

ripples of difference

be the change you want to see

Colin Salisbury

Global Volunteer Network Founder and President



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Dedication

A successful project is never the result of one-person endeavours. Never. It takes a team. Thank you to all the contributors from the bottom of my heart. This book would not have been possible without you.

Lauren McMahon this has been your project and I thank you for bringing it home!

To our GVN/GVNF dedicated staff, volunteers, partners, and supporters. Thank you.

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To my hero and father – Gordon Salisbury, my stunning wife Jo, and my amazing daughters Emily and Kate. Thank you for always being there.

Finally to you the reader, may your own ripple grow wide and impact those who need it most.

by Colin Salisbury



PHÒNG
TRẺ SO SĨNH

Erin Courtenay, GVN Vietnam Program

Ripples of Difference

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Colin Salisbury hanging out with kids from the Children's Home, Nepal

The GVN Ripple

Introduction

by Colin Salisbury

Colin Salisbury, Founder and President of Global Volunteer Network (GVN), is the visionary behind what has become one of the most widely recognized international volunteer service organizations in the world. In 2002, working out of a spare bedroom, Colin placed 240 international volunteers in communities in need. In 2008, with a staff of nearly 20, Colin and his team placed almost 2000 volunteers in 20 countries. However, the real journey began in Papua New Guinea in 1988 with the simple act of tossing a stone into Lake Kutubu and making a ripple in the water. Colin was 18 years old.

I left school with only three school certificate subjects and a leaving certificate that said, “Colin is best suited to practical subjects,” so I enrolled in an electronic technician’s course. I finished the course and spent the next three years installing alarms. During this time, I had the opportunity to go to Papua New Guinea on a six week trip volunteering with the Christian Radio Missionary Fellowship. I didn’t know it then but this was to change the course of my life.

When I arrived at the village I was struck by the children and their bloated bellies

and rust coloured hair. This was my first experience of real poverty, a glimpse of how two thirds of the world lives.

“This was my first experience of real poverty, a glimpse of how two thirds of the world lives.”

I remember wandering down to the lake and throwing stones into the water, feeling a deep yearning to help these people and to make a difference – to leave my mark. I wondered what one person could do. I watched the ripples moving out and saw the impact one stone entering the water made. At that point I thought if I could inspire others it would be like the stone’s ripple; one small ripple, leading to a bigger one and a bigger one. A ripple of change.

The following years saw me travel from the slums of the Philippines to the Konkomba tribe in Ghana’s north. And whilst my teachers had thought I was better suited to practical work, I completed my Bachelor of

Arts in Social Policy and continued on to do my Masters in International Development.

It was while I was in Ghana in 1997, researching my thesis, that the idea for Global Volunteer Network (GVN) was born. What struck me most were the local schools. A class of 100 children would have one teacher and it was clear that many kids were missing out because of this shortage. I knew that long term, trained teachers were needed but could see that in the short term if we provided volunteers to schools, many more children would be able to access education.

In Christmas 2001, the GVN website went live. I had formed relationships with three organizations on the internet, with programs in Ghana, Nepal and Ecuador. I wanted to give people the opportunity to experience life in another community and I wanted it to be affordable. To my amazement applications flooded in. In that first year, I placed 240 volunteers.

In 2004, I visited a village in Uganda that had been decimated by AIDS. People between the ages of 20 and 50 had all died and only the elderly and children were left. There was a real need to educate the children.

I realized that placing volunteers was only part of the solution and I could see a real need to assist our partners with funding for capital projects and programmes. The idea of setting up a foundation that could raise money was born.

Flying home I felt inspired to do something for those children and compelled to provide for them. Glancing through a magazine, I saw an advertisement to climb Mount Kilimanjaro and raise money to save

the rhino. I thought, “We could do that,” but we could build a school in Uganda instead. Back home I found a company who would lead the trek, launched it on the website and 20 people signed up. I was very nervous. I hadn’t done anything like this before. Each trekker raised USD\$2000 for the project, so we had USD\$40,000 for a new school.

“In 2009 GVN celebrated 11,500 volunteers. We have 29 projects in 21 countries and are well on our way to having raised one million dollars for the GVN Foundation.”

The trek was a fantastic bonding experience. We spent five days climbing Kilimanjaro together. After the trek we flew to Uganda and viewed the plans for the school. A year after conceiving the idea, the school was built.

The success of this project prompted me to organize a bigger fundraising trek, so we took a group of 40 to Mount Everest Base Camp to raise funds for an orphanage. Enough money was raised to build the orphanage and start another one.

A trek to Machu Picchu in Peru followed.



Colin Salisbury, 18 years old, Papua New Guinea

We arrived in August 2007, just as the Peru earthquake hit. I sent an email to our contact list asking for support. When we got back from the trek, USD\$10,000 was in our account, which enables us to fill a truck with supplies and assist people stranded in rural areas.

This year, 2009 GVN celebrated 11,500 volunteers. We have 29 projects in 21 countries and are well on our way to having raised one million dollars for the GVN Foundation.

I reflect back to the lake in Papua New Guinea. The ripples cast out by a single stone started my journey which is far from finished; I see this as just the beginning. As a naive 18 year old, I believed I could make a difference, one ripple at a time. Do you?

Yes. You have the ability within you to create your own story and embark on a journey to create your own ripples of difference. Of course, your journey will be very different from mine. What you end up doing or creating will be in line with

your purpose, and the skills that you have. But what is important is that you choose to make a difference.

In the following pages you will read stories about volunteers who have made their own ripples of difference. It is unlikely you will know or have heard of any of these people before. You won't have seen them in the media making headlines or receiving medals. They are regular people like you and me, but they have all done something magnificent. They have each made a difference in the lives of the people they have come into contact with.

Each story is unique to each volunteer and in some of the stories the impact may seem small. You may ask yourself - with so much need, what is the point? When these thoughts enter your head think back to the ripples on the lake. The more pebbles that touch the water, the more ripples move across the water and leave an impact far beyond the original splash!

Mahatma Gandhi said "You must be the change you wish to see in the world". This book is a call to action. It is a challenge to all of us to stand up and join the movement to create a sea of change that brings hope to those in need around the world.

Colin Salisbury

GVN Founder and President

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01

Undies for Africa

by Rocky Turner



Rocky Turner never imagined she would board a plane armed with over 1,300 pairs of underwear. But she always knew her heart would one day lead her to Africa.

A few years ago, I was lost in my own world. A busy mother of four boys, I wasn't truly aware of what life was like for others outside my cul-de-sac, let alone outside the States. Like many people, I would read what was going on out there but never did much about it. I was living my life in what I thought was a 'normal' way.

It is an amazing feeling to finally figure out why you were put on this earth. It took me a few more years (and two more children) before I started on a new path to make a difference. I wanted to help someone and the only thing I knew for sure was that I wanted to help in Africa. Where in Africa? I had no idea. It's a big continent.

I started by helping a school dedicated to street children in South Africa. I bought scissors, pencils and book bags for 100 students. That was my first real taste of charity. I then sponsored a woman from The Democratic Republic of the Congo and we started exchanging letters. It was enjoyable but I wanted to do more.

I started blogging about my experiences

and how I really wanted to make a change both in my life and as many lives in Africa that I could touch. I soon began the paperwork to start my own non-profit organization, Mothers Fighting For Others. My goals were simple: to make a difference in a child's life and inspire other moms to do the same.

“In Africa, underwear is expensive and may be considered a luxury if you're a child living in an orphanage.”

There was still something missing though. I wanted more. I wanted to be more involved. I didn't want to just talk about it.

So, one night I researched volunteer work in Africa. I had a lot of questions and GVN gave me answers. They not only provided me with the opportunity to go to Africa, but to work with and care for children one on one. It was my time to finally live my dream. A few months later, I began packing my bags.



Rocky Turner delivering underwear, Kenya

“My goals were simple: to make a difference in a child’s life and inspire other moms to do the same.”

Before my departure, I asked my Volunteer Coordinator what else I could take for the children that was not on the suggested donation list. Her first response was underwear. In Africa, underwear is expensive and considered a luxury, especially if you are orphaned.

Easy enough, I thought. So I started collecting underwear and writing about it on my blog. Then an amazing thing happened. Not only did my family and friends help, but strangers from all over the country started donating too. Underwear For Africa was born.

I flew with my sister-in-law and 250 pounds of underwear to Nairobi, Kenya. We delivered over 1300 pairs to local orphanages. What an amazing, life changing experience. The smiles on those children’s faces are forever in my memory. My favorite story was told to me by Sister Faith from Mary Immaculeta. She was passing out the underwear and one young boy asked her if it was Christmas. When she asked why, he replied, “I have never received anything so new and so nice before. Christmas must have come early.” It really put life into perspective for me.

We were placed at Saint Monica’s Children’s Home For Girls near Kahawa West. For two weeks we lived like family. We mopped floors, washed dishes and helped with homework. But my favorite part was

simply loving them. I was rarely alone and my hand was always held. After only a few days, I became a mother to 25 girls. We fell in love. They were my children now. I had 25 more mouths to feed, 25 more school fees to pay and 25 more daughters to love as my own.

Saint Monica’s needed help. They needed uniforms so we purchased a new one for each girl. They needed funds to put the three eldest girls into high school so we rallied family back home and started our first annual Gift Of Education Campaign and raised USD\$4000. The following year we raised over USD\$10,000 and put ten girls into private high school. The goal for the 2010 school year is to raise over USD\$24,000 for sixteen girls. Each girl will receive everything she needs for the year including school fees, uniform, school supplies, medical and eye exams and all her personal requirements.

There are 34 girls residing at Saint Monica’s now, each special in their own way. I hope they understand the lasting impression they have left on my heart. They have changed me forever. But that is what children do. They rock you to the core and make you a better person. I am blessed to know them. I am blessed that they call me mom. I am the lucky one.

These are the changes one person can make. One night of reading has led to



Rocky Turner and the children from
St Monica's Home, Kenya

massive changes in my life.

Today, one of my goals is to inspire other mothers to do the same. I want them to understand that they don't have to be a celebrity or have a lot of money to make a difference. They don't have to cross oceans either. They can start in their own home and in their own neighborhood. Soon they may find it leading them down a path they could have only dreamed of. I have experienced it firsthand.

Today, I am trying to make waves of my own. It took me over 38 years to do it. I am living a 'new normal' now and loving it. It consists of weekly phone calls to my girls at Saint Monica's, raising funds for school fees and collecting underwear. Who knows, maybe I'll run my own orphanage in Kenya one day. My dreams are big.

Rocky Turner is the founder of Mothers Fighting For Others Inc, a non-profit organisation dedicated to assisting mothers and children around the globe. Her goal is to inspire every mom to find a passion to pay it forward and make this world a better place for all of us. Thanks to Rocky's vision, over 4000 pairs of underwear have now been distributed to children and young adults across Africa. And guess what? We have just heard that Rocky is building an orphanage. Dreams really can come true.

Create a Ripple

Volunteer in Kenya www.globalvolunteernetwork.org/kenya

Send some undies to Africa!

www.mothersfightingforothers.com/mission/underwear-for-africa

02

Las Madres (The Mothers)

by Maggie McCombs



Maggie McCombs is the first person to admit her intentions were not saintly when she sought out the GVN orphanage program. In fact she didn't really even want to go to El Salvador, her first choice was Kenya. But at the time it was the furthest that her money would take her from a crumbling life in the United States. This twist of fate changed Maggie's life forever.

In October 2005, my first year at college, my mother passed away without warning. It was a defining moment in my life and never does a day go by that I don't wish for my best friend back. As I struggled through school, barely passing my classes, the fire I once had in my eyes slowly extinguished. I had no energy, no direction and no passion for living like I once held with so much fervor. Trying desperately to keep my head above water, I searched for an escape. It led me to GVN. I signed up and, within a few short months, I left the USA for the first time, alone and with three hundred dollars to my name.

It didn't take me long after arriving in El Salvador to find out how deficient my Spanish was. No one spoke English! But as we drove towards my accommodation,

I forgot about this and began to fall in love with the countryside and its people. I didn't realize there was a world out there until I stepped off that plane. And I am so incredibly fortunate that I did.

“Those little girls lived with a surprising and inspiring amount of happiness, having already been through so much at such a young age.”

I was volunteering at El Hogar Natalia de Siman, a Catholic home for girls in Santa Tecla. I jumped right in with the sixty 'chiquitas', or little girls aged from newborn to five, who were not old enough to go to school. As time went on, I began to chat easily with them all. It was during one conversation that I began to understand how amazing these children were.

“Tienes hijos?” (Do you have children?) Rosita asked me. “No, no tengo hijos.” (No,



Reinita, Children's Home, El Salvador

“I didn’t realize there was a world out there until I stepped off that plane. And I am so incredibly fortunate that I did.”

I don’t have kids.) I responded.

“Dónde esta tu mamá?” (Where is your mother?) “En el cielo, mi amor. Dónde esta tu mamá?” (She’s in Heaven, my love. Where is your mother?) “En el cielo también.” (She’s in Heaven, too.)

Little Rosita is one of the most delightful human beings to ever grace this earth and each volunteer that met her fell victim to her charms. Yet, I felt I got to know Rosita a little better than most. There is a special connection that you make with other children who have lost the love of a mother or father.

The premature death of a parent is something that can not be understood unless it has been experienced. Before El Salvador, my life was defined by my mother’s death. It made me distant. It changed me into someone I didn’t think I was. It made me want to scream and punch and kick. I would cry until I could no longer see. I thought the pain would never end, that the tears would never stop. It felt like the whole world crumpled into a little ball in front of me.

It was at the Hogar where I met another little girl who would change my life forever. Reinita was three but she weighed less than a one year old. She was severely malnourished because her body would not absorb nutrients. The nuns took her to the doctor, but no explanation was found.

Reinita became my best friend. We would

walk among the avocado and orange trees, and she would fall asleep in my arms on most days. She did not talk much because she was so sick. She was my constant companion. It was the most maternal feeling I have ever felt.

One day, I mixed baby formula with hot milk and cornflakes to see if it would help her put on weight. The first day, she did not really care to eat. Reinita had an indifference that I recognized in myself. I’ll never forget the words of my favorite ‘Madre’, Francesca: “Reinita! Tienes que comer! Tienes que vivir!” (Reinita! You have to eat! You have to live!).

Reinita began to eat. Slowly, she put on weight. And she began to talk. And laugh. And play. Reinita began to live.

Once, in the kitchen, we were playing a game. “Do you...want a refrigerator?” I would ask, teasing her with food. “No!” She would giggle. “Do you...want a shoe?” “No!” Then Francesca chimed in, “A mother! Tell her you want a mother!”

When I looked into Reinita’s eyes as she nodded with enthusiasm, I saw the same searching look that I had for my own mother. I had planned to spend a month in El Salvador but this quickly became three.

For months I had been living with a shadow cast over me. A flicker of hope shone on me that summer when I realized how much I loved those girls. It felt as if my heart would burst.

I believe that I was meant to love them.

I was meant to stand up and care. I myself have a gaping hole in my heart that will never heal. It is completely unnatural to feel something as profound as a parent's death before you are ready. I don't think there is ever a good time, but perhaps a time when you are ready. In an ideal world, death would be understood.

"Tiene depresión." Reinita had depression. She wanted a mother. How could someone with so little experience in the world already have the capacity for such emotion? Maybe my suffering showed my stars. My life dedicated to a death that happened by chance. Living to love others who were like me; like Reinita.

Sadness is a disease, it infects the world. There are so many sad people. But those little girls lived with a surprising and inspiring amount of happiness, having already been through so much at such a young age. I hear news of Reinita through other volunteers; she's a leader now and the other girls look up to her.

I went to El Salvador as a volunteer, but felt much more affected by those little girls than any help I could have ever been. They

inspired me to regain the fire in my eyes by showing me it was possible to keep on living, even with so little. Words will never be able to express my gratitude. With my passion back, I can live in a way that would make my mother proud. I only hope that one day I can begin to repay those sixty, amazing little girls.

Maggie has just graduated from Lewis & Clark College in Portland, Oregon with a Bachelor of Arts in Anthropology and Sociology. During college, she studied abroad in Kenya and Tanzania, focusing on Swahili and Islamic culture. "It was an amazing experience that allowed me to travel, meet amazing people and complete a month long camping safari, which introduced me to Hadza and Maasai cultures." Maggie is currently enjoying the beautiful Oregon summertime and in the process of applying to the Peace Corps.

Create a Ripple

Volunteer in a children's orphanage

Nepal www.globalvolunteernetwork.org/nepal

Romania www.globalvolunteernetwork.org/romania

Vietnam www.globalvolunteernetwork.org/vietnam

Peru www.globalvolunteernetwork.org/peru

Ethiopia www.globalvolunteernetwork.org/ethiopia

Rwanda www.globalvolunteernetwork.org/rwanda

Kenya www.globalvolunteernetwork.org/kenya

03

Out of the Corner of my Eye

by *Nadine McNeil*



In June 2008, Nadine McNeil completed a three year UNICEF assignment in Indonesia where millions of lives were lost and entire villages displaced in the 2004 tsunami. A month later, Nadine participated in GVN's Be The Change Program, which taught her that learning is a never-ending process and 'the more we learn the less we know.'

Life never ceases to amaze me, especially those moments we see out of the corners of our eyes that would entirely pass us by if we weren't paying attention. It is these fleeting moments that have the most profound impacts on our lives. My introduction to GVN is a perfect example of this.

For about three years, I agonized about how to change my life. After living in Holland for eight years, followed by a nine month stint in Sudan, I moved to Indonesia in early 2006 to join UNICEF (the United Nations Children's Fund) as their Chief Logistics Specialist in response to the horrors left by the tsunami that claimed so many lives and virtually wiped out families and communities.

By the time I arrived in Indonesia, I'd lived in 11 different countries, spanning continents from North America to Asia.

It started to dawn on me that the only place left for me to relocate was another planet! I also began to realize that the change I was busily seeking wasn't an external one but rather one that could only come from within. In other words, who was I when I showed up in a new place?

'Stepping away from the UN umbrella was not a decision that I took lightly. After all, it had been a constant in my life for just over twenty years. As I had served it, so too had it served and treated me well. Under no circumstances had my time spent there been in vain. In fact, it laid the foundation for my present journey.

As I went through an intense process of self-analysis, I saw that the aspect of my work that I was most passionate about was my encounters with the beneficiaries of the programs I implemented. There is something deeply humbling and gratifying about being able to make a difference in the life of another human being. Herein lay the start of the process of redefining myself.

I started to get anxious about leaving UNICEF – what would my next step be? After all, with the imprint of a logistician firmly in my DNA, leaping empty-handed into the void without some sort of plan was



Nadine McNeil on assignment in the Sudanese desert

“I also began to realize that the change I was busily seeking wasn’t an external one but rather one that could only come from within.”

an alien concept. I decided that a good start would be volunteering with an NGO in my home country of Jamaica.

I was Google searching for prospective NGOs when GVN caught my eye. With another click of the mouse, I found GVN’s Be The Change Program. I submitted an application without hesitation. I just knew this intensive workshop would help me live my dream to transform the world. This was the missing link for me. I was very excited when a week later GVN responded that I’d been accepted. New Zealand, here I come!

On a very cold and beautiful morning in July 2008, I met the GVN team, a young and energetic bunch determined and committed to making the world a better place. Initially I was hesitant, wondering what on earth could these ‘younglings’ teach me?

