

SCHOOLBOOK

a JOURNAL of EDUCATION

**Paideia School
Atlanta, Georgia**

I N T H I S I S S U E

**Summer 2009
Vol. 18 No. 1**

Leaving Your Comfort Zone

Jeffrey Holzberg '03

Watching a Society Rebuild

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The Potency of Challenge

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Texting for Health

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Bridging the Divide with Ultimate

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2 Paideia School, located in northeast Atlanta, has some 920 students ages three to eighteen. Founded in 1971 by a group of parents, the school actively strives for a heterogeneous population and attracts students from throughout the metropolitan Atlanta area. The ancient Greek word *Paideia* reflects the conscious pursuit of a series of educational goals by a community. It conveys the concept of a child's total education: intellectual, artistic, and social.

Service Learning as a Way of Life

Service learning and civic involvement are important at Paideia. Structured and student led initiatives throughout the school reflect community beliefs and the school's Framework of Values. For many alumni, that commitment to service has continued beyond Paideia. Working in areas including education, health, and community justice, alumni continue to try make a difference.

Jennifer Hill
Editor

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ASHA DUG HER FINGERS into his elbow, bending it to check the ulner nerve, and then again on his knee for the peroneal one. She nodded her head and asked me to feel how the nerve was harder and slid over the bone as the joint moved. She took out her pen and began to prick his skin where discolored lesions had formed. He was a middle-aged man, a member of the *gran panchayat*, or village government board, and his arms, face, and neck were covered with lesions and scars. “Samasta?” she asked in Marathi, the local language. He shook his head indicating he could not feel the prick. She nodded to me, confirming my thoughts of leprosy. They sat on the dirt ground, shooing away a goat that had come in search of food, and Asha explained to the man his situation. He was smart and certainly knew of leprosy, yet the purpose of the conversation was more to break down the high stigma that was associated with the disease. Asha was educating the man on its presentations, treatment, positive outcome, difficulty in transmission and the importance of not being fearful. She referred him to the secondary hospital of the Comprehensive Rural Health Project (CRHP) for another look, commenting that she would return soon. We politely declined his offer for tea and continued to the next house with our alcohol and hypertension study.

Asha is one of over 40 village health workers (VHWs) selected by her community to receive training in health, community development, communication, organization, and personal development from CRHP. Her primary role is to share the knowledge she obtains with everyone in the community,

in addition to organizing community groups and facilitating action, especially among the poor and marginalized. Many of these VHWs are illiterate women from the untouchable dalit caste yet all are able to diagnose leprosy, deliver babies, provide antenatal care and educate on nutrition, among other things. Asha has been a VHW for almost 15 years yet she continues to come every Tuesday for ongoing training. I have entered the world of the Comprehensive Rural Health Project (CRHP), a nongovernmental organization dedicated to restoring the health of one of the poorest communities in India.

Graduating at the top of their medical school class, Drs. Mabelle and Raj Arole went against the norm and decided not to practice in one of India’s cities. Instead, they came to Jamkhed in 1970, a small village with 40 percent of children under five malnourished, an infant mortality rate of 176 per 1,000 live births, a leprosy rate of 40 per 1,000 people, and coverage rates of childhood immunizations, family planning, prenatal care, and birth attendance by a trained provider all less than 1 percent. Taking time to gain trust and dig into the community, the two doctors worked to identify the major health concerns by starting at the doorstep of the poorest of the poor, creating multidisciplinary interventions and empowering villagers (especially women) to collaborate for solutions. By year 2006, malnutrition dropped to less than 1 percent, infant mortality to 24 per 1,000 live births, leprosy to 1.9 per 1,000, family planning to 65 percent, and immunizations, prenatal care and birth attendance by a trained provider all near 100 percent.

Jeffrey Holzberg '03

is in India for a year on fellowship to study alternative public health and primary health care with the Comprehensive Rural Health Project. He will begin attending medical school at Emory University in July 2009.

Mabelle Arole passed away in 1999 and the next year a fellowship was created in her name to host a medical student for a year, educating this fresh mind on their alternative model of health delivery, on health outside of medicine, and on the problems facing the 40 percent living on less than \$2 per day. Settling into my seventh month in the fellowship, a new understanding of health and medicine has been opened that will support me in providing health for those who need it most throughout my life. Further, I have learned the values and soft skills that make this goal attainable. CRHP's model of equity, integration, and empowerment as the essentials to health has established the role of a doctor as greater than treating disease but requires a collective understanding of the social, mental, and physical factors that underlie that patient and their community.

