and other printed materials
- **Rental of sites** for our Welcome Lunch, planning meeting, and special events
- **Website** and listserv costs
- **Student prizes** given at our picnics
- **Miscellaneous expenses** such as a new sound system and equipment for group activities

## WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT INTERNATIONAL FRIENDS?

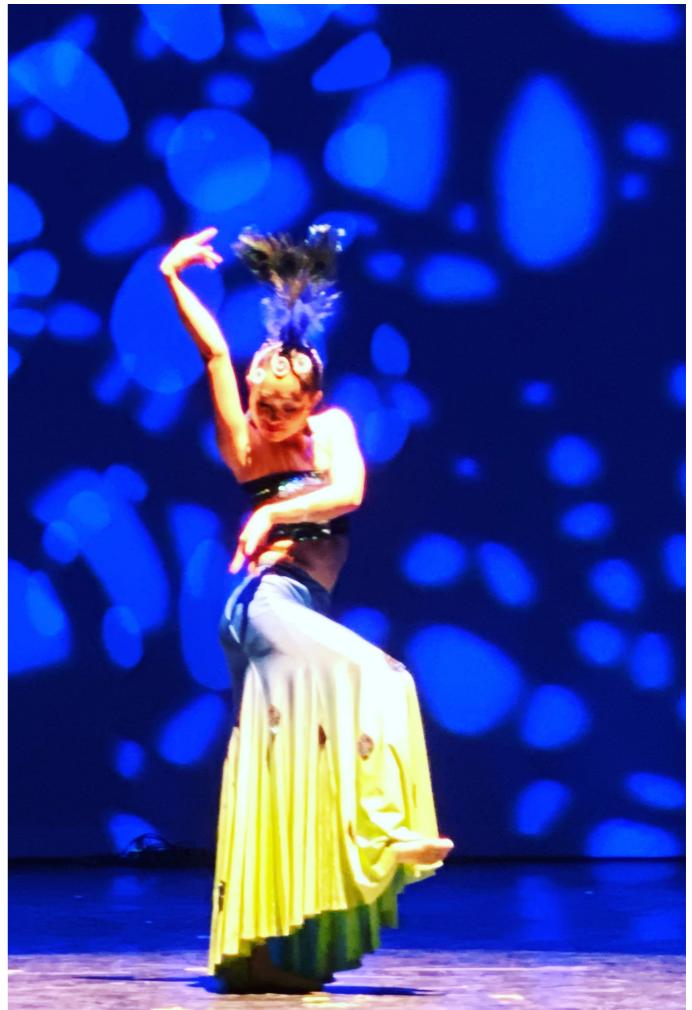
[www.ifriendstucson.org](http://www.ifriendstucson.org)

Public Facebook Group  
**International Friends @ Tucson, AZ**

*Interested in writing an article for the next IF newsletter, providing photos, or want to be showcased in the Artist Spotlight?*

Please submit your ideas to the IF Newsletter Editor and Designer Rachel Ivanyi, Board member and host

[rivanyiart@gmail.com](mailto:rivanyiart@gmail.com)



Yunjia Yang performing the Peacock Dance at Global Wildcats Got Talent 2019



*Looking for information about events and things to do around Tucson? Check out*

[www.visit Tucson.org](http://www.visit Tucson.org)

Rachel and Craig Ivanyi with their international family, Left to right: Min Jung Baek, Irina Potapova, Rachel, Craig, Yunja Yang, and Rahul Roy Mattam

# CONNECTIONS

International Friends Newsletter

# International Friends

Tucson, Arizona

*“Our goal is simple but important. We bring people together to share their cultures, interests, and life experiences. International students and local hosts are matched with the intent of them meeting at least once a month during the school year for socializing, activities, and fun.”*

## **International Friends, Inc.**

International Friends is an all-volunteer organization that brings together international students attending the University of Arizona and Southern Arizona residents.

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