Before day one came to a close, I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that I had made the right move to participate in Be The Change. Our first assignment was to create a visualization board. I smiled to myself. Prior to going to bed the previous night I was brooding over the fact that I hadn’t completed my last board that I’d started in Indonesia. It was now tucked away in storage, along with the rest of my life. And then it dawned on me that perhaps that last board had served its purpose – to move me to the place where I am now, with an aim to rediscover my true purpose and self. So with

this clarification, I got on with producing my new board entitled ‘Rebirth.’

Tucked away in a wood cabin on the outskirts of Lake Taupo, seven people of five nationalities breathed, lived and learned from one another over eight days. We began at eight every morning, with a break for lunch (where brainstorming continued at the dining table) followed by an afternoon session which usually concluded around three o’clock. After an outdoor activity we’d meet for dinner and delectable local wines. Needless to say, we especially enjoyed this time of day. I also managed to read a most awe-inspiring book by John Wood, titled Leaving Microsoft to Change the World. No sooner had we arrived at the cabin than Colin Salisbury handed me this book, inquiring whether I’d read it. He would later learn how uncanny his choice was given that the story mirrors my own – in 2002, I co-founded the Jamaica Reads Foundation. Wood reminded me what is possible with vision, determination and focus.

More than acquiring new information, the course gave me the perfect opportunity to review my past and present and envision my future. My greatest lesson throughout this week packed with creativity and ideas was the necessary reminder that learning is a never-ending process. The more we learn the less we know.

Even though it never quite made it to my

visualization board, one of my intentions was to explore taking Be The Change to Jamaica. I felt that both the program and my country would benefit from making this knowledge readily accessible to North America - Jamaica is a much closer travel distance than New Zealand. And participants would draw inspiration from learning and brainstorming in a developing country. It would provide a first-hand opportunity to witness the challenges as well as the triumphs of NGOs.

“Before day one came to a close, I knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that I had made the right move to participate in Be The Change.”

I put the idea to the GVN team, who were immediately sold. Eleven days later, I left New Zealand and the team knowing that our paths would cross again.

Shortly after my arrival home I met an incredible anthropologist whose life story reminded me of my own. Clare Littleton had lived and traveled the world for humanitarian reasons and was keen to also make a lasting contribution to her new home, Jamaica. I shared my New Zealand experiences with her and my vision to launch Be The Change Jamaica. Without hesitation, Clare offered her involvement.

Several emails, phone calls and some divine intervention later, I'm proud to say my vision has manifested.

Nadine McNeil achieved what she set out to do and then some! Not only did she successfully host the inaugural Be The Change program in Jamaica, she teamed up with Colin Salisbury in Colorado where together they co-led Be The Change Breckenridge. They spent an intensive week with nine incredible participants from around the globe who are now unleashing their passions on the world and living the life they always dreamt of. Next stop – Tuscany!

Create a Ripple

Join the Be The Change program
Italy, New Zealand, USA, Jamaica, and Kenya
www.globalvolunteernetwork.org/be_the_change

04

Lay Down Your Heart

by *Hannah Ford*



This is the story of a crumbling building in the old town of Bagamoyo, Tanzania. More so, it is about the artists who bring this place to life, create something from nothing and live to learn. Hannah Ford entered their world as a teacher but walked away a student, complete with fresh eyes and an inspired vision. What Hannah learnt was far beyond anything she'd ever been taught at university. Her students showed her a life of simplicity where time is irrelevant, humanity is paramount and a sense of community is second nature.

I stepped through the doorway of Sea View Sculpture Art Centre and was overwhelmed by the sea of smiling faces that greeted me with hand shakes and light fist punches. A swirl of foreign names filled my head as I was introduced to each student. They called me 'mwalimu', which is Swahili for teacher. I suggested they just call me Hannah, but the response was a chorus of "oh nooo." Teachers are highly respected within Tanzanian culture.

One of the students presented me with the only seat while everyone else gathered in a circle, sitting on either the ground or logs of wood that would later be carved

into works of art. As I looked around at the 15 faces, alive with excitement at the prospect of what I might teach them, I suddenly felt ill-equipped for the task. These were professional artists, their talent and imagination evident all around me. Within this crumbling ruined building, beneath the only remaining section of roof, they displayed their art: brightly painted canvases, detailed wood carvings, cement castings of heads in all shapes and sizes, beaded jewelry and knitted bags.

It dawned on me that for the first time in my life, I was a teacher. What would I teach with the limited materials available? Would I have anything new to teach them? What did they expect from me?

It wasn't too long before I discovered my students weren't expecting anything from me, but were simply grateful I was there. They were ready to absorb whatever knowledge I could impart that might help develop or promote their art, which in turn would sustain their living.

What took place in the following months was, more than anything, a sharing of ideas, cultures and past learnings. When our first project, a collection of Tibetan-inspired mandala paintings, was displayed in the



The Sea View artists proudly display their hand-carved creations, Tanzania / Photo by Alex Clayton

“There is a definite charm about being in a place that appreciates the present moment fully, without feeling the slightest amount of pressure to rush forward to that next moment.”

windows, the pride in the smiling faces of my students filled me with warmth and confirmed why I was there.

Occasionally I struggled with the concept of being a ‘mzungu’, (white person) in a country where being white equals wealth. But when I walked through the door of Sea View each day, these feelings evaporated. Here I was not viewed in terms of my skin color, my gender or my age – I was simply a teacher and a friend.

I filled my days teaching English with my gradually improving Swahili, introducing Australian art, creating papier-mâché masterpieces, hand-drawn business cards and painted gift cards, and learning from my students. I was always learning.

The foundations upon which Sea View was built were so much stronger than the crumbling ruins from which the group works. Together they laid the groundwork of community and gradually, layer upon layer of shared ideas and inspiration have been added. Each canvas is a window into an individual’s view of the world in which they live. Each intricately carved sculpture captures an expression, a gesture, a moment.

The open doorway (without a door) leads into a world where artistic expression, in all its forms, is valued. Between the cracked

and crumbling walls lives a shared belief in the power of art to convey a story, to educate people about a culture. The finished product is a building that is a work of art in itself. It exists not only in its material nature, or what is left of it, but deep in the hearts of those who are a part of it.

Afterthought

How bizarre to be back in a place where everyone speaks English. Where my skin colour is the same. Where there are signs everywhere, telling me where to go, how to do things, what to buy, so I don’t have to think for myself. Where things happen fast, but everyone wants them to happen faster.

The western world overloads my senses in a very different way to Tanzania. There were plenty of moments when ‘Africa time’ (no hurry...in Africa!) drove me crazy, but I came to really appreciate the pace and simplicity of life there. What I’ve noticed most since returning is the millions of ways technology tries to make our lives ‘simpler’. We are constantly searching for ways to cut time, costs and people power.

So why does life in Tanzania seem so much simpler? Sure, things take longer, sometimes a frustratingly long time. But the people are patient and not hung up on time. They live by the rising and setting of the



Buddhist-inspired mandala paintings on display
at Sea View Sculpture Art Centre

sun, the tides of the ocean, the dhow fishing boats returning to the shore, the rumble of a hungry stomach, the wailing sounds of prayer time at the nearest mosque. What can't be done today will get done tomorrow. Or the next day. Or sometime next week.

I can understand how many people would find this mentality incredibly irritating. I certainly did many times throughout my Tanzanian experience. But I also discovered there is a definite charm about being in a place that appreciates the present moment fully, without feeling the slightest amount of pressure to rush forward to that next moment.

Despite being the same colour as the majority of those around me, it feels as though I'm wearing a different skin, that I look different. I certainly feel different and I wonder if other people notice. Perhaps it takes time to wash away the layers of sweat and dust I became accustomed to in Tanzania. Whatever it is, I want to hold on to it tightly. I don't want to rush through moments that matter; that deserve to be savored slowly. I never want to lose what I learnt, breathed and lived in Tanzania.

Hannah returned to Tanzania 18 months later and again immersed herself in the lives and work of Bagamoyo's artists. She said she felt touched by their gratitude at the simple act of her return. "The thing that strikes me the most about volunteering is that once you do it, you can never walk away. You're inevitably tied to a place, a people...their stories take root somewhere deep within and you never forget. And neither do they." Hannah is now preparing to move to Tanzania to take up a role as communications coordinator for a non-profit organisation.

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Touch lives through, music, art therapy, or jewellery making

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05

Dirty Laundry

by Rosie Hughes



Rosie Hughes didn't want a laundry lady. But when she arrived at the Liberian refugee camp in Ghana, pinned on the wall of her guesthouse was a piece of paper with 'laundry schedule' printed at the top. She found her name next to Jackie, laundry lady number four, on Wednesdays. Rosie was to pay her 30,000 cedis (three dollars) to wash her clothes each week.

Jackie came to see me on the morning of my second day at camp. She lives next door, in the back room of a small concrete enclosure. Three small children cling to her legs. Her face is round and youthful, but her right eye is half closed and pure white. I struggle not to stare.

"Hi, nice to meet you, I'm Rosie." I extend my hand, smile big.

"I'm Jackie. I will do your laundry," she replies. No smile. Three small faces peer from behind her legs, giggling.

I do most of the talking – so, you live next door? What are your children's names? How old are they? How long have you lived at the camp?

She answers my questions curtly. There is a short pause then she presses me on the laundry.

"When will you give it to me?" Her tone is aggressive.

"Wednesday, like the sheet says, I suppose." Am I just a pile of walking laundry money?

She asks me what time on Wednesday and I tell her I don't know. She nods and says goodbye.

"For many people like Jackie, eight dollars a year for a child's education is not affordable."

During the day, Jackie sits on a wooden bench under a large tree. Sometimes she has a child or two perched on her lap, but often she sits alone, idly, her body wilted and her good eye half-closed. I wonder what is going on in her head. Is she thinking? Dreaming? Reminiscing? Making plans?

When she sees me leave or enter the guesthouse she yells, "Wednesday," and pulls on her shirt to indicate laundry. As if I could forget.

Jackie belongs to a class of helpless,



Rosie Hughes, dinner time in the Liberian Refugee Camp, Ghana

“After all, without my weekly laundry, she has no money. Whether or not her family eats depends on my laundry.”

languid people. They were just kids when the Liberian Civil War broke out in 1990 and spent their childhoods living in refugee camps. Now they are adults and have children of their own. Most are illiterate –it is said that 90 percent of people in the camp cannot read. The ones who could afford education left the camp long ago – for the University of Accra in Ghana or, if they were lucky, to live with relatives in Canada or the USA. The UN refugee agency (UNHCR) subsidizes about 50 schools on camp, but they still cost money, usually around eight dollars a year. For many people like Jackie, eight dollars a year for a child’s education is not affordable. Over 1000 children in the camp do not attend school.

The situation does not look to improve. Since November 2008 when the civil war officially ended, the UN and other aid agencies have scaled back support to refugees in order to focus on rebuilding Liberia’s destroyed infrastructure. Liberians are now being urged to return home. Large posters depicting jubilant refugees on a boat returning home and urging that “Liberia needs you” hang all over camp.

But the process of repatriation is slow and involves endless paperwork and medical check-ups. At the end of July, a ship carried 298 refugees home, the largest group since the end of the war, but only after months of delays. It will take several months before

the next boat is ready.

Most refugees, however, are not ready to go back. Rumors abound that the rural areas are still not safe. And besides, many lost their family and property in the war. What is there to go back to?

With aid dwindling, survival has become more difficult for the 38,000 people still on camp. As refugees, they are not permitted to work in Ghana. Even under the table work is difficult, since most Ghanaians are reluctant to hire outsiders.

A small number receive support from overseas relatives. But the majority depends on menial tasks to survive. They push wheelbarrows, roast corn or braid hair. But mostly they wait; women sit under trees and men walk around with empty wheelbarrows.

I give Jackie my laundry bag every Wednesday morning. To my chagrin, the routine never changes. She takes out my dirty underwear, mildewed bathing suit and sweaty t-shirts and counts each piece. If there are more than 20 items, I pay her extra. My laundry always comes back folded and crisp.

One day, Jackie asks for an advance on her laundry money. Her son, Levi, is sick and needs medicine immediately. I give her the money and ask if there is anything more I can do. “No, thank you” she says.

The next day I visit Levi. He’s doing better, she says, and thanks me for asking, half smiling in response. I stay and we talk

for a while. She is 21, my age, with three kids. She stopped going to school after fourth grade, when rebels took control of her village. She lost both of her parents, but was lucky to escape to the Ivory Coast, then to Ghana. She was married, but just last year her husband died of an infection in his leg. She would like to finish her education, and learn to read and write, but school fees are expensive and she has small children to look after. She points to her lame eye and says, "A stick. It poked me in the eye when I was walking!" I wonder if this is the truth, or if she is sparing me from a more painful and brutal version. She shakes her head back and forth. "I'm so sorry", I say. I really am.

Our conversations have branched out some, but they always lead back to my laundry. Jackie is so serious and so unwilling to talk about anything else. After all, without my weekly laundry, she has no money. Whether or not her family eats depends on my laundry.

When Liberia's new Minister of the Interior made an official visit to the camp in July, he gave a riveting speech urging the refugees to come home. Over one thousand people sat on the cracked mud football field under blue UNHCR tents to listen as he invoked God and spoke of Mama Liberia as a country on the mend. "Liberia is finally safe and she needs your skills!" he said. The crowd grumbled as he spoke.

Five refugees were allowed to ask a question at the end. They all asked the same thing, but in different words. "We have been deprived of education and skills training for the past sixteen years. How do you expect us to rebuild our country without education, without useful skills?" After each question the audience cheered.

As long as international volunteers continue to need clean clothes, Jackie and her children will eat. But what about their future? If, or when, she returns to Liberia, what will she do?

The talk now is of rebuilding the country. The UNHCR is urging people to go home. But what will they rebuild, and what will they use?

After all, a country only needs so many wheelbarrow pushers and laundry ladies.

Rosie is heading back to Africa after accepting a job as a case worker with a Refugee Program in Nairobi, Kenya. Part of Rosie's role will include travelling to refugee camps throughout Eastern and Southern Africa to interview and do initial background checks on refugees who are eligible to resettle in the USA.

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Volunteer at an IDP Camp in Kenya www.globalvolunteernetwork.org/kenya

06

A Universal Language of their Own

Erin Cassidy / Written by Megan Tady

Josh turned over another plastic toy in his hand and decided to sleep on whether he could bear to part with it. In the morning, it was still there, proudly on top of the pile like a Christmas tree star - a shining token from a boy who couldn't quite grasp the meaning of his gifts.

What he did understand was that his toys would go to children not unlike him. They had also lost their dads.

To deliver the toys, Josh travelled with his mom to Uganda. Despite the stark differences in culture and language, Josh and his mom used their own loss to connect deeply with the women and children in the village of Ndejje and created a bond that would last longer than the toys, balloons and chewing gum they had brought.

Erin Cassidy was married to Paul for one year when she became pregnant with their first child. Three months later, they discovered Paul had bowel cancer. As Erin gave life to her son, she watched her husband die. Only five months after Josh entered the world, Paul left it. Erin was alone with her infant and Paul's seven-year-old daughter. The world, it seemed, would never spin in the same direction again.

Four years on, Erin was working as the

office manager for GVN. She watched hundreds of people sign up to volunteer their time and often thought about volunteering herself. There was one particular program on her mind: the Widows' Empowerment Project in Uganda.

“Most of the women in the Widows' Empowerment lost their husbands to AIDS and watched their spouses waste away too.”

When Erin made an off-hand remark to a friend at church about the project, he told her to book the flight and bill it to him. When she realized he was serious, she did just that, but she didn't go alone; she took Josh too.

“I wanted to show him that even though we think we don't have a lot, we have more than others can only dream of,” she said.

As for Erin, the trip was a sort of homecoming in a foreign land, where she



Josh playing with the kids from a local village, Uganda

“I wanted to show him that even though we think we don’t have a lot, we have more than others can only dream of.”

could offer her knowledge of sorrow for others to lean on.

“I was aware of what I was dealing with,” she said. “Most of the women in the Widows’ Empowerment lost their husbands to AIDS and watched their spouses waste away too.”

AIDS has devastated Uganda. In 2003, there were 530,000 adults living with HIV/AIDS, and 2.2 million orphans in a population of 24 million who had lost one or both parents to the disease. The strain this has created on communities is hard to bear. As the husband is the traditional breadwinner in Ugandan families, his death often leaves the family in financial crisis.

The Widows’ Empowerment project gives women choices about their financial future and provides relief from making difficult choices between food and education, water and medicine. The project was started by a local organization in Ndejje, and with the help of GVN, employs international volunteers to help teach mothers and widows practical skills to earn a living. For Erin and Josh, that meant helping to build pens for women to raise pigs and sell for profit.

“I know how hard it was, and still is at times, for me and the children,” Erin said. “And I had the assistance of social welfare, friends, people at church and other support organizations. I also remember I did not want to accept anyone’s help. And yet here were these very proud women being so

gracious. I’m ashamed to say that I probably wasn’t as gracious in accepting help on the scale that I received. It was very humbling.”

A language of their own

When I interviewed Josh, he was keen to tell his story. He tapped the tape recorder to make sure it was rolling.

When asked what the hardest thing was about his trip, rather than saying the food, heat or cold showers, he answered, “The hardest thing was to let them go. I wanted to stay longer to help them.”

Josh started out with a vague sense of the meaning of ‘poor’. When he walked Uganda’s city streets, he gave beggars high-five’s, not realizing that their outstretched hands were asking for something more.

“It’s one thing to say to kids, ‘You eat that up, because there are people who have nothing.’ But it’s just words until you see for yourself that there are children who really do have nothing. He thinks it’s tough when we can’t afford McDonald’s,” says Erin.

Josh quickly became a celebrity in the village, and not only because of the toys he was handing out.

“Everywhere we went, he was touched, poked and prodded, and he was so good about it,” Erin said. “They had never seen a white child before, so they stared. The children would run up and grab him and hold his hand.” Josh made a best friend in

the village but can't immediately recall his name; he can remember, however, teaching him to play rugby and 'Duck Duck Goose'.

"I think children just have a universal language of their own," Erin said. "It really didn't matter what they looked like or what they had. They were just kids together, playing and running down the street."

The saddest thing

The decision to take Josh to Uganda wasn't easy. But in the end, Erin knew that she couldn't go without him.

"Josh and I talked a lot before we left," Erin said. "We looked at photos and talked about what it means to not have a daddy. He had a lot of knowledge for a five-year-old."

As much as she prepared Josh for the trip, she couldn't always put her own mind at ease.

"I didn't know a lot about AIDS before I went," Erin said. "I knew that a lot of the kids he would be playing with would have AIDS. I got a bit paranoid thinking, 'What if he falls over and cuts himself while he is playing?' That was my biggest worry. But I don't think it even entered my mind once we were there."

Despite their relative safety and Josh's adaptability, Erin wouldn't recommend the trip for every child.

"I think it depends on the child," she said. "It would be really hard for some children to even see those conditions."

In his interview, Josh repeatedly said how sad he was for the children.

"The saddest thing was that the kids had no parents, and no grandad or grandma."

One afternoon, he met an orphaned boy with Down's syndrome in tattered clothing. Josh gave him his shirt in exchange for his ratty one. It's a story Erin's told before, but she still cries with its retelling.

And it isn't the only story that makes Erin emotional. There are faces she can still remember, and perhaps they will shadow her for life.

"I think children just have a universal language of their own."