My first year out of college, I took a job with National Student Partnerships in Bronx, N.Y., running an office that allowed undergraduate students to work one-on-one and help low income and homeless residents navigate through the social service maze. Greater than simply understanding government entitlements, the job reaffirmed my belief that more is learned from those that are different than those similar to you, especially when strength is gained without money. I was amazed by my clients, lost in the social service world and New York's work force yet maintaining such strong priorities and a sense of value in life. The small, rural village of Jamkhed has challenged me even further, giving the opportunity to understand a different way of life, a different struggle but yet often the preservation of core values like love, family, survival, and health.

When visiting a foreign culture and a new type of people, the tendency to judge differences as strange, incorrect, and unhealthy is easy and it serves to justify the decisions behind our own life. However, adjusting to the differences and forcing yourself out of your comfort zone is difficult but essential to learn about others and yourself. Stepping outside your comfort zone is a fantastic way to open your mind to new ideas, new ways of life and different forms of happiness and suffering.

Without placing western and personal judgment on them, it encourages you to reanalyze yourself. This challenge has pushed me to be accepting of others and appreciate differences rather than judge them.

In mid-January, I was on a train traveling from Varanasi to Delhi, sitting on a blue wooden bench with two men beside me and three women across from me. We struck up conversation and I offered one of the women some of my sweets, which she accepted and ate, continuing on with conversation without saying thank you or appreciating the gesture. It was not uncommon, as there seems to be little politeness in Indian conversation, with minimal use of *thank you*, *please*, *excuse me*, or *I'm sorry*. In fact, I have rarely heard anyone say *thank you* in a sentence since I have arrived and an American friend of mine was told not to say it so often because "it makes you look weird when no one else does."

I was somewhat disturbed that the woman had not appreciated the cake, remarking to her that "I think I say thank you too much." She then explained that in India, thank you is not said because it seems fake and contrived to mean something that is not felt. "Thanks," she said, "is recognized in your gestures and in your eyes without having to say it. People can tell if you are appreciative and often those who say it are covering up for not truly meaning it." Her point was true and indicative of a deeper spirituality I have noticed in most families that I meet. It is a belief in something greater, in a larger purpose of action that not only permeates daily life but motivates perseverance through strenuous times. And it is a concept that seems to be external of religion and Hinduism but ingrained in culture. It would have been easy for me to judge the lack of appreciation as an insult, rather than as a compliment. When the time is taken to understand, I have often found that there is a supported, deeper reasoning and a rational belief behind every oddity and everything that I would consider abnormal.

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The lessons have not stopped while in Jamkhed, as I have learned from doctors, staff, village health workers, villagers, and even the dogs with their own unique ways of survival. The undercurrent of it all is that health is a concept beyond caring for disease and the infections faced by low-income communities at an abnormally high rate. Improving health does not mean increasing the number of doctors, nurses, medicines or health facilities but rather requires the understanding of health's interrelation with nutrition, agriculture, economics, education, women's status, and other social and mental factors.

Stepping outside your comfort zone is a fantastic way to open your mind to new ideas, new ways of life and different forms of happiness and suffering.... This challenge has pushed me to be accepting of others and appreciate differences rather than judge them.

I have learned about primary health care, an approach that identifies the main health problems in a village by working through the community and tackling the needs through integrated services. It is a concept that stresses the role of doctors not as providers of health but rather enablers of it. Misunderstanding of that difference often explains why in India people often become doctors for the money and at the expense of the patient.

Equity, rather than equality, in health care implies more than providing health services to the neediest. It mandates getting to the root of the problem, which is often the socioeconomic, political and religious base of society. To truly treat disease and assist the patient, disease needs to be viewed in light of community behavior and environment in addition to treatment. Equally, the interventions made need to be viewed as the most pressing need for that community.

In the mid-1990s, the government of India set up a program to assist with water and sanitation in the villages. It was an attempt to tackle the root causes of some diseases inequitably unjustly present in poorer areas, such as diarrhea, malnutrition, and hepatitis. Funding the program, the government made it so each family would have access to a toilet. Previously, men, women and children would

defecate outside their homes, on the streets, or in fields, but with toilets it was felt that the spread of disease would be mitigated.