"At one point, Josh got a bit wheezy and I had his asthma puffer," Erin said. "I only had one. A lady saw it and wanted it for her child. It was awful because I couldn't give it to her. Did I do the right thing? Goodness knows where I would have found another one. The one thing we had in common was the love for our children. You want them to have good health and no worries."

There were some moments of the trip when it was difficult for Erin to keep her composure.

"The first week, the culture shock was overwhelming. I felt like it didn't matter how much money the world had, you could never fix the problems. But once the jet lag wore off and I got used to the heat, I thought, well, whatever you can do to make a difference, you do."

“When you volunteer, it just impacts you positively on how you live the rest of your life.”

Never regret it

“When you volunteer, it just impacts you positively on how you live the rest of your life,” she said. “We can all go and help someone. No one can ever prepare you for it. I’d seen pictures, watched videos, but in the end, the reality was so different. After those first few days, when you get over the change, you will never regret it.”

I’m so much more aware of the little things. You think, ‘What is that going to do for someone?’ Now I just know the huge difference it can make.”

Months after the initial excitement of their trip had worn off, Josh and Erin are still making the choice to do whatever they can to make a difference.

“This Father’s Day, we didn’t have a dad to get a present for,” Erin said. “So instead, we bought a goat from World Vision for someone. I’m so much more aware of the little things. You think, ‘What is that going to do for someone?’ Now I just know the huge difference it can make.”

For Josh, that difference was in the hands he held, the games played and the toys given.

“The toys were special to me, but I knew I had to give them away,” he said. “The kids felt a little bit happier.”

Perhaps he’s heard his mom say it, but Josh repeats it with all the conviction that he can muster, “I think this will stick with me for my whole life.” He says he wants to be a volunteer when he grows up.

It is almost five years since Erin and Joshua volunteered in Uganda. Erin continues to volunteer locally, and this year she took part in the Machu Picchu fundraising trek. She has also completed a Diploma course in Writing for Children, and hopes in the future to write of the challenges children in extreme poverty face to bring awareness to a younger generation. Joshua is now 10 and in a student leadership role within his school. He has clear memories of his time in Uganda, and continues to be sensitive to children in need. He dreams of “discovering things”, at this stage he is thinking in the scientific field.

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Volunteer as a family in

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Josh makes a friend, Uganda

07

A Little Knowledge Can be Dangerous

by Adam Burford



The Buduburam Refugee Camp in Ghana was set up in 1990 to house 5000 Liberians looking for a safe haven from the perils of civil war. However when Adam Burford volunteered in 2006, he found the camp's population had ballooned to over 40,000. Adam says that while he has no doubt Buduburam provides a better life than the one the Liberian people escaped from, it is by no means acceptable. Yet what he found there was nothing short of inspiring.

The Buduburam Refugee Camp is an example of humanity bursting at the seams. One 11-bed health clinic and 45 under-resourced schools boasting class sizes of 50 plus students manned by enthusiastic but poorly trained teachers. However the inner strength of the residents to get on with life and make the best of their circumstances is inspiring.

During my time as a member of the HIV 'care and support' team I met an inspirational man. This man, due to his six foot six inch frame was known to his friends as 'Taller'. Taller had acquired HIV some years earlier and was trying to come to grips with this disease.

My first meeting with Taller was quite unsettling. I had seen HIV patients before

and had prepared myself. However, it was not his physical appearance which was of most concern, it was his state of mind. He was a shadow of a man. He lived in alone in a 'house' in the bush, within walking distance of Buduburam. Taller did not make eye contact but would stare into the distance. He clutched a pamphlet in his hands 'Living with HIV.'

"I was horrified by their living conditions."

During my first few visits he spoke only occasionally but I came to understand what he was thinking; "How had my life come to this?"

His self esteem was rock bottom. He had gone from being one of many survivors of the war to a HIV positive man driven out of camp through ignorance, along with his son.

It was on my third visit I met 'Small Taller', his five year old son. Small Taller was anything but tall and resembled more of a frail elderly man than the young energetic boy he should be.

In the months before we met, Taller had been living with his wife and son within the camp. Taller was an imposing figure due to



Adam Burford and the counsellor on their way to visit Taller and Small Tall, Ghana

“With each passing week, stares evolved to smiles and laughter.”

his height. He earned his living back in Liberia building houses and prided himself on his enormous strength.

The camp was an environment poor in infrastructure and services but abundant in humanity. People were always ready to help and comfort each other, a resource that is underestimated until it is gone. Upon meeting Taller, I saw what this loss can result in. Being abandoned by your fellow man had broken Taller, now a reject of his society.

Taller had confided in his wife and friends that he had HIV. While many in the camp understood that the disease can be transferred from one individual to another through sexual activity, not much more was known other than it can result in death.

Ignorance breeds fear and fear breeds persecution. Taller's wife left him and their son. His friends not only retreated but also encouraged myths about Taller and HIV to spread. He was harassed by his neighbours until it became unbearable.

He moved out of his rented house with Small Taller. They slept in the open and in school buildings and eventually in a makeshift shelter he constructed from wire and cardboard. With the wet season approaching, Taller's HIV counsellor, a generous woman who also had fled the war, found a half finished building on the outskirts of the camp.

I was horrified by their living conditions. It was a one room house with a dirt floor, no doors or windows - just spaces where

they should be. There was no roof apart from a sheet of corrugated iron providing shelter in one corner. This was where Taller and Small Taller slept.

Being an Australian, one of their few possessions immediately attracted my attention, a scruffy toy koala bear missing an eye. I immediately picked it up. Little did I know, I was breaking a taboo in Taller's eyes by handling something that he could have infected.

Some people in the camp have many misconceptions about HIV; it can be transferred by sharing cutlery, drinking out of the same glass, touching one another, kissing.

However, the full magnitude of this lack of information and the damage it can do came from Small Taller; “Daddy hugs Koala but he will not hug me. What is wrong with me? What have I done?” It breaks your heart. A little knowledge can be dangerous.

In the coming weeks, Taller and I had many conversations; some about HIV, some about football, Australia, Liberia, farming, school, Small Taller and Lady Porsche (their adopted dog). Education about his condition enabled Taller to understand myth from fact.

Taller's story also touched my family, friends, and another GVN volunteer, a larger than life Irishman by the name of Mark Hayes. Mark made these visits with me to visit Taller and Small Taller and like a true Irishman he was always the optimist. His enthusiasm was a driving force and



Adam Burford walking through the Liberian Refugee Camp, Ghana

before long donations came in and the money went to purchasing a roof, pots and pans, a radio, and 6 months rent on his home. Taller and Small Taller loved Mark's visits; Mark's love for life was infectious. An Irish quote sums up Mark

"I believe in the sun when it's not shining, I believe in love even when I feel it not, I believe in God even when he is silent"

However, I know Mark would agree with me when I say that the most important person who would have to be credited (not that she would ever look for praise) with helping this broken man and his son rebuild their lives was and still is, to this day, their counsellor (pictured). For confidentiality reasons she can not be named but long after Mark and I had departed the camp this incredible lady continues to provide

support. A refugee herself, it is people like her that give meaning to the word selfless.

With each passing week, stares evolved to smiles and laughter. Taller came to realize a future with his son and contact with others were all possible despite being HIV positive. Hope is a powerful force. Small Taller started to become more active as well. It was like the recent energy boost Taller had experienced had been transferred to his son. A cherished moment was kicking a soccer ball with Small Taller.

Taller started a vegetable patch near his house and used his carpentry skills to build a porch. On one of my final visits I saw a father hugging and kissing his son. Taller was now aware this was perfectly safe.

Taller now has visits from others on the camp who are HIV positive. He is helping to educate and support these people, to help them understand that there is hope as a person whom is HIV positive. What an inspiration this man is; shunned by his community all due to that little knowledge that can be so dangerous. Yet, he has the strength of mind today that reflects his 6 foot 6 frame and has started his own ripple.

In 2008, the Governments of Ghana and Liberia along with UNHCR re-initiated the voluntary repatriation of Liberians from Ghana. In 2009 the Government is seeking to close Buduburam camp and move the remaining Liberian refugees into Ghanaian communities.

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08

It Only Takes One

by *Christianna Savino*



What if you were born without a family? Not knowing what your name is, how old you are or when you were born? Christianna Savino was an orphaned infant from South Korea who had many unanswered questions growing up, however it wasn't until she became a volunteer and spent time with children in orphanages around the world that she learnt the important and meaningful aspects of life.

As an adopted child, I always had a strong sense of compassion for orphans. I was curious about their lives. Growing up I often wondered what the lasting effects on a child were who had never had a family and so I chose to study human development. As I learnt about the critical stages of infant development into adulthood and the consequences of absent love, I spiraled into sadness. I felt grateful that I was fortunate enough to have a family but I also felt a strong sense of urgency to help orphans around the world.

I decided to become a volunteer with GVN and took up a placement in Nepal at a children's home for four months. From the moment I touched down in Kathmandu, I knew I had made the right choice and that

this experience would change my life.

On my first day I saw poverty and sickness, nothing like I had ever seen before. There were shacks made of iron sheets, children in tattered clothes, entire families begging on the dirt streets in the middle of winter. There were people without legs crawling on the ground through the mud and it horrified me.

“Teaching the orphans was one of the best times I have ever had.”

I tried to emotionally prepare myself to embrace new cultural challenges such as sitting on the floor, eating with my hands, living in a mud hut without electricity and showering with a bucket of water. However the most awkward and uncomfortable experiences like squatting in the outhouse right next to the water buffalo, or bathing in the middle of the village, ended up becoming some of my best memories.

In the beginning I wondered how much I would be able to communicate with the orphans. Would they like me? Would I end up becoming emotionally attached? I soon



Popcorn and movie night at the orphanage, El Salvador



Christianna with baby Hope

saw that the children were kind, loving and very receptive of me. There were kids of all ages and some with disabilities such as Down's syndrome and polio.

It was challenging yet we found ways to communicate through body language, facial expressions and song. From early in the morning until late at night we would play and sing. Even wrestling the kids to bathe made me laugh. They helped me wash clothes and sweep floors, and loved to simply sit on my lap and look out over the village.

I learnt so much from this country, its people and the beautiful orphans. They taught me that language isn't necessary to communicate. There are universal understandings, like smiles, no matter what language you speak. And all children, no matter what their living conditions, level of health or education, all want to learn and all need love to survive.

Soon after my time in Nepal I volunteered

in Thailand for a year.

Vietnam became my third adventure as I began a search for self-discovery. Vietnam has a rich culture and I loved all its influences dating back through history. The orphanage I taught in was quite large, with children of all ages. As an orphaned infant myself I found myself drawn to spending time with the little ones.

One infant in particular, a premature girl, stole my heart. I loved holding her close to my chest so she could hear my heart beat. I had learnt that infants who are not held are not able to develop properly, so I spent extra time rocking her in my arms. She was the tiniest thing I had ever seen and I began wondering if I looked like her when I was in the orphanage. She hadn't been given a name yet and I knew immediately what I wanted to name her. Hee-Vong; which means Hope in Vietnamese. I had such hope for her to be healthy and hope for her to be adopted and loved by a family of her own.

Teaching the orphans was one of the best times I have ever had. We laughed, sang and danced all the time and the children were some of the happiest I have ever met. I really loved the culture, the children and the other volunteers. We all had a wonderful time with lesson plans, teaching as a team and getting to know the kids.

The children in Vietnam taught me how to make the best of any situation, to always keep a light heart and to be as silly as possible, whenever possible. When I felt sad or sorry for the children with severe health problems or when the caretakers of the orphanage were angry, they would run to me with smiles across their faces and I knew they would be alright.

My next experience took me to El Salvador. This orphanage was run by Catholic nuns and all the children were girls. In fact, many of them were young ladies because their ages ran all the way up to 18 years. This was a wonderful and happy home to grow up in. The nuns were fabulous with the cheeriest dispositions, the kindest hearts and the gentlest voices. They were happy to be there and to look after the children.

I really looked forward to teaching art projects, reading stories and playing games on the basketball courts. All the kids were eager to get to know me and to learn English. They wrote letters to pen pals and would draw pictures. They all seemed in good health and were able to attend school. I had a wonderful experience and it was inspiring to be part of a well run orphanage.

Overall, my experiences spanning orphanages in three different countries was life altering. I learnt more about myself and the world, and have many hopes and dreams for the futures of all the children I was fortunate to meet. I am committed to creating awareness of the plight of orphans and to maybe someday run my own orphanage, adoption agency or volunteer organization. Perhaps I will even go further and someday change adoption policies so more children can be placed

in loving homes.

Volunteering is an important aspect of my life. It keeps me grounded and reminds me of what is important in life. To think that my college career and my fancy computer don't even compare to the lessons I have been taught by these children still amazes me.

Each moment is a gift. If one person is touched by someone else through the memories that they share and the laughs they have together, then we can see that it only takes one to begin to make a difference for the future of our world.

Christianna is teaching preschool at UCSD and currently working on her BA in International Studies. She is currently applying to graduate school to get a Master's degree in International Relations with a career emphasis in non-profit management. "The experiences that I have had through GVN as a volunteer in Nepal, Vietnam, and El Salvador as well as my teaching in Thailand and other volunteer projects in Mexico and Panama have all been a crucial part of me taking the next step in my career," says Christianna.

Christianna has since been in contact with the family who adopted Hope from Vietnam. "Hope now lives in the United States with a loving family just as I had hoped for her."

Create a Ripple

Volunteer as a family in

Vietnam www.globalvolunteernetwork.org/vietnam

Philippines www.globalvolunteernetwork.org/philippines

Peru www.globalvolunteernetwork.org/peru

Panama www.globalvolunteernetwork.org/panama

Romania www.globalvolunteernetwork.org/romania

09

Namaste

by David Heinz



It was Christmas Day, 2003 when David Heinz boarded a plane at New York's JFK airport. Little did he know that the trip he was about to make would dramatically change his life. David was on his way to volunteer his services to a small village school in need of repair somewhere in the mountainous hills of Nepal.

"It's through the helping of others that we truly help ourselves." When I heard this quote many years ago, I'd certainly appreciated the concept, but didn't fully comprehend it. My trip to Nepal gave me the opportunity to fully embrace its meaning.

As I settled into GVN's Kathmandu offices with 25 other volunteers, I learnt about the local projects I could be involved in. I'm a furniture maker by trade and have also done some building restoration, so I had signed up for the School and Community Maintenance Program before I left the USA.

There were several project sites close by but I was keen to explore Nepal, so I chose a school repair project located in a remote village called Bhimpokhara, two and a half days travel from Kathmandu.

Bhimpokhara is located in a part of Nepal that, at the time, was being controlled by a

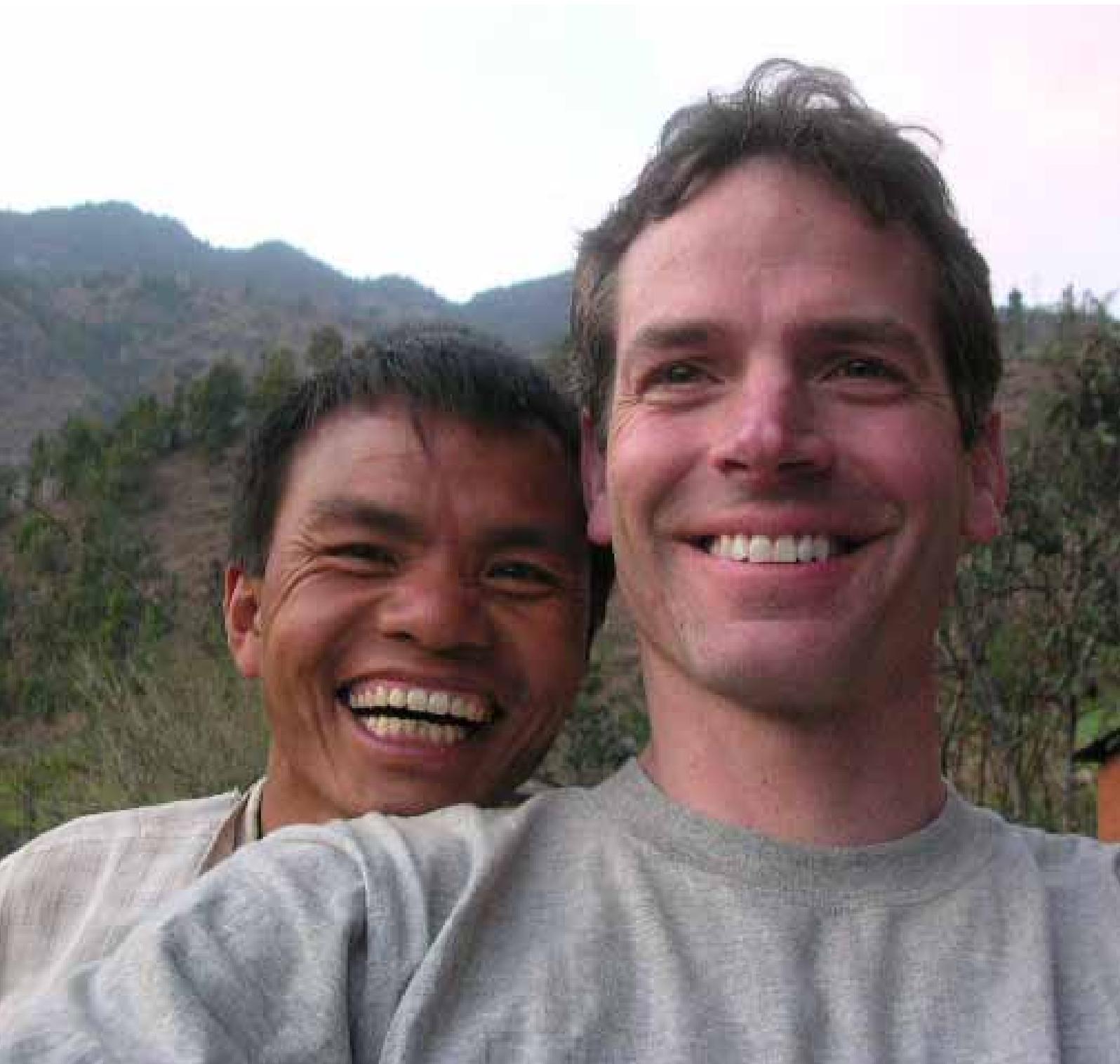
rebel group called Maoists. As the Maoists did not care much for the USA, its government or people, I had to weigh up the safety risks. After much contemplation and discussion with other volunteers, I chose to go but took the precaution of entering the village under the guise of being Canadian.

The beauty of Nepal's countryside is like nothing I'd ever seen before. The last two hours of our journey from the city was by jeep on a road full of holes that caused jarring bumps and bounces. While I was physically uncomfortable, I actually enjoyed the thought that each pothole emphasized the distance I was removed from my normal life.

Along with four other volunteers, I arrived at the guesthouse that was to be our home for the next seven weeks. We were introduced to our hosts, a married couple called Amma and Bah and their three daughters still living at home, who all welcomed us warmly.

We were shown to our sleeping quarters to freshen up before a cup of tea. Soon dinner was served, a curry rice dish called dhal bhat, which we would eat many times during our stay.

The following morning I went to assess the



David and friend Dil in 2008, Nepal

“It’s through the helping of others that we truly help ourselves.”

damage to the school in need of repair. My first impression was one of great trepidation. Twenty-three years ago, local carpenters had built a new classroom but did not properly join it to the original school building. The method used to construct the main building was sound, demonstrating the skill and experience of the men who had built it. So, I was curious as to why the additional classroom had not been properly attached. Due to the weakness of the structure, its floor had collapsed. It was not being used and the door was padlocked shut.

Upon further inspection with Dil, the local craftsman, we decided that the classroom had to be completely torn down. This was big. The repair I had envisioned before I arrived was a manageable project that I could do on my own. Never did I anticipate that the project would require so many hands or that the whole village would end up offering their time to help. It was daunting but also exciting to think of the work that lay ahead.

The first thing we needed was materials such as cement, structural rebar and new slate shingles however the village had no money to offer the project. I needed 244,000 Nepalese rupees, or about USD\$3600.

By this time, I was emotionally invested in the project and wanted to do everything I could to make it a reality. The reconstruction could not go ahead without funding so I walked to nearby Baglung to call GVN.

Emma, my project coordinator, was as

shocked as I was about the extent of work required. GVN committed just over half of what I needed. Where would I get the rest? Having just spent the previous month in India, I had about 70 friends and family members I was keeping in touch with via email. I decided to send a group email, asking them to donate money toward the project. It was seven in the morning back home, so I stressed the urgency of the situation and asked them to reply that same day if they could assist.

I had an excited night’s rest and anxiously checked my email the following morning. To my surprise, my family and friends had pledged USD\$2000, more than I needed for my portion of the materials. Over the next few days and weeks, as more people read my request, I received more pledges. Ultimately, the total amount raised was USD\$2875!

In retrospect, I realize this was the beginning of my journey toward helping make the world a better place. With one email, I tapped into a society that already has so much, a society full of caring people that want to help but don’t have the time or inclination to do so. I could be the conduit by which they can also improve our world.

I do have the time to travel and offer hands-on help in villages far from America. And I know for sure that people do want to help. They knew of my travels and my intentions and they trusted that their contribution would be used for the purpose it was intended.

The ripple effect of that experience has

continued for me. After that Nepal trip three years ago, I trekked to Everest Base Camp with GVN. Forty people from around the world came together and hiked one of the most beautiful routes of the Himalayas to raise money to build an orphanage in Kathmandu. Once again I sent out an email to my friends and family. This time I raised USD\$4000 more than I needed for my contribution to the orphanage.

But the ripples did not stop there. My time spent with the villagers in Bhimpokhara allowed me to get to know them, albeit briefly. I came to have a sweet, joking friendship with Vishnu, the 12-year old daughter of my friend and co-worker Dil. So it was Vishnu that I thought of when I realized I had USD\$4000 to donate to a worthy cause. I knew of a good boarding school in Baglung and thought that this money could help Vishnu and her friends get a better education. I went back to the village after the Everest trek and spoke with the villagers about my idea. They were thrilled that I was willing to help eight of their children access a better chance in life. One year of boarding school was USD\$500. Eight children were chosen, but sadly Vishnu was not one of them. Dil felt she was too old and too valuable to the family at home. Instead, his youngest daughter Gori Thappa was chosen to attend in Vishnu's place.

The eight children have now completed two years of schooling and I continue to fundraise for them. It's a rewarding endeavor and I'm now working on a plan to help the village be more self-sustaining. It's in early development, but I want to help the locals sell their handcrafted items.

I think most of us go on these types of trips to help where we can, to give back a small portion of the blessings that we so easily take for granted. But as we put in our time and do the task at hand, we are raised to a different level of appreciation for the beauty that life has to offer. It all started for me on that one Christmas Day in 2003. One small village school needed repairs and one man felt he could help. I had no idea that the benefit I would gain from that experience would be as great as, if not greater than, the benefit that I would provide. Namaste.

David continues to raise money for eight children in Bhimpokhara to attend boarding school, and has committed to provide two new teachers to the local village school.

In 2009 David organized a fundraising hike along the Vermont section of The Long Trail, a 275 hiking path that runs north/south through the state of Vermont. His goal is to raise another USD\$10,000 for the children in the village.

Create a Ripple

Volunteer in a Community Development Program

Nepal www.globalvolunteernetwork.org/nepal

Honduras www.globalvolunteernetwork.org/honduras

Ghana www.globalvolunteernetwork.org/ghana/community

10

Kiwimbi (Ripples)

by Gwen Harrop



If you stood on the beach in Tanzania and cast a rock into the ocean, do you think that the ripple created from that single rock could cross the Indian Ocean and eventually meet the land-mass of Australia? Gwen Harrop will tell you exactly how it can.

Before the first day of my volunteer placement for GVN in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, East Africa, I visited the chaotic and sweaty but extremely colorful Kariakoo Markets. It was April 2006 and the sights and smells were vastly different to my hometown of Melbourne.

“They trusted me to take their daughter half way around the world.”

At 27 years of age, having just quit my physiotherapy job, I'd set out on 18 months of overseas adventure and was soaking up my surroundings like a sponge. A lasting vision that day was a beggar walking on calloused knees, dragging his club feet and wasted legs behind him - club feet

is a birth defect where the baby is born with their feet facing inwards and soles pointing backwards. Without treatment the afflicted person appears to walk on the outsides of their ankle and foot. Unable to support himself due to his disability, he was reduced to a life of begging merely to survive. So when, on my first day at 'Kawe Mentally Handicapped School', I met Tatu, an angelic seven year old teetering on her club feet, I couldn't help but think of her unfortunate future. She was clearly malnourished, weighing only 13kg; less than the average three year old. However Tatu was all smiles despite her condition and obvious challenges.

She lives in a corrugated iron and mud building with her parents and two siblings. They have no running water or electricity and the toilet is a communal outhouse. Her mother cooks meals over a small charcoal stove on the ground outside and tends to her three children. At last contact, Tatu's father was unemployed and had spent a brief time in prison for assault. However on meeting him he is a friendly, appreciative man with good English skills. Tatu's brother and sister are healthy and attend a regular class at Kawe school, unlike Tatu.



Gwen Harrop and Tatu, a day at the Melbourne Zoo, Australia

“After much thought I decided that if I could help just one child I would make a difference.”

Due to Tatu’s physical disability she is wrongly judged as being mentally disabled and therefore attends Kawe Mentally Handicapped School. This actually balances in her favor when I arrive. My placement is at grass roots level and has its fair share of frustrations.

Most children in the class have cerebral palsy, ranging from severely to slightly affected, with perhaps only a speech deficit or loss of use of one arm. The daily class routine is 45 minutes of sport, usually ball skills, followed by the recital of numbers one to five, over and over “Moja, Mbili, Tatu, Nne, Tano” (Yes, Tatu means number three!).

However they never seemed to learn what the numbers meant or how to apply them. This was the same with the alphabet. They are also taught ‘home skills’ like learning how to light a stove and prepare tea, unlike children in mainstream education that do creative activities such as arts and crafts, singing and dancing.

As a physiotherapist, I tried to utilize my time working one-on-one with the kids. I encouraged those with cerebral palsy to recognize and use their affected limbs with some basic equipment I’d brought from home - play dough, a puppet, puzzles, activity books and pipe cleaners.

One girl I particularly enjoyed working with was Bernadette. She had trouble with speech and fine-motor control, such as using a pencil to write. When I worked with her on maths problems and mazes,

she was clearly as smart as a normal child, and in fact had a twin in normal stream. However, like Tatu, her physical abilities deemed her mentally handicapped by the national system. I could sense her frustration due to a lack of stimulation. As my placement progressed an ethical question rolled through my mind. Should I channel all my effort and skills into one child or help as many as I could in a little way? After much thought I decided that if I could help just one child I would make a difference.

I felt that Tatu was the one child I could make the biggest difference for. I gathered as much information as I could. In addition to my volunteer duties, I emailed orthopaedic contacts in New Zealand, Australia, London and South Africa and researched the latest evidence for treating club feet. It wasn’t long before I realized that Tatu desperately needed extensive orthopaedic surgery. I visited the Muhumbili Orthopaedic Institute to track down her medical records and meet with the orthopaedic professor.

As my placement was from 8am to 11am, I was left with plenty of free time. So I decided to put it and my gymnastics coaching skills to good use. With the help of other volunteers, I started working with about 30 local boys and girls developing their ‘Sarikasi’, or gymnastics skills. We all absolutely loved it! Meanwhile an interesting chain of events was unfolding in Australia. An email I had sent to the Royal Children’s Hospital



Tatu in 2006



Tatu in 2009

in Melbourne was forwarded to Leo Donnan, an orthopaedic surgeon who does part-time work for Moira Kelly's Children First Foundation (CFF).

The Foundation seeks to help children, primarily up to 15 years of age that have operable conditions but are ineligible for assistance from larger aid organizations due to their country of origin, remoteness or the severity of their illness.

In particular, the Foundation's Miracle Miles Program identifies children in war-torn or poverty-stricken lands suffering from debilitating illness, injury or deformity, and brings them to Australia for life-saving or profoundly life-changing surgery. Rehabilitation is undertaken at the Foundation's farm in rural Victoria. Children accepted into the Miracle Miles

Program have all their expenses paid for including travel, food, accommodation, and all surgical, medical and rehabilitation costs. They generally travel without a parent, instead accompanied by a CFF representative.

“It was surreal to be flying out of Germany with a big box of donated clothes, toys and school supplies...”

Just one week after I'd left Africa for Europe, Tatu was accepted into the program.

“They have no running water or electricity and the toilet is a communal outhouse.”

The Foundation asked that I represent them and escort her to Australia. This was fantastic news but also the start of a huge challenge: navigating government red-tape from outside of Africa.

I was located in a remote part of Germany working as a physiotherapist for the British Forces on a NATO base. I soon realized that if I was going to get this project off the ground, I needed a reliable Tanzanian-based helper.

Janet Kiwia was a godsend. As a Dar es Salaam travel agent she knew the ‘ins and outs’ of the Tanzanian passport and visa system. She also has her own NGO with volunteer houses in Moshi and local orphanage support. To top it off, Janet has a son in Tatu’s class at school and consequently knows Tatu’s family well. Without Janet, Tatu’s surgery never would have come to fruition. You may be wondering why the Foundation insisted I accompany Tatu to Australia?

Although a parent is great emotional support for an unwell child, it can have dramatic effects, especially when dealing with impoverished families. There is a delicate balance necessary for survival; mother prepares food, cleans and tends the children, while father earns some money to pay basic rent, food, health needs and other necessary bills.

It was important that a normal family routine was maintained for Tatu’s siblings. Also, children are much more flexible to change than adults, hence uprooting a child from a third world nation and taking

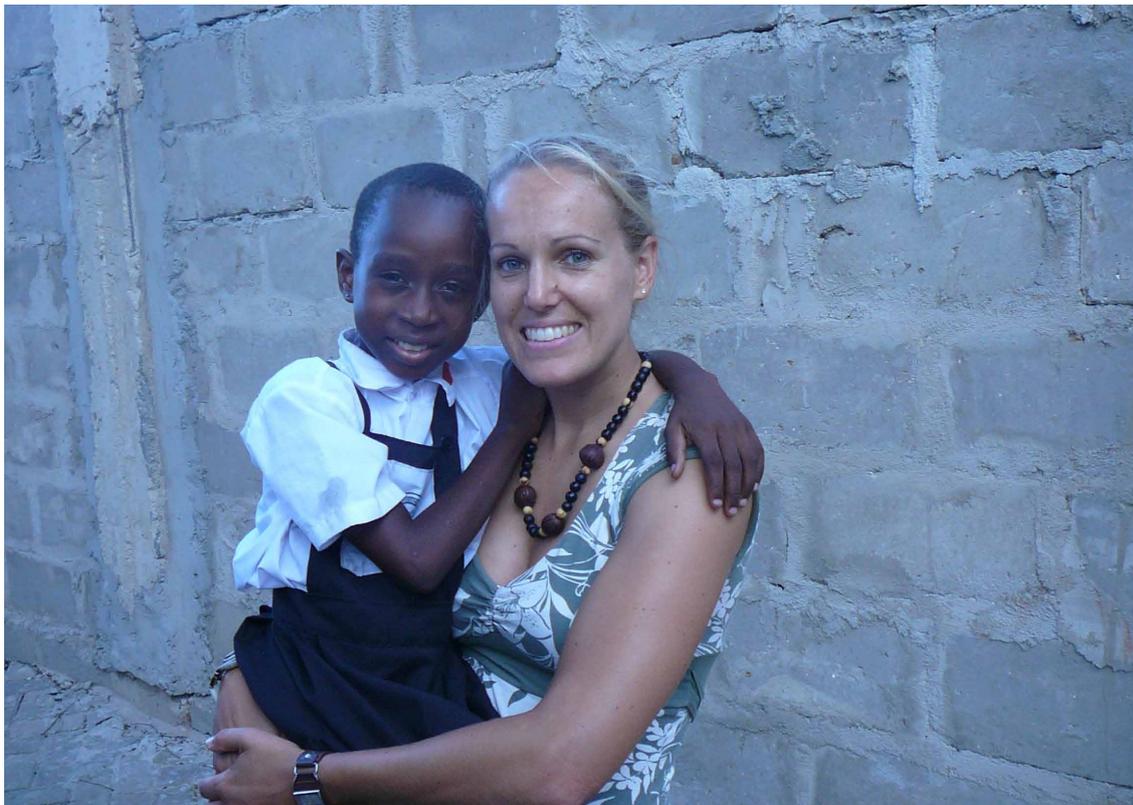
them to a western society is a lot easier than for an adult.

Tatu’s parents understood and agreed that she would go without them. They said “Tatu’s health comes first and we are so grateful for anything you can do to help her”. They trusted me to take their daughter half way around the world. Dealing with the African system required huge patience. After her acceptance into the program in May, Tatu received her passport in September. The next step, applying for her visa proved less efficient.

“Tatu’s health comes first and we are so grateful for anything you can do to help her.”

All paperwork had to go to the Australian Embassy in Nairobi, Kenya by tracked mail. The Tanzanian mail system turned out to be far more reliable than the embassy. They misplaced sections of her application and the board doctor refused to do the necessary medical examination until prompted by the embassy. However, despite our requests they never did. They even called Janet asking for Tatu’s medical report.

It took three months for the embassy to work this out, during which time Janet and I



Gwen and Tatu - reunion in Kawe, Tanzania 2009

both became disheartened and close to losing faith in the project. However somewhere in the depths of my heart I knew that goodness would prevail. January passed and our planned date for departure, February 16, came and went without a visa in sight.

Finally, we had jubilation in April when Tatu's visa was accepted and our flights were booked, nearly one year to the date since I had first met this special girl.

Tatu's project also enabled another Tanzanian under the Foundation's radar to come to Australia for medical attention. Zahra, a stunning 14-year old Muslim girl whose family fled Somalia in the 1990's, had a heart defect that prevented

her from leading a normal life. Without medical attention her life expectancy was diminished. So not only was I responsible for Tatu, but also Zahra.

At this stage, my life couldn't have been any busier! On April 15, I ran the Paris Marathon; on the 18th I flew from Germany to Dubai, and on the 19th I arrived in Dar es Salaam. Two days later, I flew with the girls via Dubai and Singapore to Melbourne, Australia. I travelled four continents (Europe, Asia, Africa and Oceania) in less than a week.

Having spent months playing a waiting game, it all came together very quickly. It was surreal to be flying out of Germany

with a big box of donated clothes, toys and school supplies, on my way to escort two Tanzanians half way around the world. I kept smiling to myself in disbelief, hardly believing that it had finally come to fruition. I used the flights and 10-hour Dubai transit to continue studying the Swahili language, as Tatu had no English skills.

It felt so good to be driving through rush hour in Dar es Salaam. I wound down the window and breathed in all the familiar smells - cooking chapatti and BBQ maize, burning, sweat, and earth, and I smiled to myself. When I saw Tatu, the focus of more than 100 hours of work, it was truly brilliant. She not only recognized me, but greeted me with a massive grin and her well recited English phrase “Good morning Madam”, even though it was five o’clock in the afternoon!

The next 48-hours were spent with Tatu’s and Zahra’s parents, learning allergies, religious requirements, likes and dislikes. We completed paperwork and Foundation contracts. I visit the Kariakoo markets once more, this time to buy Tatu a travel bag. I don’t see the beggar-man, a good omen I hope.

Dar es Salaam airport is horrendously hot and chaotic. People everywhere, queuing to enter through security to departures. We farewelled the girls’ families outside the airport – no tears and brave faces all round. Tatu and Zahra were so patient as we queued to get through security and waited for one hour in the intense humidity for our boarding passes. It was certainly touch and go through passport control. Taking Tanzanian children out of the country unaccompanied by a parent is a serious matter. Although my

intentions were honest, there are plenty of cases of children being taken out of Tanzania for illegitimate reasons.

“She not only recognized me, but greeted me with a massive grin and her well recited English phrase “Good morning Madam”, even though it was five o’clock in the afternoon!”

Tatu’s travel companion is ‘Three’, a huge pink bear. It was a present from eight year old Jade Clarke, who insisted I cart it all the way to Tanzania as a present for Tatu. Jade touched me with her humanitarian insight when saying “Oh my gosh, it’s hard enough going to hospital let alone without your mom, or even a teddy”. So she spent her pocket money on this massive bear! It turns out to be a godsend as Three makes a great pillow, allowing Tatu to sleep through the long transit in Dubai. The next chapter of this story is one of girls exploring a brand new world. Tatu enthusiastically presses all the buttons around her airplane seat; light on, light off, light on, light off! Chair down, chair up! She calls on the air hostess about 30 times. I showed both of the girls how to operate the toilet and reassured them that



Tatu recovering in the Mercy Hospital after her surgery, Australia

they wouldn't be sucked out the bottom of the plane. Zahra needs to be taught how to step on and off an escalator - after all it's rare to come across an escalator in Africa. I teach Tatu how to use a knife and fork, as she normally eats with her right hand, keeping the left for toileting.

We finally get a window seat on the Singapore to Melbourne leg. I encourage the girls to watch as the plane takes off as I am becoming suspicious that Tatu doesn't understand that we are flying and instead thinks we are simply sitting in a room eating and watching movies! As the plane leaves the paddy fields behind and levels off into the fluffy clouds Zahra looks at

me with a look of horror. "Swap seats, I'm scared", she tells me in Swahili. So I pull the blind down and she soon forgets we are 10,000 feet high in the sky.

"I teach Tatu how to use a knife and fork, as she normally eats with her right hand, keeping the left for toileting."

When we finally arrive in Melbourne I feel like a walking zombie, having stayed

awake for 36 hours to keep vigil over the girls. When my head hits the pillow I sleep for hours. When I finally wake up, Tatu, in the twin bed next to me, is already up and gazing out the window. I imagine she is baffled at how different this neighborhood is. Looking over her shoulder we both notice the silence. Where in Tanzania, 100 people would walk past you in any given minute, perhaps carrying chickens and baskets of bananas on their heads, or laden with Masai blankets. Here it is normal to see perhaps one person walking along the pavement and a cat mooch past.

I have 10 days to settle the girls into their new life style before I need to return to Germany. Unfortunately this means I won't be around for Tatu's operation but on meeting Moira and the Foundation team all my concerns dissolve. I couldn't have brought them to a more safe, comfortable, loving and cheerful environment.