The toilets were installed yet were not used. People would still urinate and defecate outside and in farmlands, something I noticed during my morning walks when I would have to dance my way along the road. When CRHP investigated they found that the stalls were being used to store grains and crops. The villagers were clueless as to why toilets should be used. Plus, they enjoyed the comfort of defecating in the free wind rather than in an enclosed box. The more dire need for the community was storage areas to protect crops from being stolen or eaten by animals. The toilets were a fantastic idea and a useful government program, but still failed to be effective because they were not the utmost need of the community and its importance was not properly translated. CRHP then took the time to speak with the community, establish storage facilities and educate villagers as to the reason for toilet installation. Only recently has CRHP begun a water and sanitation program in the villages absent of toilets. It was an intervention targeting a disease priority identified by the community, so that the village is involved and even further, families help to fund the project.

The experience in Jamkhed has challenged me to think bigger and more seriously about the role of the doctor. The role of a physician in a developing community is one of education, communication, and cultural understanding as much as disease and root causes. The role of a rural physician mandates the necessity to understand agriculture, villagers' work schedule, and when market day is held. Will the role of a physician be the same in an urban and developed community? I also find it hard to dismiss things that I find wrong as simply being a part of the culture, thus letting it stand as is. Universal rights are innate no matter where the country or hospital and dismissing poor health as a cultural characteristic is a great disservice. The movement towards human rights involves behavior change as much as socioeconomic and environmental ones, yet

how much of the local culture and mystic belief should be utilized to adequately create change? And who are the ones enabling this behavior change—NGOs, the government, or the people themselves?

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One thing I will take with me as I become a physician is the importance of service and the giving to others in my work. Regardless of what is done for the community, I have found that I always acquire a personal gain and that mixture of personal satisfaction with community service will always have to be present throughout my work, with neither lost nor sacrificed.

After Asha and I checked the leprosy patient, we moved on with our hypertension and alcohol study. In her village, which is more of a rural slum than a typical village due to the many migrant workers, overrun space and lack of community cohesion, an abnormally high rate of alcohol abuse exists. Yet attempts to study these rates have not been conducted due to the stigma associated with high alcohol consumption present throughout the community. Masking the alcohol survey under a hypertension study,

Asha and I effectively went house to house, checking blood pressures and asking questions on exercise, diet, tobacco and alcohol use. The stigma associated with high alcohol consumption was mitigated by directing attention toward causes of hypertension, through trust created by the VHW, and by collection of data in private and in patient's homes. As of now, 304 men have been surveyed and the methodology seems to have successfully reduced the associated stigma. The data collected showed that 31.3 percent of men were found to consume some alcohol with 47.6 percent of these drinking at least twice per day, seven days per week. Interestingly, a correlation was found between hypertension and alcohol abuse, as 9.8 percent of men with normal blood pressure, 12.7 percent with pre-hypertension, 27.3 percent with stage 1 hypertension, and 40.0 percent with stage 2 hypertension were found to drink heavily.

As I walk from house to house, speaking with villagers in Marathi, I wonder why I would want to be doing anything else?

A young girl in India boils water during the early morning hours.

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Courtesy of Photoshare



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Every day in Liberia is a lesson in development.

Jeffrey Austin '98 lives in Liberia where he works for the Carter Center running a community-based justice program in partnership with a Catholic human rights organization.

Liberia first appeared on my horizon seven years ago. That summer, I backpacked through five West African countries—but not Liberia, which was descending into the second act of its horrific civil war. I shared one bush taxi in Senegal with two Liberians in Fubu-wear knockoffs who kept flashing wads of American currency. I took them for rebels. When the bush taxi dropped us at the Gambian frontier, the border guards denied them entry, and they continued onward to Guinea to try their luck there.

Everything I knew about Liberia was curious. The rebels were fighting a president, Charles Taylor, with a name so familiar and un-African that my congressman in North Carolina shared it with him. On a BBC World Service documentary I caught on my short-wave radio, I listened as child soldiers told their stories in accents that brought back memories of my childhood in Georgia.

The story of my move to Liberia, however, goes back farther than that. Part of it dates back to high school, where I was already a public-service guy. I headed Volunteer Paideia and helped start the high school's first recycling program. Academically, I was an arts guy. In high school I filled my free time playing jazz trombone and writing for the *Blue Rider*, the literary magazine.