We meet Tatu's new brothers and sisters. Two abandoned boys from Iraq with congenital limb deformities and two Albanian girls with facial deformities sustained when pigs, kept within the family home, chewed on their faces as babies. A lovely boy from Somalia with an unusually enlarged head due to encephalitis. His head is dappled with burn scars. Before he came under the caring wings of Children First Foundation, a witch doctor, misunderstanding his condition, had tried to banish the demons from within him by burning his head repetitively with a hot poker. An energetic five year-old Papua New Guinean girl bonds particularly well with Tatu. She has a tumor over her eye. The CFF

house is a kid's dream home with boxes and boxes of toys, arts and crafts, a trampoline, numerous bikes, a huge playground, play houses, sand pits and a swimming pool. Pet chickens, a pet lamb and kangaroos visit at dusk and dawn. Volunteers cook the most fantastic meals and provide the kids with tons of loving care.

Tatu settles in within a flash and before you know it she is charging around the house on bikes with the other kids and even bouncing on the trampoline. Barbie dolls are the biggest hit though and, soon enough, everywhere we go, Barbie comes too.

Two days before I return to Germany, we visit Melbourne Zoo. Although Tanzania has the world's best national parks for wildlife, only the wealthy can afford to go there. It's crazy that this is Tatu's first time seeing lions, baboons, monkeys, giraffes, zebras, cheetahs and leopards. But her favorite is the platypus.

“One child's story has lead to 108 children's lives being transformed...and counting.”

However it's not all plain sailing. Tatu is frightened whenever she is examined by doctors and is hysterical at the sight of a needle. Back home, she sleeps snuggled up to her siblings, and parents are only a few feet away, unlike our spacious homes. Initially she is frightened to sleep alone and

without a light on. So we team her up with her Papua New Guinean friend in a twin room and this works well.

Before we could even consider Tatu's operation we needed to improve her health. She was still dangerously underweight and arrived with a nasty chest infection, worms and an infected ulcer. By the time I left these things were on the mend and she was eating three large meals a day.

It was a sad farewell as I would have loved to have stayed. However I was midway through a sabbatical and had a line up of countries to visit with my fiancée Brett. I remained in close contact with the Foundation regarding updates and decisions.

“In April 2008, I took Tatu home; happy, healthy and speaking excellent English. To see the smile on her mother’s face when she saw her healthy daughter and her incredible new feet made the two years of effort worthwhile.”

In October, I returned to Melbourne. Tatu's surgery was a great success but she did have to endure heavy, cumbersome

braces on her lower legs for some months, followed by splints. Tatu spent many months rehabilitating with Brett and I in our own home.

Zahra's heart surgery was also successful and, after a full-recovery, she returned to Tanzania.

In April 2008, I took Tatu home; happy, healthy and speaking excellent English. To see the smile on her mother's face when she saw her healthy daughter and her incredible new feet made the two years of effort worthwhile.

On the eve of her leaving Australia, one of the volunteers at the CFF house asked “Tatu, what are you going to do when you get home?” Tatu stunned us with her reply “I'm going to help my friend Issa get a new foot like mine, and she did.”

If you come across disabled children in your own volunteer experiences, please don't turn a blind eye. If you feel that the disability can be reversed or altered, there are foundations out there to help. The stone I cast off Bahari Beach, Dar es Salaam, in April 2006 indeed created a mighty ripple that crossed the Indian Ocean at the roaring pace of a jumbo jet to lap the shores of Australia.

Postscript

A year later, in April 2009, after visas and passports were arranged, I flew back to Tanzania to collect Issa (with a club foot) and another of Tatu's neighbours, Asha (a tiny girl with a life threatening bowel condition and a leg contracture).

These two children travelled with me to Australia to undergo life changing surgery as well. On the same visit to Tanzania, I met

Gerald (a five year old with leg deformities requiring surgery), and checked on Sophia (a teenager with severe elephantitis). In 2010, Gerald and Sophia are also coming to Australia for surgery.

Sadly Tatu's family situation had slipped further into the depths of poverty upon my return to Tanzania with Tatu in 2008. We were able to leave Tatu in a wonderful boarding school using funds raised through GVN, and her 2009 and ongoing fees are now being covered by a private sponsor. Tatu is now flourishing in school. Her report card shows straight A's and indicates she is top in her class. Through ongoing funds raised for Tatu, we are able to monitor her feet closely and 18-months post surgery they are still looking wonderful.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank GVN not only for placing me in the right place at the right time but also for their fantastic fundraising drive and support. I would also like to thank Janet Kiwia, The Katuli family, Moira Kelly and all the staff at CFF, Brett Harrop, Jean and David Jones, Faye Harrop, Jade and Sandy Clarke, Zahra Ahmed, and finally Tatu for being brave and always having a smile on her face.

Gwen's experiences amongst the children in the slum community of Kawe have lead to her forming the Watoto Kwanza Project. In 2009, 104 orphans secured futures when the project paid their local school enrolment fee and issued them with the necessary school uniforms, stationery and necessities packs (containing items like toothbrushes and underpants to allow the children to maintain good health).

Gwen visited these children and ran an arts workshop. Their artwork was carried to Australia for a fundraising exhibition, raising some USD\$7,000 to enable the Project to ship a container load of aid to the Kawe slums later this year. This contains 200 mosquito nets, 50-slum designed children's wheelchairs and enough books and equipment to open a Children's Library and Literacy Centre in the slums of Kawe. Education is the key to breaking poverty cycles.

One child's story has lead to 108 children's lives being transformed...and counting.

Create a Ripple

Volunteer in Africa www.globalvolunteernetwork.org/programs/africa

Assist the Children's First Foundation www.childrenfirstfoundation.com

Support Gwen's Watoto Kwanza Project www.watotokwanza.org



Tatu in her ilizarov fixators in 2007; brave and always smiling

11

Life on a Refugee Camp

by Chrissy Prydun



Chrissy Prydun sent this colorful email to her friends and family following her volunteer placement in Ghana back in August 2004. Chrissy's humor, wit, compassion, and spirit immediately caught our attention and we could not resist sharing this with you! Enjoy.

Yesterday I was casually walking around with a big rubber dildo in my hand, when the reality of the situation dawned on me. Mind you, it was all in the name of HIV education and I should also clarify that the scene of the crime was the maze of alleyways that haphazardly weave their way around the dwellings of the 40,000 plus inhabitants of the Liberian Refugee Camp in Buduburum, Ghana.

It seems like a lifetime ago since I first set foot on Buduburam (or more accurately plonked down an unsuspecting sparkling-white Aussie thong) into one of the many sewage puddles that dot the camp. Indeed the three day journey via Cairo to the Ghanaian capital Accra seemed to take a lifetime probably due to the fact I misplaced my travelling companion and fellow volunteer Phyllis prior to boarding an eight hour flight onboard alcohol-free Egypt Air - from where I soberly envisioned

all the scenarios that could account for her possible whereabouts!

“I was quickly thrown into the energetic pace of camp-life (albeit on African time) with new sights, sounds and names.”

Eventually, after one sleepless night in Cairo (where the 24 hour internet cafe I'd hoped to contact her through was shut) and one in Accra (where I attempted to decipher the distressed message she left on my credit-less mobile phone), I located my lost friend and lost luggage and made my way to Buduburam.

Jumping into the 'least broken' taxi I could see, I immediately remembered all that had drawn me to Africa before as I rode past dusty villages and amusing advertising (The Bigot Cafe; The Fear-God Woman Hairdresser, The High Brain Academy) with the smell of burnt coal wafting through the window and an all too familiar synthesized



Chrissy Prydun, Ghana

“The more time we spent with them, the more they embraced us into their communities, taught us about their culture and somberly yet openly shared with us their tales of war.”

reggae beat thumping from the taxi’s state of the art cassette playing sound system.

The previous drama was swiftly forgotten upon arrival at the camp with the aid of fifty kids running to jump on me and a fresh bunch of smiling international and local volunteers waiting to greet me. From here I was quickly thrown into the energetic pace of camp-life (albeit on African time) with new sights, sounds and names.

Sights - Watching a Liberian orphan outfit put on a spectacular drumming performance for the community; the first unsettling glimpse of a mouse tail in my bedroom to be and of course more amusing advertising such as the God’s Time Photo studio motto: “We guarantee to add 200% value to your already beauty that even you won’t recognise”.

Sounds - There was no need for an alarm because if the locals yelling “way-ohhh-way-ohhh” directly into our windows at five in the morning didn’t wake us, then there was a good chance the New Age Church’s deafening PA message “Good morning, put your garbage in the bin or YOU WILL BE ARRESTED!” would do the trick!

Names - African parents have a great sense of humor when it comes to naming their kids: there was 2Pac the taxi driver; local kids: ‘Baby G’, ‘Worship’, ‘Sweetie’ and ‘My

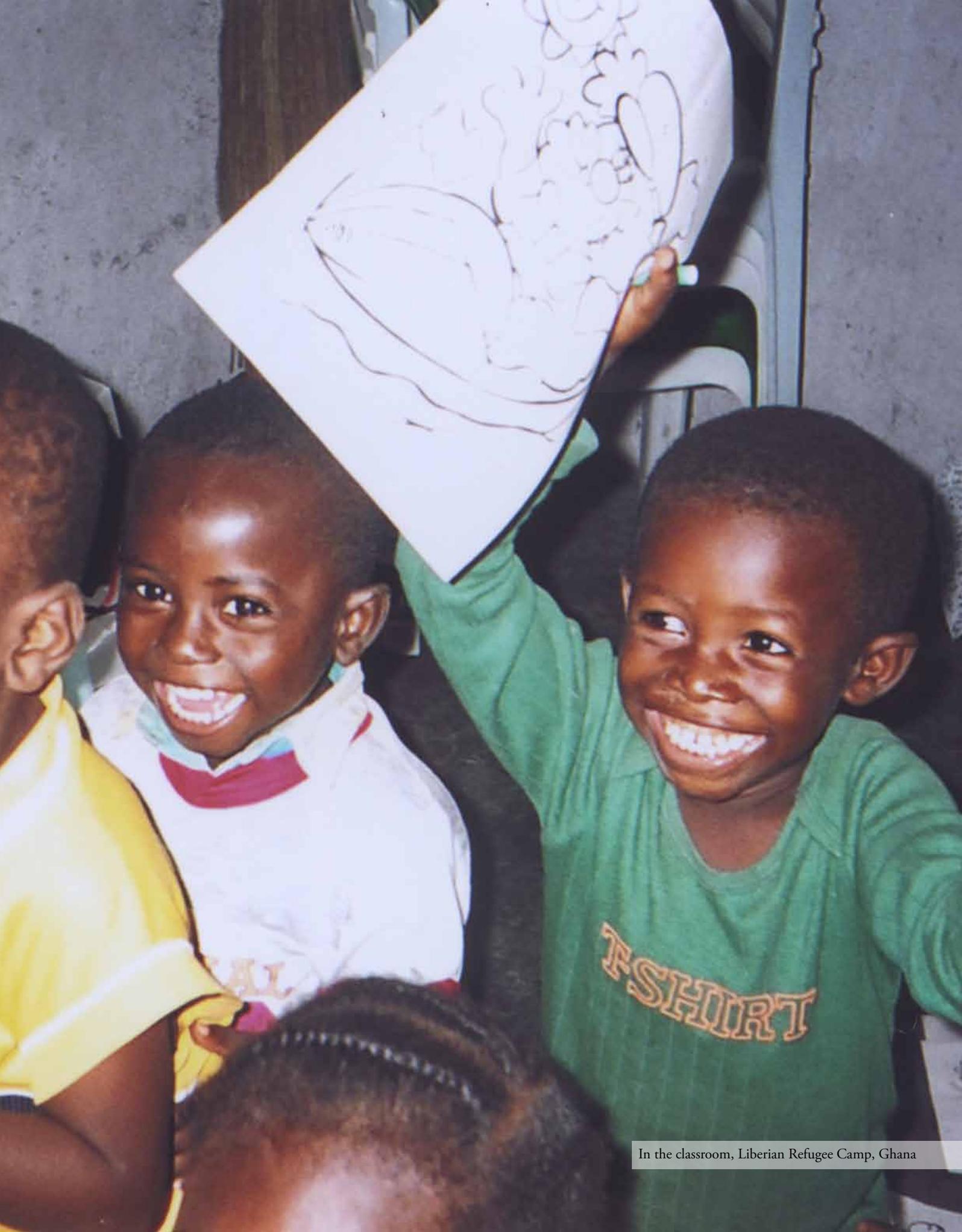
Friend’; oh, and how can you ever forget a name when someone introduces themselves with “I am perfect”. Excuse me? “Yes, my name is Perfect”.

The local organization I worked with was primarily involved in making life better for the refugee kids on the camp and so initially, I eagerly jumped into various teaching roles at the school, which was created for the numerous kids on camp who couldn’t afford an education.

I spent my mornings attempting to discipline the hyperactive nursery class with an average of one casualty per lesson (often a crying kid who got crushed in the ‘whoa’ part of the hokey pokey), mixed with teaching the fifth grade science class. Wednesday was reserved for strengthening my vocal chords and my muscles as I teamed up with Phyllis (in ‘Jane Fonda’ style attire) to teach PE to the entire school.

At the end of semester, I became involved with the HIV Education Team - aptly referred to as ‘The Protection Unit’. Run by a local volunteer nicknamed ‘Mr Condom’, I was armed with a pen, paper, condoms and dildos to visit homes and schools with local volunteers in an attempt to educate the community about HIV and safe sex.

As if the word ‘penis’ was not appearing



In the classroom, Liberian Refugee Camp, Ghana

in my vocabulary enough, I also teamed up with a Canadian volunteer to put on an intensive three-day sexual education workshop for the local volunteers, including enlightening and sometimes entertaining discussion on topics from homosexuality to pedophilia, rape and sexual harassment, the illusive g-spot, masturbation, and the culturally-sensitive issue of female genital mutilation. We learnt as much as we taught.

The weeks flew by and weekends were spent with trips to Kokrobite, to the cultural hub Kumasi and the Cape Coast. We learnt about the slave trade and had a chance encounter with a local radio DJ, where we did some plugs for the local organization live on air.

However, one of the most entertaining expeditions was a day trip to Akosombo, home to West Africa's largest man-made dam. I felt privileged to be invited and inaccurately assumed it would take the hassle out of planning my usual Ghanaian weekend away. I may not have learnt a great deal about Akosombo, but nonetheless I acquired a new sense of humor!

Ingredients of an African Road Trip

1. Full house: Take 30 passengers and one mini-bus, but make sure it seats only a maximum of 20 passengers.
2. Safety in numbers: Hire five bus drivers i.e. one genuine bus driver and four friends of the driver who all believe they are the bus driver.
3. A modest destination: The destination is not important aboard an African day trip. It is more important to maximize the time spent on the bus.

4. Flat battery: It is paramount to leave the light inside the bus on at all times even when the engine is not kick-starting efficiently, unless all the passengers shout "TURN OFF THE LIGHT" in unison three times.

5. Time efficiency: Arrange many pit stops including:

- one legitimate stop for all passengers to go to the toilet
- eight stops because the bus driver is sceptical that the sign pointing to Akosombo actually goes to Akosombo, and needs to stop the bus and disembark to continue arguing with his four friends about the correct route
- six stops to ask directions because the bus driver is still adamant that following the Akosombo sign will not necessarily lead to Akosombo
- one stop less than five minutes away from the camp for corn
- three or four stops where the purpose of stopping is unclear but it is absolutely necessary for everyone to get off the bus immediately.

It was the Akosombo day trip that cemented the friendships that had been easily formed between the international and local Liberian volunteers. The more time we spent with them, the more they embraced us into their communities, taught us about their culture and somberly yet openly shared with us their tales of war. I recall countless conversations with these volunteers - be it during an informal work-break, whilst out on the field or casually

over a beer at dusk, where I would sit in stunned silence to hear their stories.

One guy told me how he hid for months under leaf litter and slept in barns to escape his war torn homeland, another had witnessed rebels murder his parents right before his very eyes, while a brave young woman told me how she escaped to the refugee camp after years of having been enslaved and raped by rebels, acting willingly as a hostage in order to escape the threat of being killed.

“The more I engaged with the community the more I was inspired, which made it hard to leave the camp and ‘reality’ as I now knew it.”

To this day I still cannot believe the stories they shared. You might expect them to have a vendetta against the world, or to have gone mad and been sent to an asylum with all they have had to bear. Yet these young adults and students were still pursuing their dreams and aspirations. Their strength and ability to move on and bear no grudge amazed me the most.

The more I engaged with the community the more I was inspired, which made it hard to leave the camp and ‘reality’ as I now knew it. However, four weeks had passed and my

time was nearly up. In a few days I was due to fly out to Cairo to meet up with my friend Tina to travel around Egypt for two weeks.

As much as I was excited about my travel plans, a part of me instinctively felt there was more work to be done on camp. It wasn’t until the day before my departure that I received a sign I should stay. After weeks discussing all the health prevention work I would love to get involved with, ‘Mr Garbage’, the head of the Water and Sanitation Department - a department I had so eagerly wanted to work for, finally approached me with a job.

He excitedly told me about how an important representative from UNHCR had selected them to front a Health Education scheme for the entire camp and that he wanted me to write the proposal for it. I was very excited but at the same time sadly had to inform him that I would have to turn it down because I was leaving the following morning.

Nonetheless it led me to believe that my ‘gut-instinct’ had been fuelled by more than just nostalgia and I remembered saying that evening “If only there was some way to extend my stay, like an air-strike...”

As if by the hands of fate, the following morning I received a text message from Tina who had known nothing about my thoughts. She told me she had got the chicken pox and could no longer travel to Cairo. I was overcome with conflicting emotions: disappointment for Tina who I felt I had cursed with chicken pox, yet excitement at the opportunity this presented to extend my stay.

Now as I sit here in Cairo (two weeks after I was initially meant to arrive) on a two-day stopover, as opposed to my original travel plans, I don’t regret a thing. Yes, I had plans

to climb Mt Sinai and sail on a felucca but the two weeks I extended my stay at the refugee camp, were by far the most satisfying of my life and enabled me to complete the draft Health and Sanitation proposal.

My experiences in Ghana offered me a taste of an alternative 'reality' and sparked my intrigue to look outside the square. This is something I often forget to do and it takes experiences like this to remind me of the beauty of life and what is really important at the end of the day.

Chrissy's experience at Buduburum had a huge impact on her. She had originally planned to commence postgraduate studies in Nutrition and Dietetics, but her experiences at the refugee camp prompted her to enrol in an MSc International Public Health Nutrition as she thought that it was more important to address the health inequities prevalent in developing countries.

Chrissy also accompanied a tetraplegic as part of a team of six, on his six-month fundraising, world-first, trans-African expedition, where he became the first person ever with his level of injury to successfully drive an adapted vehicle from London to Cape Town. The expedition raised over £600,000 for different charities in the UK and in Africa and spread the message that disability needn't get in the way of living your dream (see www.drivinghome.co.uk).

Recently Chrissy has completed an internship with Oxfam Australia and is now looking for new ways to get back to Africa.

Create a Ripple

Volunteer in Ghana

Community Development www.globalvolunteernetwork.org/ghana/community

Teaching www.globalvolunteernetwork.org/ghana/teaching

Volunteer at an IDP Camp

Kenya www.globalvolunteernetwork.org/kenya



Education for Knowledge

Liberian Refugee Camp, Ghana

12

Getting Attached to Romania

Kirk Olsen/Written by Megan Tady

When Kirk Olsen stepped off of the bus in the small town of Galati in Romania, it was like stepping back in time. There were horse-drawn carts moseying down the road. People walked to a well several times a day to fetch water in buckets. The shops were few and tiny.

Kirk couldn't think of a better way to describe the town than this, "Think of the way an eastern European village looked 50 to 100 years ago. That was it."

But Kirk didn't go to Romania just for a change of pace. The 48-year-old retired bus driver from California traveled to Galati, and stayed for eight weeks, because a group of young orphans were counting on him.

Through GVN, Kirk volunteered to work at one of several group homes run by the Tanner Mission, where he helped to care for eight physically and mentally handicapped orphans, ranging from ten to 22 years old.

"All of the orphans were rescued from state-run institutions," Kirk said. "None of them is able to function on their own. This is their home now."

The Tanner Mission was started after an American couple watched a startling documentary about the dire and horrible conditions of state-run orphanages in

Romania. There are currently 80,000 to 100,000 orphans in the country. Their plight was made public after the fall of communism in 1989, when it was discovered that children were living in deplorable conditions in the country's 650 orphanages.

"There was one boy that I would have brought home if I could."

The orphans were a result of Romania's former dictator Nicolae Ceausescu's "family planning policy." In an effort to increase the population and the workforce, Ceausescu denied birth control to families until they had produced five children. Because most parents were unable to care for them all, children were often sent away to be raised by the state, most often growing up malnourished, mistreated, and with little or no affection.

Today, Romania is still feeling the effects of this draconian policy. Exacerbated by extreme poverty (UNICEF estimates that 30 percent of Romanians live in poverty),



Dress up at the Tanner Mission, Romania

“This is a different kind of vacation. You’re giving back to the world.”

orphanages remain full. Recently, however, Romania has made moves to close some orphanages and improve the conditions of others in response to demands from the European Union. The country is hoping to become part of the union, but must meet certain conditions before granted entry.

Bruce and Sandie Tanner, however, couldn’t wait for bureaucratic action, and have taken their own steps to rescue 33 orphans from state-run institutions. The rescued children now live in group homes that the Tanners built. At Christmas, they put on a recital, bake cookies and cover the houses with homemade holiday decorations. The contrast between the orphans’ old and new homes is astonishing.

But the Tanners can’t, and don’t, do it alone. They rely on volunteers like Kirk to help teach and counsel the orphans, as well as feed, cook, clean, and play.

“I did everything and anything they asked me,” Kirk said. “A lot of it was just hanging out with the boys. I chopped wood by hand. I helped plow a field. I even gave driving lessons.”

Through his experience, Kirk made lasting relationships that had a profound impact on his life.

“There was one boy that I would have brought home if I could,” Kirk said. “He’s in a wheelchair. We would watch this Romanian music video program together and sit there dancing. He would just dance away in his wheelchair. He really

touched my life. When I told him it was time for me to leave, we both started crying. I got attached.”

Kirk kept a journal while he was in Romania. From his writing, it’s easy to see how he became attached.

“Through his experience, Kirk made lasting relationships that had a profound impact on his life.”

“Last Sunday was the big Easter egg hunt,” Kirk wrote. “It was very much like a family event, and very much like home. I pushed one of my boys in his wheelchair and before it was over, I had three more boys in tow. Over 300 eggs and tons of candy and prizes for everyone. We, I mean all the kids, coloured the eggs on Saturday. It’s an Easter I will never forget.”

Making the decision to leave his home and life behind to work in Romania was a difficult decision for Kirk, but one that ultimately has him grateful for the experience.

“I had never traveled by myself before,” Kirk said. “I had never done anything like this. On the plane, I went into panic mode. I thought, ‘What am I doing?’ But in hindsight, it was one of the most rewarding things I’ve ever done.”



Sunflower days, Tanner Mission, Romania

While his trip may be over, Kirk thinks it's only the beginning of a new path that will have him volunteering for the rest of his life.

“When I first got on the internet to look up volunteering, I was surprised that you had to pay to volunteer,” Kirk said. “But once you’ve done it, you’re happy to pay for it. Other people asked me, ‘Why don’t you just go on vacation?’ This is a different kind of vacation. You’re giving back to the world.”

In July 2008, economic pressures forced the Tanner Mission to face the very real possibility of having to close the program. However, thanks to all of the donors who so generously gave to the Tanner Mission Emergency Appeal, USD\$25,000 was sent to Romania to help Bruce and Sandy continue to run their Mission. Today, the Tanner Mission still desperately needs volunteers and funds.

Create a Ripple

Volunteer in Romania www.globalvolunteernetwork.org/romania

Donate to the Romania Children's Fund

www.gvnfoundation.org/programs/projects/romania

13

Pocket Money and Pens

by Michelle Gourley



She blinks. Humidity surrounds her, seeping into her pores, causing her clothes to stick to her damp skin. The smells and sounds of Africa heighten her senses, alerting her to the unfamiliar that is everywhere. There's a lot to take in. She takes a deep breath of hot air and steps into the orange dust that coats everyone and everything. Bebu is a tiny village in Ghana and it is where Michelle Gourley is posted for the next two months.

I stare up at the unwelcoming building that stands formidable and alone in a concrete compound. This 'hotel' is to be my home and its prison-like appearance belies the sense of safety and sanctuary that I will come to depend on. The two men who work at this hotel are to become my bodyguards, my friends, my guardian angels. Kwame and Ofori work seven days a week, often twenty-four hours a day to support their families. Yet they ask me for nothing – their primary concern is only that I am looked after. I don't know what to do with this sort of generosity; I am grateful and humbled.

My room in this deserted hotel is spacious but sparse. I have a bed and a table and an army of ants to keep me company. Out of my window I look down on life in the village:

children playing soccer, a small boy waving up at me, people laughing, talking, buying and selling food from plates on their heads, chickens squawking, even the occasional car driving through to the next village.

“A room full of silent, solemn black faces with big white eyes stare at me.”

I can also see across the field to schools. The two seemingly derelict buildings are the educational facilities for the children of Bebu and surrounding villages. The high school is made up of three classrooms, a small teachers' room, and a 'library' which turns out to be an empty, dirty room with several torn, broken books covering in the corner. I am to be the English teacher; it seems my work will be cut out for me.

A room full of silent, solemn black faces with big white eyes stare at me. I am sweating and my mouth is dry. The intense heat does not seem to bother them. The classroom reminds me of an old bombed out building with dirt walls. Here I teach



School students take a break from class, Ghana

“In turn they teach me the correct price to pay for bananas, the best way to wash my clothes, how to eat rice from a bag...”

the children verbs, adjectives, nouns and how to do word-finds. I explain snow and computers and life outside of Bebu. In turn they teach me the correct price to pay for bananas, the best way to wash my clothes, how to eat rice from a bag and how to play very complicated clapping games.

The locals, at first cautious and untrusting, now welcome me on my daily strolls around the village. The children are the first to accept me, running to hold my hand and eager to walk with me. My students shyly show me their homes and their families and allow me to glimpse into their lives. Parents greet me and share their hopes and dreams for their children. Slowly I become part of life in Bebu. I am fiercely protective of this place and these people. It is my home.

I cried as I sat outside in the dark, hot air on my last night in Bebu. The emotion was overwhelming. I felt profoundly and irreversibly changed by my time here. Ofori and Kwame sat with me. We sat and looked at the sky in companionable silence and thoughts raced furiously through my head, trying to make sense of all that I'd experienced. How do I repay the kindness and generosity shown to me here? How do I help continue to make a difference in the same way that they've made a difference in my life? It's impossible. I simply can't. I had built a library and family and friends had sent over boxes of books. But it does not

seem like enough. Back at home I teach in a school with electricity and resources, with teachers who are paid well and students who don't understand what life in a third world country is like. So I tell them. I tell them about the children who arrive at school at seven in the morning to sweep the courtyard. I tell them about the children who go hungry at lunchtime and who stand up to answer questions. I tell them about the laughter and quiet moments. I tell them about the sheer joy of being given a pencil case and the white scars on their bodies from the cane.

We pack boxes full of books and shoes and photos and letters. New Zealand children are eager to connect and learn about a world so unfamiliar. They sit for an hour, uninterrupted, fascinated by the stories, photos and lives of children like them but not like them. They spend their pocket money on pens and their time carefully writing letters. Maybe some day they too might think about volunteer work. And if I can alter their perspective or broaden their thinking then I am in some small way repaying the people of Bebu for what they did for me.

I tell my students to look beyond the pictures and the words of my stories into a world that they can only imagine. In this world they will discover, as I did, commonalities they never thought possible:



School students and the community dance with Michelle at her leaving party, Ghana

a shared sense of humanity in its most vulnerable form. The framework around which I'd built my truths, my reality, had changed forever. The insight into a society most often represented to me as 'the other' unexpectedly and powerfully became part of who I am. Scary and exhilarating, frustrating and rewarding, empowering and humbling; teaching in Ghana was for me, life changing and immeasurably soul changing.

One day I would love to return to the small village of Bebu and spend some more time with the wonderful people who looked after me so well and of course, with the children whose faces I will never forget. None of it would have been possible without the support of my mum, who sent the first box of books. This piece is dedicated to her.

It has been three years since Michelle volunteered in Ghana. During this time she has been teaching English and Classical Studies at Kaiapoi High School in New Zealand. Every year the children at her school still work together to fundraise and send boxes of books and clothes and toys back to Ghana. They send letters in return.

Create a Ripple

Teach in Ghana www.globalvolunteernetwork.org/ghana/teaching

Teach in the Philippines www.globalvolunteernetwork.org/philippines

Teach in Cambodia www.globalvolunteernetwork.org/cambodia

Teach in Peru www.globalvolunteernetwork.org/peru

Teach in South Africa www.globalvolunteernetwork.org/southafrica

Teach in China www.globalvolunteernetwork.org/china

Teach in Honduras www.globalvolunteernetwork.org/honduras

14

Kil-a-man-jaro!

by Libby Wann



Fresh from leading the 2008 Mt Kilimanjaro Fundraising Trek, which raised over NZ\$40,000 for the Africa Children's fund, Libby Wann sent a riveting email to her family and friends about her life changing experience on the 'roof-top of Africa' that will have you on the edge of your seat!

It's been about a week since I returned from Africa. As often happens when momentous trips conclude, the overwhelming immediacy of emotions, still vivid and raw on the plane ride home, have already begun to fade, leaving me with only a thin dreamlike residue of my African adventure of which to cling.

The trip was so dynamic in its challenges—quite complete in its depth of experiences. Literally, in my 20 odd days on the road, I cried numerous times. Some tears were bitter, some sweet, some from exhaustion and some from joy. I sat in tattered school rooms listening to orphans sing hymns and only several days later sat perched on a rock at 15,000 feet, watching the clouds snake their way up the tallest mountain in Africa. I played soccer in a park with refugee children displaced from post election violence, discussed the upcoming American election with a Masai chief, visited the 'cradle of

humanity', and gave myself a pat on the back for somehow coordinating a trip for 17 strangers and seeing them safely through a politically unstable country to which I had never before visited. I watched a pride of lions circle and stalk a gazelle from 20 feet away on the Masai Mara plains, and stood atop a 19,368 foot peak in a raging snowstorm.

Mud huts and Masai warriors

On the fourth day of our trip, after collecting the rest of the hiking participants in Nairobi, we boarded our charter bus bound for Tanzania. Eighteen of us waved goodbye to the brown, haze filled skylines of Nairobi as we drove out of the city past cement companies, dusty police checks and dozing policemen with machine guns. About four hours into the eight hour bus trip to Kilimanjaro National Park, the suburbs and surrounding plains of Nairobi gave way to the rolling eternity of orange clay and scrub-brush which mark Maasailand. Pale yellow fields, dry bushes and prickly washed-out greens collided with the deep blue sky. Our rickety bus bumped and rattled its way along the washboard road. I remember staring out the window at the passing scenery. Every so often, like a mirage, a tall, dark, willowy phantom



Libby Wann with children from Shelter Children's Home, Kenya

“Had you asked me on the way up if I would ever do it again, my answer would have been a resolute ‘no’. However, a little time does wonders for the soul.”

dressed in bright red and purple sheaths would emerge out of the bush, herding stick in hand. In the distance, mud huts like those I had seen at the museum would become visible on the dry horizon. Like actors in a living museum, it was hard for the elegant Masai men and women not to capture my mind and play up to the wildest parts of my western imagination. I can only relate the experience to the equivalent of driving through the mountains in Colorado and stumbling upon on a whole community of Native Americans dressed in full feather headdresses, deerskin pants, and moccasins emerging from the forest and going about their daily routines.

“Some tears were bitter, some sweet, some from exhaustion and some from joy.”

My heart raced at the sight of their striking ‘foreignness’, their textbook ‘otherness’ encapsulating everything I find magnetic about other cultures. Although I knew I was somewhat romanticizing their existence from my bus seat, I couldn’t help admiring their exotic grace and physical

beauty. The whole experience left me with the distinctly unpleasant vision of myself as overly pink, beaky nosed and bland.

The hardest thing ever

The hike up Kilimanjaro itself begins in the lowlands. Much like the Everest Base Camp trek I had done several years earlier, the walk begins in relatively lush surroundings and works its way up through rainforests, dusty scrub and finally a high altitude desert. Unlike Nepal however, Kilimanjaro does not share the same type of atmosphere and ecology as the Himalaya. While the Himalaya loom over you, Kilimanjaro, which sits as a solitary extinct volcano without a range, lacks the density of other peaks and so you find yourself basking in the openness of your surroundings. I frequently found myself looking out and down rather than up.

The clouds also become a major player in the daily activities on Kilimanjaro, almost taking on a persona of their own. Because Kilimanjaro and Mt Meru, which sits to the south, are geological anomalies on the otherwise flat plains of Tanzania, they create their own weather patterns, trapping and dictating the movement of clouds. One afternoon, on the third day of the hike, I sat perched on a rock, at eye level with a huge billowing cloud formation. Sitting there, I

had the realization I was witnessing views usually only seen from the window of an airplane. Indeed that night, we slept at the same elevation many airplanes fly.

The next day we traversed the saddle between the two peaks of the mountain over dry lunar deserts of sparse lava rock and scree. We had amazing views of Mwenzi peak, jagged behind us, and the picturesque flat top of Kibo's extinct cone in front. On both sides, the clouds sat almost motionless at eye level or below. We were literally walking above the clouds with the Tanzania/Kenya plains stretching out 10,000 feet below.

That afternoon we arrived at the busy base camp. There was a cautious celebratory feel in the air as nerves and altitude took their toll. Several hours later, after a light meal and an even lighter sleep, we found ourselves lined up, anxiously vying for a decent pull-position for heading out of base camp. Ahead and above, lines of headlamps snaked up the mountain and disappeared into the inky night. It was cold and snowing sideways. I thought it wasn't supposed to be cold in Africa? Checking my watch, I saw it was just after midnight as we began our painfully slow march up the mountain. Several of our team were sick from the altitude and a couple had been vomiting. I was surprised they had made it out of their tents to attempt the final push.

We began our summit bid at 15,000 feet and over the next six hours would switchback up loose, steep scree and gain 4,000 feet in elevation to top-out at Gilman's Point, the first of two summits. I vividly remember the first two hours of the hike as being intensely joyful. I was

high with the thrill of doing something so perfectly bizarre and beautiful. Marching one foot after the next, I smugly thought to myself 'if this is all I have to do for the next six hours, it's in the bag'.

“Sitting there, I had the realization I was witnessing views usually only seen from the window of an airplane.”

But then gentle snow turned to icy sleet, occasional wind gusts turned to a shrill blast, 15,000 feet turned to 17,000 feet and something inside of me began to shift. By the time we got to the midway point, we sat huddled in a cave to protect ourselves from the onslaught of the elements. My water bottle had frozen, my clothes had turned stiff with a thick layer of ice and my hands were too cold to open my frozen backpack to get anything to eat. To look at my hiking companions was to stare into the eyes of a group that had gone into battle.

It seems dramatic to write such sentences now, but all I know is that somewhere in the span of a half kilometre, the scope of my understanding had been reduced to my most immediate surroundings. In this new capacity I began to process things in the basic biological categories of life and death. My cheery optimism had gone. I'm not sure what to blame this shift on - the altitude, the

weather, fatigue, the rapid gain in elevation or the fact that it was the middle of the night. Maybe it was a combination of them all, but somewhere along the way I gave in and became enveloped in my own misery.

Survival mode had taken over. I identified it and in my moments of relative lucidity was fascinated by the depth of my mind's innate instinct to now selfishly look after only me. I had intense mood swings and became mute and cranky, occupying my time hiking with evil thoughts about the perceived weakness of my companions.

My Everest Base Camp trek two years ago, although only about a thousand feet lower at its highest point, could not even begin to be compared to this journey. This was a mental battle. Although we were tired from walking for six consecutive hours, the real exhaustion was due to lack of oxygen (less than 50% the amount available at sea level) and the mental and emotional turmoil. I never once remember my heart beating rapidly from exertion or my muscles burning from fatigue.

Deep in the recesses of my mind I knew I was okay, that things would be okay, that this was only a bizarre experiment of human adaptability. But the immediacy of my misery and self pity at times became all consuming. Although I only experienced moments of craziness peppered in between longer spells of clarity, those negative mental spaces had a power that I have rarely encountered.

Nearly six and a half hours after leaving camp, just as the day began to break, we cut our final few switchbacks and finally reached Gilman's Point. The summit

moment, as cliché as it felt, was exactly like the movies. Although we hadn't done anything monumental like scale the slopes of Everest, the few seconds of pure joy felt upon reaching our destination was as raw and intense an emotion as I can recall ever feeling. I immediately began tearing up, with exhaustion and joy - a sense of relief compounded by the advance of daylight.

“The summit moment, as cliché as it felt, was exactly like the movies.”

At the top, we weren't rewarded with any views, save a thirty second window when the peachy, billowing clouds parted and Mwenzie peak across the saddle jutted into view. The usually dry rocky crater at the top was blanketed in a thick cover of snow. The wind was still whipping a million miles an hour. I could have been disappointed, but it seemed a bit futile at this stage - nature had asserted herself as the dominant force, and perhaps somewhere deep down I knew that the view from the top wasn't to be the most valuable part of this journey.

My feelings of joy were short lived. From Gilman's Point we had to travel another hour and a half around the crater to reach the highest point of Uhuru Peak. Although not rewarded with the views I had envisioned, the snow, paired with a lack of oxygen and exhaustion, gave a dreamy, twilight effect to the experience. As we plodded along the



Libby Wann, Mt Kilimanjaro Fundraising Trek, Tanzania



Mt Kilimanjaro Trek Team 2008

unprotected windy rim, glaciers appeared like icebergs out of thick cloaks of fog before disappearing back into the white void and icy crystals slithered like sand across the frozen surface of snow. When we finally reached Uhuru, we spent just four minutes snapping photos in the gale force winds before turning around to descend.

Nearly ten hours since setting out, I found myself again maneuvering the piles of scree at the base of the summit. The sun had come out and, as I descended, I felt my brain and limbs begin to thaw and cast off the icy, numbing layer that had blanketed me for the previous seven hours. I began to

smile. I can't remember a time when I've been more drained of energy, yet content at the same time.

I finally shuffled back into base camp 11 hours after our journey began. I began to assess the damage of my teammates, many who appeared to still be shell-shocked. A silent nod was all that some were capable of mustering. Some appeared truly rattled; some wanted to hug me and cry, muttering that it had been the most amazing experience of their life. I'm not sure any of us were prepared for the intensity of it all. It was truly the hardest thing I have ever done.