My interest in social sciences and far-away lands dates back to a fluke of college admissions. The summer after high school graduation, I was preparing to go to my second-choice school when my first-choice school accepted me off its wait list for admission the following year.

I was hesitant at first. I didn't want to show up in college a year later than everybody else, but the more I thought about it, the more I realized I had been offered not only the gift of four years at my first-choice school, but also the gift of another year of life. I accepted.

I considered many options, but in the end, a family friend's suggestion that I volunteer at a hospital he had heard about in Haiti seemed most exotic, and most appealing. And I liked the idea of putting to use the French I had learned in Joanna Gibson's classes.

Everything in Haiti was new to me. The more I experienced it, the more I wanted to experience: the voodoo offerings at the crossroads outside of town, the Creole proverbs, the immense grief every time a patient died at our hospital. Poverty was an abstraction to me until my time in Haiti. State failure and the long shadow of the United States—these were concepts I had never even considered. Once on a supply trip into Cap Haitien, a nurse in the front seat wondered aloud when, if ever, the country might rise above its suffering. The Haitian doctor who was driving said he knew that real change in Haiti could only ever come from Haitians. I had never thought of it like that, and suddenly I was pondering a question I have been trying to answer since.

The summer after I returned, I lay on my parents' sofa flipping through the course catalog of the college I was preparing to attend. I read about one major described like this:

"This program is designed to provide a comparative perspective on the long-term social, political, and economic changes that have accompanied industrialization and the growth of the modern state in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Middle East, and in the historical experience of European countries. Among other topics, The Development Studies concentration includes a concern with understanding how processes of change impact the distribution of wealth and opportunity both within and between nations."

For the idealistic, energetic expatriates like me who come here hoping to witness rebirth, living in Liberia is as much about disappointment as about exhilaration. I see more similarity from year to year than I do change.

It was a revelation. I had already discovered the overwhelming question of our time, but until then I hadn't known people studied such things. I took other classes in college, but really my course was set on the sofa that summer day. I took all the courses in development my school had to offer, studied abroad in West Africa, wrote a thesis on microfinance in Bolivia, graduated with a degree in development studies, and after college ended up working for the Carter Center. In 2005 I finally made it to a newly peaceful Liberia, where, still working for the Carter Center, I run a community-based justice program in partnership with a Catholic human rights organization. In a network of offices across the country, our paralegals mediate disputes, talk people through their problems, and refer cases as necessary to lawyers on staff.

The Grip of History

Every day in Liberia is a lesson in development. In the north, onion farmers show me how they plot the price of their crop on a blackboard, and how it rises and falls in inverse proportion to quotas on Dutch imports set by a policy board in the capital. On my morning jog at home on the southern coast, I map Liberians' confidence in their future each time I see a new field under cultivation for the first time since peace arrived. I see the grip history holds on each of us in the strong upper arms of the planter women next door in the Ivory Coast, where Félix Houphouët-Boigny, the post-independence leader, invested in agriculture at a time when neighbors like Liberia were promoting extractive industries and industrialization. And I hear it in the British inflections in the accent of the Sierra Leonean proprietor of my local tea shop, and in the familiar Southern rhythms of the Liberian accent.

Of course Liberia's history was always part of what drew me to it. Like me, Liberia has its roots in the American South. The first independent African republic was founded by free Americans of color more than 150 years ago. And like the city of my childhood, Liberia was burned to the ground during civil war. I am here watching as Liberia struggles to rise from the ashes.

In January I returned from the Christmas holiday at home with a book about reconstruction after the U.S. civil war. In it, I have been learning how the ideals of that time were threatened not only by southern resistance but also by apathy and a desire for reconciliation in the north. In 2006, Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Liberia's dynamic president, spoke in her inaugural address about building a new Liberia, not about rebuilding the old one. But sometimes I wonder, given all the difficult choices that entails, and Liberians' understandable nostalgia for what they call the "normal days" before the war, whether that will really ever happen.

For the idealistic, energetic expatriates like me who come here hoping to witness rebirth, living in Liberia is as much about disappointment as about exhilaration. I see more similarity from year to year

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than I do change. The road I take to reach the capital is still impassable during the rainy season. And it seems as if the tough questions—like land reform—will forever be punted down the line. Last year, an American friend who worked for a human rights organization told me that she believed she could only be useful here so long as she remained optimistic. Not long after, she quit the country.