That afternoon, despite our 11 hour battle

on the mountain, we had to move seven kilometres lower to spend the night at a safer elevation. I had already begun to reflect on the experience in a new light. The ability to repress memories of intense anguish must be an innate survival tool that humans (particularly women) possess - why else would mothers continue to give birth after the pain of their first child? Had you asked me on the way up if I would ever do it again, my answer would have been a resolute 'no'. However, a little time does wonders for the soul. Despite the fact that I've never had any major aspirations to climb tall mountains, I think there are probably a few more snowy peaks in my future.

Afterthought

Although I'm still a long way from making sense of this experience, I know I have changed. I was touched by the landscape and the mountain, the hospitality and the humanness, my own abilities and the abilities of those around me, the gritty realness, the astounding history and the overwhelming potential of the people I met along the way. I've felt lucky to glimpse another piece of the puzzle and, as with all travel, there have been multiple lessons learned. But the more I travel, the more I realize that perhaps these lessons do not need to be readily summarized, analyzed

and interpreted in order to be powerful.

East Africa is a land of extremes. There is beauty and ugliness, cultural richness and material poverty, complex history and an unknown path to the future. The thing I struggle with now is the infuriating disregard by the world community for the very real human suffering still so readily apparent. These lessons of my place and my connection to others, my role in their survival and their reciprocal role in mine may lay dormant, undefined and unclassified for the time being but I do know I am a much wiser person now than I was four weeks ago.

Libby is currently living in New York City where she continues to work with non profits in the Grants Administration field. She remains closely connected and involved with the GVN family and it's various partners and projects. "My time in Kenya and Tanzania will remain one of the more memorable experiences of my life- it was an adventure in every sense of the word! The people I met, both locals and trek participants, were an integral part of pushing me to grow as an individual, reinforcing my belief that travel with a purpose can change lives."

Create a Ripple

Join a fundraising trek

Mt Kilimanjaro www.globalvolunteernetwork.org/kenya/kilimanjaro

Mt Everest www.globalvolunteernetwork.org/nepal/everest

Machu Picchu www.globalvolunteernetwork.org/peru/machu_picchu

15

A Human Connection

by *Emilie Stevens*



Emilie Stevens met Kevin during her first week volunteering at a medical clinic in Kenya. She says he was quiet and unassuming. However on that day a friendship was born that grew over time and gave two people from opposite ends of the world the strength to heal and change each other's lives forever.

Kevin had come to speak to the social worker to ask if a sponsorship could be arranged for him to complete a mechanics training program.

He did not have a high school education, but hoped that completing the program would give him skills that would allow him to make enough money to support his family and perhaps one day return to high school.

Kevin's father had passed away from AIDS related complications and two of his three siblings had died as a result of yellow fever. He was now living alone with his mother, who was suffering from HIV.

Sister Veronica, the nun in charge of the clinic, informed me and another volunteer that Kevin's mother was bedridden. She suggested that we travel with Kevin to his home and provide some physical therapy to his mother.

Arriving at Kevin's home, an iron sheet

shack in one of Nairobi's slums, we found his mother lying in bed with immensely swollen feet. She had not moved from the bed in a number of months so Kevin was getting food donations from the clinic and preparing them for her.

“...I was proud to have helped his family in such a practical way.”

Seeing Kevin with his mother brought back many memories for me. When I was seventeen, my mother passed away from cancer. She was bedridden for several months, and I had cared for her in much the same way that Kevin was now caring for his mother. Watching them together, I could understand what Kevin was going through and I felt so sad for him.

When we left Kevin's home that day, he walked us back to the clinic. As we made our way through the slum, I started to tell him a bit about my past and my experiences dealing with a sick mother. He really responded to my openness, sharing with me his fears and anxiety over what was to come.

Over the next month, Kevin and I



Emilie and Kevin make their way to the clinic, Kenya

“...I knew I wanted to return this goodwill by sponsoring Kevin to complete his mechanics course.”

continued to discuss his feelings about his mother's illness and his plans for the future. In addition, we managed to get Kevin's mother out of bed and walking short distances. He seemed elated at her progress and I was proud to have helped his family in such a practical way.

I had received so much assistance while my mother was ill, I knew I wanted to return this goodwill by sponsoring Kevin to complete his mechanics course.

Before I returned to Canada, Kevin bought me a small necklace to thank me for all of my work with his mother and for sponsoring him. Knowing his financial circumstances, I felt truly touched that he found it necessary to make this gesture, and provided him with writing materials and stamps so we could stay in contact after I left Kenya.

A short time after returning home, I received an email from the other volunteer telling me that Kevin's mother had passed away. Because of her HIV status, she was unable to fight off her tuberculosis. I felt such pain knowing that Kevin was now alone with no one to talk to. I sent him a letter through Sister Veronica and hoped that he would soon write to me.

A few weeks later, I received a letter from Kevin explaining to me his feelings and circumstances after his mother's death, referring to me as “Mother Emilie” and informing me that “I was the only one left

to care for him.” He told me that he felt very alone, and did not know what to do with his time now that he did not have to care for his mother. I remembered very clearly feeling the same thing when my own mother passed and hoped that by explaining to Kevin how I had coped, he could feel more confident to deal with his own situation.

“I have realized how little it actually takes to effect real change in someone's life.”

We are still in contact, a year after I returned from Kenya. I have since started sponsoring Kevin to complete his high school education. Since he no longer had to care for his mother, we both felt it was more practical for him to return to high school directly. For a while after his mother died, Kevin wrote to me to discuss his grief and his sense of having no direction. Now, he writes with stories of progress in his life.

Giving Kevin the power to change his life will have untold effects in the future. Completing his education will not only give him a better life, but the chance to provide a better life for future generations of his family. Having an “adopted” Kenyan son has had a great effect on my life as well.



Emilie and Kevin with his mother outside their house, Kenya

I have realized how little it actually takes to effect real change in someone's life. By being open and sharing difficult stories with Kevin, I allowed us both to heal and find some closure. I also came to understand that, while we have very different backgrounds and cultures, a very human emotion binds us together. My experiences with Kevin have shown me that regardless of language, race, or culture, we are all linked and, as such, all have the power to change a life for the better.

In the three years since Emilie returned from Kenya, much has changed in her life. She recently completed her first year of Medical School at the University of British Columbia. "I hope to use this education to help others both in Canada and globally. I have continued my volunteer work, and I am using my medical education to help disadvantaged people in Vancouver."

For more than two years after Emilie returned, she received regular updates from the clinic regarding Kevin's progress and continued to fund his high school education. Recently, however, the nun at the clinic wrote to Emilie and informed her that Kevin had not been attending school. While she is disappointed, Emilie says she realizes that Kevin does not have the same support and guidance that she received in the same situation. "I am still in contact with the staff at the clinic, and will support them in other ways if Kevin decides not to return to school."

Create a Ripple

Volunteer in a medical program

Kenya www.globalvolunteernetwork.org/kenya

Nepal www.globalvolunteernetwork.org/nepal

Peru www.globalvolunteernetwork.org/peru

Honduras www.globalvolunteernetwork.org/honduras

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You are Going Where, to do What?

by Jason Timm

Jason Timm is the first to confess he used to be one of ‘those’ people who would sit at home and watch tragic stories of human suffering roll across CNN or NBC and think to himself “That’s too bad, those poor people. But what can I possibly do?” Well, Jason got tired of the lines he was feeding himself and decided to take action.

As a reasonably intelligent young man of 25, and a self-proclaimed liberalist and idealist, I felt obligated to do something. One who says he wants to help the world and change minds. One, who up to this point hasn’t really done anything that helped achieve my lofty idealistic goals.

I am also an albino who is legally blind, a person that has needed help and is fortunate to live in a country with a stable socially-minded government. I believe I was lucky and that if I had been born somewhere else, without these useful tools, I would not have the education opportunities I had in the USA. My mobility and possibilities would be severely limited. It was with this mindset, I scanned the internet to look for a volunteer opportunity. After loads of research I found GVN and the country of Nepal. For the next few months, I prepared for a journey

that unknowingly would completely change the way I viewed the world.

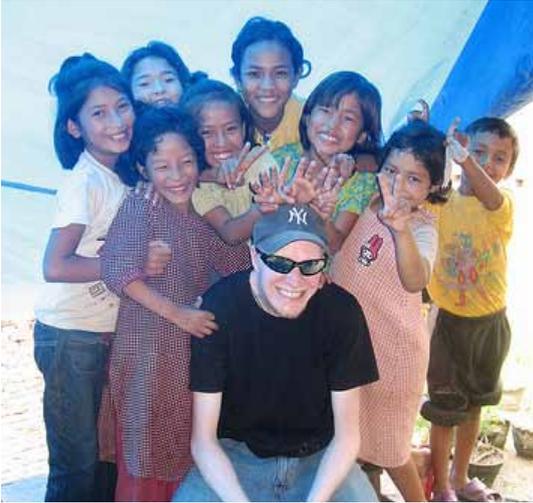
I set off from Atlanta, Georgia and headed to the recently former Hindu Kingdom of Nepal. As I flew over the terrain of Nepal approaching the capital of Kathmandu, I was hit by the first of many surprises I would encounter on this trip. I gazed out my window to see the most vivid shade of green I have ever seen. The landscape was hilly with tree covered mountains. The land was divided with rivers the color of orange clay that glistened in the sun. Already, I was in awe and impatient for the plane to land.

Finally, we touched down in the mystical and ancient city of Kathmandu. The city is sprawling and covers much of the valley of the same name. The mountains lining the valley are not overly large but to a guy from Florida, the flattest state in the union, they were grand enough to hold my gaze. I felt great excitement at how different things were already, and I had only just got off the plane!

After the usual airport routine, I exited the airport to see a crowd of several hundred people, shouting, pushing and pulling for attention. It’s an overwhelming feeling when you are converged on by such a mob. It was at this point I thought that coming



Children from Brighter Future Children's Home, Nepal. Photo by Xi



Jason Timm and the kids from the Charity Nepal, Nepal

here may have been a mistake, and maybe five months was too long to volunteer. Then a wave of relief came over me as I spotted the gentleman holding a sign board with my name. He drove me to the guesthouse; a journey I can only describe as a white knuckle adventure, which anyone who has ever experienced the traffic of this part of the world can attest to. With near misses, narrow roads, honking horns and suffocating gas fumes, I was on the absolute edge of my seat. Fortunately, we arrived at Potala Guesthouse safe and sound.

Volunteer training began the next day and during the first week I absorbed a wealth of knowledge about the Nepalese culture, language, and beliefs. In this training I learned things I never imagined I would ever need to know like the proper way to use a charpi (squat toilet) and the correct way to eat dahl bhat (curry lentil soup with rice). We stayed in a village for seven days to acclimate to the local way of living. Bhistachap was a beautiful, simple village on the outskirts of Kathmandu

and my host family was wonderful and extremely accommodating.

During training we also went on an orphanage tour and visited the homes that the local organization, Volunteer Service in Nepal, supported. We visited home after home, and each seemed more dilapidated than the one before. Then we arrived at Charity Nepal. The shabby bus we were traveling in could not make it down the road leading to the children's home, so the group of volunteers and I walked the rest of the way down a rugged path of dirt and sandbags.

The first thing that hit me when I got to the home was the stench of the outdoor charpi, made of spindly bamboo and a piece of green tarp. A peek inside proved even more sickening. The toilet that these children had been using was overflowing and filled with bug larva and maggots.

My attention turned to the house - a tiny, two-room two-storey home that housed 42 children plus the orphanage owner and his wife. At the back of the home was a small porch set up with rickety child-sized picnic tables. The porch also held three bunk beds. Several of the children could not fit in the house so had to sleep outside. It was saddening.

Inside the air smelled stale and unclean and I was not surprised that some of the children were sick. The beds upstairs were also pitiful and barely stood. Some beds held three small children. Their only 'amenity' was a small 15 inch television, which all the children sat around to watch Bollywood movies and favorite Nepalese shows. The conditions were hideous and our volunteer organization said that of all the homes, this one was in the worst state.

The manager could not afford to send

the children to school so he decided to build one. This 'school' was made partially of brick, but mostly of bamboo with a tin roof. The classrooms were open air, offering little protection from the elements. Painted plywood was used for blackboards.

I decided that this home, Charity Nepal, was the place for me.

During my time at the home, we did everything from organizing classes to holding a sports day where the children participated in different events like the three-legged race and a running relay. One occasion I was especially proud of was moving the kids to a new home. Another small but important moment for me was the short amount of time that we were able to keep the kids without lice. I constantly found myself in different situations that tested my skills. The other volunteers and I did the best we could to assure a rich, healthy, happy life for each child while we were there.

I was with the school and the orphanage for five months. In this time, the children and I made great progress in understanding each other. I developed meaningful relationships with the children, as well as the organization that helped give me the tools I needed to do what was in the best interest of those kids. At the end of my placement it was an emotional time. The kids were sad, as was I. The hugs they gave me lasted a long while as they held on and would not let go.

I am proud of my time teaching and volunteering at Charity Nepal. I learned as much from the children as I tried to teach.

I left Nepal with a feeling of accomplishment and of appreciation for another culture completely different from my own. I promised the children I so enjoyed working with that I would return.

The experience left me with confidence and a drive in my life that I had never felt before. Before Nepal I did not know if I had it in me to handle a 'third world country' and the task that I was undertaking. This life changing and mind altering experience taught me more about myself and my life in five months than I had learned in 25 years. It has also encouraged others to volunteer or donate to GVN and other like minded organizations.

Volunteering was the best thing I have done in my life and I am very grateful for the experience. It has given me a focus and drive to help others who have been forgotten about by society, and provide others with opportunities that everyone deserves to have in their lifetime.

Jason is currently teaching English in Bangkok, Thailand where he has been living for the last two years. He is also in the process of starting a NGO that will support street children and disabled children through vocational programs in an effort to have them join and be productive, happy members of their communities.

Create a Ripple

Volunteer in Nepal - Teaching, building, orphanage care, and health care

www.globalvolunteernetwork.org/nepal

Everest Fundraising Trek www.globalvolunteernetwork.org/nepal/everest

17

The More

by Mandy Morell



Mandy Morell has traveled through Ethiopia and India, and in 2008 spent a month volunteering in Kolkata. Mandy is a committed humanitarian and says “The reason I travel is to volunteer; not to climb mountains or lay on a beach (although I love these things and try to do them as much as possible). I make volunteering the point of the trip because of the more”.

Trying to describe the more is like trying to describe ‘The Nothing’ in The Never Ending Story. It is amorphous, indescribable, ineffable, uncontrollable and unpredictable. But unlike ‘The Nothing,’ the more is a positive thing, not a force to fear. Once you have experienced the more you cannot imagine life without it. One is speechless, dumbfounded and a myriad of other clichés because there are no words, at least that I know of, to tell others about the more.

The problem with not being able to describe the more is that those of us who have it, want it and can’t live without it, end up sounding like stuttering school children when asked, “Why are you going there (insert country of choice here) to volunteer?”

Why not go to Ghana to enjoy the splendid beaches? It’s much cooler there

than in a concrete box with a tin roof. Why not check out the gorillas in northern Uganda instead of shifting bricks for two days in the sweltering heat outside of Entebbe? No safari in Kenya? What about Goa? You went all the way to India to spend time in one of the most polluted places in the universe!

“...there are no words, at least that I know of, to tell others about the more.”

The pious have words for it: God, gods, enlightenment, sacrifice, humility, etc. However, those are not the words I would use to describe the more.

The more is the man on Park Street. He has no legs and hated me for a couple of weeks because I gave him a smile instead of money. Yet every morning and every evening I greeted him with an exuberant “Hello” until I learned “Namaskar, Ke mon acho?” Now he notices my legs with zeal among all the others passing by and looks up excitedly as we greet each other in the



Mandy Morell proudly wearing her sari with the girls, India

same instant; he knows I treat him like a human, not a crippled beggar. His presence in my life is the more.

The more is complimenting the family on AJC Bose Rd on their spring cleaning. They live on the sidewalk; a man, his wife, and their little son, on a four by six foot square space covered by a tarp. They got a new tarp and it's green. Being here every day, part of a neighborhood, a street community, an auto-rickshaw route, dodging the heroin needles as I walk down our sidewalk, allows me to make this observation. Noticing the change in a tarp color is the more.

The more is Ganesh, named after the elephant man-god, a Punjabi who turns on the little fan as I talk on the phone in his hot-as-Hades telephone booth.

The more is working with a group of women, or a school, a project, for an extended amount of time – a short trip can't do it. Four weeks rarely does it. Two months teases you with what the more could be. And even though I continue to seek out the more I am continually surprised at how I receive it. As I said, it is not predictable; the only predictable thing about it is how not to find it.

The reason I travel is to volunteer; not to climb mountains or lay on a beach (although I love these things and try to do them as much as possible). I make volunteering the point of the trip because of the more. The more is why I am here.”

Mandy is currently teaching high school photography and English in Anchorage, Alaska. She is also working with a cultural ambassador program wherein rural village students exchange with urban students to learn about one another. Mandy is constantly looking forward to her next volunteer and travel opportunity and hopes to start involving her students!

Create a Ripple

Volunteer in India www.globalvolunteernetwork.org/india

Volunteer in Ethiopia www.globalvolunteernetwork.org/ethiopia



Mandy with her students, Ethiopia

18

One Heart at a Time

by Ana Dodson



We got to know and love Ana Dodson when she was 13 and volunteered in the GVN Foundation office. Ana worked on GVN's Stop Child Poverty advocacy campaign and later went on to be the Youth Ambassador for the campaign. This young gun certainly has the 'it' factor and there is no doubt she will change the world. In fact, she already is - one heart at a time, through her own non-profit, Peruvian Hearts.

I was born in Cusco, Peru and my parents adopted me when I was a baby. During the summer of 2003, when I was 11 years old, my mother and I went on a homeland trip to Peru with other adopted kids and visited orphanages. I took children's books in Spanish and teddy bears that I had collected for the children.

The Hogar Mercedes de Jesus Molina is a small orphanage in Anta, Peru located in the hills outside of Cusco. I really wanted to visit the Hogar since it is near where I was born. When we went to the Hogar and had given the children the books and teddy bears, we discovered that the orphanage had never had visitors before.

When we were leaving, one little girl named Gloria who I had gotten to know,

hugged me and started to cry. She said to me "Ana, I know you will not forget about us and that you will help us in the future."

When I was a baby I could have been put in an orphanage, and the same situation that the children in the Hogar were in. My visit to the Hogar that day, and Gloria's unforgettable words, really moved and inspired me to do something more to help.

"...we discovered that the orphanage had never had visitors before."

I have so many things in my life that I tend to take for granted. I have wonderful loving parents that support me in any way they can and I have a wonderful education. My visit to the orphanage made me realize that I wanted the girls to have what I have. I also realized that they needed more than books and teddy bears. I believed that if I tried I might be able to really help them.

When I formed Peruvian Hearts, I really wanted to give the girls a better education and improve their quality of life. Since



Ana visits Hogar Mercedes de Jesus Molina, Peru

“I know I can’t change the world in a day and I know I can’t do it by myself, but I believe that people working together really can make a difference.”

then, I have collected substantial money and donations for the orphanage so that, unlike some kids living in orphanages, the girls have vitamins, school supplies, shoes and warm clothing, nutritious food three times a day, warm water for baths and clean water to drink.

Peruvian Hearts has taught me that even when we see a situation that appears to be helpless, there is still hope. I know I can’t change the world in a day and I know I can’t do it by myself, but I believe that people working together really can make a difference. One of my goals is to inspire other kids to reach out and help others less fortunate than themselves. I believe that each person can change the world a little bit at a time.

The motto of Peruvian Hearts is “changing the world one heart at a time.” I hope that Peruvian Hearts will make an impact on the lives of other kids and help them believe that they can make a difference in the world. Every time a child helps another child, they perform a small act of peace.

Each small act can help us create a more peaceful world.

Ana has received numerous honors and awards in recognition of her humanitarian work. In 2007 she spoke at the United Nations International Day of Peace for Students and also featured on CNN in their ‘Heroes’ special. In 2008 Ana was nominated for a Brick! Award which recognizes young people who are contributing to making the world a better place. This year, Ana received the highly prestigious Caring Award by the Caring Institute in Washington D.C. Other recipients have included Mother Teresa and General Colin Powell.

Peruvian Hearts continues to expand its work in Peru and now operates a nutrition program for over 700 children. The children are provided breakfast, multi-vitamins, and lunch. The children’s attendance and grades have improved significantly.

Create a Ripple

Volunteer in Peru www.globalvolunteernetwork.org/peru

Join the Machu Picchu Fundraising Trek

www.globalvolunteernetwork.org/peru/machu_picchu

Support Peruvian Hearts www.peruvianhearts.org

Letter from Sindy

This letter was sent to Ana and her family by Sindy Ruth, one of the recipients of Peruvian Hearts' school nutrition program.

Good afternoon Mama Judi, Friend Danny, and dearest Ana and Friends!

My name is Sindy Ruth, I am 10 years old and in the forth grade in School #50160. I come from the community of Pogues. I want to share with you my life.

My community is very far from the town of Lamay; I wake up at 4:00 in the morning with my mother and my little brother Edilberto to prepare the food that my mother brings for the alpacas and also for us to bring to school.

My little brother Edilberto and I, get ready to leave to walk down to school at 5:00 in the morning and we leave and arrive at school at 7:00am or 7:30am after 3 hours of walking, and in school I receive my milk; I'm in school until the hour of the lunch program which is over at 1:30 in the afternoon. We all go to the lunch program running to have our drink and receive our food. Thank you all for your help and thank to the Sisters and ladies who prepare the lunch because that is required. I am very happy.

After lunch I leave to return to my community and arrive at 5:00 in the afternoon. Before nightfall I do my homework quickly and help to gather the animals once night has come. This is what I wanted to share with you all, I hope that you were able to understand me. Thank you, one thousand thanks from all of my heart! Because the children from these communities are very grateful for all of your help.

Sindy Ruth

19

It all Begins With a Feeling

by Carlee Keeler



Children are bombarded with visual stimulation every day - video games, cartoons and music videos. However Carlee Keeler thinks this is one of the best ways to reach them. Following her volunteer placement in Ghana, West Africa, Carlee went on to become a teacher and is now showing her students what is truly important in this world. She teaches children as young as six years old about world issues and says that volunteering truly changed her life, and is now changing the lives of the children she teaches.

“These children taught me that you can find something good in everything. Life with less is more.”

It’s amazing that we have five senses with which to explore, however I feel that touch and sound are often ignored. I want my students to truly understand the differences between Africa and their own country.

A two-minute video montage of images set to music that I created following my time volunteering in Ghana has been the perfect tool to take children into the realities of African society, tapping into multiple senses.

I watch their eyes as they view, for the first time, lives so different from their own. They are glued to the flashing images. Questions roll inside their minds, but no one moves or says a word. When it is over they ask to see it again to fully absorb the short story I’m telling them. I know this is like nothing they’ve ever seen. They can see glimpses of me in the film with the children and they look up to see me standing in front of them, touched with the reality of it all. When it’s over some have questions and some sit back quietly taking it in. They want to know why there are no buildings, what the children eat, why they carried rocks on their heads, why they didn’t have desks, and the most observant question: Why are they happy?

I am suddenly consumed with the same feelings I had every morning, waking up to those beautiful faces in the small village of Dawhenya.

The feeling of using every sense to its fullest is a realization. It is also seeing



Feeling Larger Than Life (Kofi, Kwasi, Olu), Ghana



School at the Beach (Olu, Kristine, Carlee, Vida, and Tula), Ghana

everything that happens as just a moment in time, and knowing that you have the power to change every moment into something positive. These children taught me that you can find something good in everything. Life with less is more.

As I'm reveling in the potency of these lessons, I consider the lessons the children in front of me are learning. What are the differences that restrict my Korean students from seeing their lives as my African students do? Perhaps it all comes down to the one thing that we all either take for granted or waste: time. Every minute of time in this village was used in love, grace and gratitude. They spent time with family, time with friends and time alone to reflect on how beautiful life is. Everyone in this village worked to live instead of living to work. Here, people know that living your

dream doesn't always refer to the work that you do, or how much money your job makes you. They understand that living is about self fulfillment, and that this can be as simple as spending 10 minutes a day doing something that makes you truly happy. Now is my time. It is my time to share and pass on these messages but, at the same time, give these children an opportunity to see where their help is needed.

“All of these children have pure hearts.”

Seeing and speaking about Africa with my children has inspired them to do something. They are breaking their own barriers and sometimes opening their parent's minds to foreign culture too. Stereotypes and racism are passed down, yet so easily broken in children. Children feel for other children. One student told me “We are African people too, there's helping”, while another said “When I grow I can help Africa, I can teach how to make a better world, I have a very good feeling about that”.

All of these children have pure hearts. Their energy radiates inside our small classroom. It all begins with a feeling. The more we discuss the issues, the more ideas they have to affect change. I know that everything they say is genuine. They have a desire to give even their own possessions, and they understand the concept of having

Create a Ripple

Teach in Ghana www.globalvolunteernetwork.org/ghana/teaching



A Day of Discovery (Mawusi, Josephine, Robyn, Tula and Vida), Ghana

too much.

From their generosity and understanding I see my own purpose in life. If more teachers spent more time teaching their children about global issues we would see a more compassionate world. These children feel my passion but they also feel a responsibility to help. They are passing the message on. I have even heard that local schools have held book drives and raffles for some African children charity organizations.

As teachers, we'll never know where our influence stops, our ripples run on.

Carlee Keeler was born on the west coast of Canada, and has lived all over the country. She has also lived in Australia, Korea and Ghana, and now calls Toronto home. She currently teaches grade six, and loves living and teaching in a truly multicultural city. She encourages her students to view the world with an open mind, contribute to our global village, and appreciate how lucky they are.

20

Action Inspires Change

by *Shelley Bragg*



Shelley Bragg signed up to host an Eat So They Can fundraising dinner and then casually put it in the back of her mind and continued with life as usual. However, little did she know that this small action, this small pebble that was dropped into the water, would be a source of inspiration for so many and create ripples of difference around the world.

Weeks flowed into days and email reminders started coming in regularly from GVN's Eat So They Can team. The pressing need for me to plan my event started penetrating my daily thoughts. It's easy to sign up to do something. I think we all have good intentions to do things, but it is much harder to actually take action. I tried to ignore the questions threatening to drown my intentions, "Can I do it? Would people come? I haven't been in Shanghai that long. Do I know enough people? Can I organize everything? Where will I find a venue? Who would help me?" I tried to find answers. Then, everything started to fall into place.

I was working at the Expat Expo when I met a stylish, immediately likeable lady. She introduced herself as "Sheilla, sales

manager for the Grand Mercure Hotel". She wanted to tell me about special deals on venue hire. "Are you currently planning to host any events?" Ripple.

On the same day, a colleague, and friend, said, "I just met a South African over there and I told him he must come over and say hello." South Africans are in the minority in Shanghai so we always get overly excited to meet one another. Conrad came over a little later and we reminisced about home. "I work for the South African Fine Wines Company," he informed me in his thick Afrikaans accent, "and we often do promotions at events. Our company is new here so we're looking for opportunities to make ourselves known." Ripple

The water was moving.

Brendan McGibbon is a pleasant, courteous and witty gentleman. This was my first impression of him and it has grown stronger since. He is a pianist/singer/music teacher (in no particular order of skill or importance) and when I decided I needed live entertainment at my Eat So They Can dinner, he was my first choice. The question was how to get him involved. One morning, I joined my friend Mindy, a trombonist/instrumentalist/band teacher (also in no



Guests enjoying dinner at Shelley's fundraiser

“A lady approached me after the dinner and said she was so moved by KYP that she wants to do another project with them to raise money for schools in Africa.”

particular order), and Brendan for breakfast. Sipping on my coffee, listening to their conversation and laughing intermittently, I waited for the perfect moment to broach the subject. “So...I was thinking.”

“Oh no!” Mindy said, recognizing the slight smile on my face. “What are you planning?” Her loud voice filled the restaurant.

“Well, I’m having this event, a fundraiser, for disadvantaged children in Africa.”

“Oh.” They both looked at me with slight wonder, mixed with confusion. “That’s nice.”

After answering a few questions and explaining a bit more about it, I said, “So, I realize that I need to entice people to come, and...I thought...” my voice trailed off, as I tried to ease them into the idea, “that it would be great if I had some live entertainment... some musical acts.” I finished, adding a big, pleading smile, which I have perfected for times just like these.

Mindy was the first to say something, as I knew she would be, “What? You want me to do a solo on the trombone? That won’t really work.”

“Yes, you’re right, but maybe you could do something,” I followed this statement with an innocent, somewhat helpless expression, also well rehearsed.

“I could do something,” Brendan said,

quite simply, without me even needing to plead, convince or bribe. “I’d be happy to help you in your good cause.” Ripple.

When I first met Thulani Madondo, I was taking a visiting friend from the USA on a ‘Tour of Soweto’ in Johannesburg, South Africa. I had never been on the tour myself and had no idea of the impact it would have on my life. Thulani runs the Kliptown Youth Program (KYP), which operates out of Kliptown, in the heart of Soweto. KYP offers educational, sports and performance art programs to children from two to 18 years old. It helps to educate the local community and provide them with opportunities.

To get to the KYP center, you drive straight through the impoverished township. The children playing soccer in the littered, dirt road stop to watch us pass, while the ladies hanging their clothes on the broken wire fencing between their tin shacks simply glance over before carrying on with their work. After a bumpy drive, we pull into a walled, yard area, with huts on either side. We step out of the van to be immediately greeted by a charismatic man with a sincere smile that made me remember him as two feet taller than he actually is, such was his presence.

Thulani gave us a tour of Kliptown. He

showed us his own home, a one-bedroom shack, swelteringly hot in the mid-summer heat. The ladies in his hut were making pap (a common, inexpensive meal in South Africa). “This is for the children’s lunch,” Thulani explained. Three ladies volunteer to cook food each day for the 350 students that attend the program. We saw the communal tap, which supplies all the water for their side of the township. We saw the dog that Thulani adopted, which had been stabbed and almost killed by a local gang. We saw the public phone, which was literally a manual dial telephone placed on a box, under an umbrella. There is no electricity in the township and the area is fraught with crime. As it was, Thulani would only take our group up one road near the center, because it simply wasn’t safe to go further.

“People see your action so they act, and that is how change happens!”

Afterwards, all the students and program coordinators performed the traditional South African gumboot dance for us. Their pure energy and spirit filled the room and our hearts. The program makes the majority of its funding from donations given at these performances. These children, living in such harsh conditions, come to this center each afternoon because they want to learn and they want a future, and Thulani helps them accomplish this. He started the program three years ago to give them the opportunities that they wouldn’t otherwise

have. Afterwards, I went to Thulani’s small office and made a donation. I also asked for his contact information. I didn’t know why at the time, but I just knew that I needed to have it. Ripple.

One ripple leads into another

The KYP ended up performing the gumboot dance live, via Skype, at my Eat So They Can dinner. Thulani introduced the program and he, along with the children, touched the hearts of my guests, like he had touched mine a year before. Ripple.

The Grand Mercure Hotel ended up hosting my event for a small per head price and no venue charge. They prepared delicious food and arranged beautiful reception and dining areas. Their staff worked tirelessly to ensure its success. Sheilla stayed throughout, eager to hear more about the campaign and to watch the KYP performance. We are currently organizing the next fundraiser to be hosted there. Ripple.

Conrad supplied wines for raffle prizes, lucky draws, silent auctions and gifts. He approached me at the end of the evening, moved by the event and encouraged by the cause. We are currently organizing a wine tasting whereby all the funds from the sale of his wines will go to the fund. Ripple.

Brendan went from saying he’d ‘play a few songs’ to lending me his piano, checking the venue, organizing and setting up the sound system and playing for the whole evening. Our catch phrase now is, “We’re doing it for the kids.” Ripple.

Then there were the ripples that made it all possible; the people that came. Reflecting after the event, all those ripples hit me like a wave. 70 people = 70 ripples. They didn't have to come, but they did. They received my invite and had no obligation to come, but decided that they wanted to help, that they wanted to make a difference and that they wanted to help the lives of children halfway across the world. So they came and they spent, they listened and they encouraged. Then there were those that couldn't come but still bought tickets or made donations online. Ripple.

After the event, people donated more money. One person gave as much as USD\$730, all on her own. Ripple.

The owner of the sound system I hired told me that he donated the money I paid him to a Chinese charity. Ripple.

Another guest at the event decided to hold his own fundraiser at the company he works for. He said that my dinner reminded him that we could all make a difference. Ripple.

A lady approached me after the dinner and said she was so moved by KYP that she wants to do another project with them to raise money for schools in Africa. Ripple.

Why? Why are these people stepping forward, how are these ripples being created? I realized that it takes action to start change. People see your action so they act, and that is how change happens! That

is why people said yes to the dinner, not because I just asked them to donate money but because I was taking action. From the minute I dropped my pebble, they were also ready to act. And that is how I managed to be a part of such an excellent cause, because GVN has decided to act. It's about action, taking the first step, dropping the first pebble. Action inspires change.

Thulani, he is a pebble. He inspired me because he was actually doing something - he was taking action. GVN is a pebble. Through their constant efforts and programs, they are taking action to make people's lives better. I was their ripple, but I became a pebble. I took action and inspired change. My guests that took their own action will also continue to inspire change.

Together we raised USD\$1800 for Eat So They Can and USD\$485 for KYP. This money will help children's lives. They will feel our ripples and hopefully one day create their own.

Shelley Bragg was born in Cape Town, South Africa and while growing up also had the opportunity to live in Namibia and Bahrain. She is currently based in Shanghai, China and is about to embark on an exciting new adventure – GVN's Mt Kilimanjaro Fundraising Trek! "After the climb I will be heading to the United States and then I am hoping to volunteer in Africa."

Create a Ripple

Join Eat So They Can www.eatsotheycan.org



Gumboot dancing, Kliptown Youth Program, South Africa

Conclusion

I hope you enjoyed reading the Ripples of Difference book and you found the collection of stories as inspiring as I did.

Isn't it beautiful to hear about the extraordinary lengths that a human being will go to in order to help other human beings in need? These remarkable stories, and the people in them, fill me with hope. Hope that with a little courage, a little determination, and a little creativity, every one of us can be the change we want to see in the world.

The old mindset that 'the problem is too big' or 'what could I possibly do?' is no longer justifiable. Because these stories are the example and these people are the evidence. Something can be done and one person can change the life of another.

So now what? What will you choose to do? Forget everything you have just read or take action?

I believe your first task is to simply help spread the ripples by sharing these amazing stories with everyone you know. Invite them to join the movement and receive their own free copy of the e-book by signing up to the Ripples of Difference website: **www.ripplesofdifference.org**

The more people we can inspire, the bigger agent of change we can become.

And finally, I believe your personal challenge is to go out and create your own story. Start a ripple of your own. You never know how big an impact you will make. Then please share your story with us so we can help your ripple grow and grow.

Together, let's inspire world action and help turn the tides on the humanitarian and environmental crisis we face - one ripple at a time.

Sincerely,

Colin Salisbury



All smiles, photograph taken by a GVN Volunteer

Partners and Resources

Children First Foundation

Children First Foundation's mission is to provide a safe haven in Australia for children, irrespective of race or creed, who are in need of medical or emotional support.

www.childrenfirstfoundation.com

Colin Salisbury

Colin Salisbury, Founder and President of Global Volunteer Network (GVN), is the visionary behind what has become one of the most widely recognized international volunteer service organizations in the world.

www.colinsalisbury.com

Eat So They Can

Eat So They Can is an international fundraising campaign that addresses international development issues by inviting global citizens to participate in what is collectively one huge dinner party.

www.eatsotheycan.org

Global Volunteer Network (GVN)

GVN offers volunteer opportunities abroad in 29 community projects throughout the world, as well as three treks.

www.globalvolunteernetwork.org

GVN Foundation

The GVN Foundation's vision is to support the work of charitable organizations around the world that assist children, women, and the environment. It works with community organizations throughout Europe, Asia, South America, and Africa.

www.gvnfoundation.org

Mothers Fighting for Others

Mothers Fighting For Others is dedicated to providing vulnerable children with opportunities their parents would have provided, if they only could; a loving and nurturing environment and a quality education, so they can learn, thrive, and achieve their highest potential.

www.mothersfightingforothers.com

Peruvian Hearts

Peruvian Hearts is a non-profit organization dedicated to enhancing the lives of children living in poverty in Peru through nutrition, education, and health care. Peruvian Hearts was founded by Ana Dodson in 2003.

www.peruvianhearts.org

Ripples of Difference

Ripples of Difference is a book, a website, and a movement, featuring volunteers who are touching the lives of others and making a difference – a ripple of difference.

www.ripplesofdifference.org

Watoto Kwanza Project

The Watoto Kwanza Project seeks to provide opportunities for children to learn, develop, and progress by breaking the poverty cycle with the empowerment of education.

www.watotokwanza.org

“I’d love to see more young people taking action to help the poor and disadvantaged...
Two places to get started are Network for Good and Global Volunteer Network.”

- *Bill Gates, Philanthropist and Co-Founder of Microsoft (Newsweek Web)*

“I know I can’t change the world in a day and I know I can’t do it by myself, but I believe that people working together really can make a difference.”

- *Ana Dodson, Founder of Peruvian Hearts*

“Scary and exhilarating, frustrating and rewarding, empowering and humbling; teaching in Ghana was for me, life changing and immeasurably soul changing”

- *Michelle Gourley, Ghana Volunteer*

“The thing that strikes me the most about volunteering is that once you do it, you can never walk away. You’re inevitably tied to a place, a people...their stories take root somewhere deep within and you never forget. And neither do they.”

- *Hannah Ford, Tanzania Volunteer*

“The experiences that I have had through GVN as a volunteer in Nepal, Vietnam, and El Salvador as well as my teaching in Thailand and other volunteer projects in Mexico and Panama have all been a crucial part of me taking the next step in my career.”

- *Christianna Savino, Nepal, Vietnam, and El Salvador Volunteer*

“Volunteering was the best thing that I have done in my life and I am very grateful for the experience.”

- *Jason Timm, Nepal Volunteer*

Colin Salisbury, Founder and President of Global Volunteer Network (GVN), is the visionary behind what has become one of the most widely recognized international volunteer service organizations in the world.

Global Volunteer Network 
connecting people with communities in need

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