I, too, left once. After the 2005 Liberian elections I moved to Washington, D.C., and worked for a magazine covering Capitol Hill. In D.C., life was good—friends from college, a girlfriend I might have married, an affordable apartment in a hip neighborhood. And yet, as I watched President Sirleaf on C-Span address a joint session of Congress and later followed the news story of Charles Taylor's arrest in Nigeria on charges of war crimes, I felt that there, in Washington, D.C. the center of the empire, I was far away from the story that really mattered to my age, and from the question I had uncovered so long ago in Haiti. (Then again, Washington was under different rule in 2006, and perhaps the real problem was not so much that I was missing the story, but that I didn't like the story I was part of.) I came back to Liberia the first chance I got, and I have been here since.

One of the benchmarks of my time here has been a statistic I read in *The Economist* during that year in D.C. Whenever things look good and I begin feeling optimistic, I remember that Liberia must maintain an economic growth rate of 10 percent—high by any standard—for 25 years just to return to the level it was at in 1980, when all the trouble began.

In recent months, news about economic growth rates has been almost universally bad. And yet in a recent release, the International Monetary Fund singled out one country that might make good in 2009: Liberia, with a projected growth rate of 14.8%.

Everyone wants to be part of a success story. It's too early to tell whether we are writing one in Liberia, and other statistics paint horrifying illustrations of sexual violence and youth unemployment. But watching a society build itself is about the most fascinating thing I have ever seen. And there's enough grist, in the meantime, to hope.

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Ben Klein '03 is a Peace Corps volunteer assigned to the Ministry of Education and Training in the southern African country of Lesotho.

Ben, a graduate of Stanford, is in the second year of his Peace Corp service.

Dear Paideia,

You're talking to Teboho Lebone [We give thanks to you, one of light] aka Ben Klein, and as you read this I will be in the midst of my second year of Peace Corps Service in Lesotho. Lesotho is a small landlocked country in southern Africa. It's called the Mountain Kingdom both because of the landscape and because of the altitude—it's the country with the highest low point in the entire world! I arrived on the continent in November of 2007 with 23 other volunteers. Together we comprise the education group. Our counterparts are community health and economic development (CH/ED) volunteers who arrive every June. Within the education group, volunteers are split up into secondary teachers responsible for high school math and science and teaching students, and resource teachers, volunteers that work mainly with teachers to improve methodology and the larger education system. I've been assigned to be a resource teacher, and I work specifically with 10 separate early childhood care and development centers in Ha Makhoroana (my village) and surrounding villages.

On top of their official Peace Corps assignment, volunteers often take on additional work called secondary projects that can require an equal amount or even more time than their primary assignment. For example, on top of my ECCD work I teach a class at Malithuso (the local high school), tutor advanced students from my rondaval,* lead Saturday study at Malithuso, have put in libraries at a number of local primary schools (along with educating teachers and students on how to use them), and perhaps the most important of all, simply learned to live within my community.

One additional activity deserves its own paragraph. In this tiny country of only two million people, almost a third of the entire population is infected with HIV/AIDS. HIV/AIDS is an enormous problem here, and accordingly, a volunteer who is serious about her role in Lesotho *must* address the issue. A significant amount of a Peace Core volunteer's (PCV) time is (opinion alert: and should be) spent in HIV outreach: AIDS education, sex education, relationship advice to the youngsters, counseling and grief groups. Basically anything you can think of that relates, we volunteers are trying to institute it. It's too important of an issue for PCVs to ignore.

Development work is difficult. Progress is slow. It can be frustrating to witness, time and again, your teachers failing to adopt beneficial techniques or resources in their classroom. Sometimes volunteers feel that they're not even wanted, and that their work is both fruitless and pointless. The key, as it often is, is attitude. If you hold on to your American expectations and ideas of culture, then you're certain to experience disappointment and likely to be unhappy. However, when (and only when) you start thinking like a Masotho and relating to the host country nationals on those terms, well, your progress will be staggering.

So that's Lesotho in a miniscule nutshell. It's hard (None of the luxuries or amenities that I'm used to. I miss my friends and family.), can be depressing (I've attended too many funerals for too many young kids.), and frequently infuriating (Why can't Basotho ever be on time for anything?!). But, truly, most of the time life is fulfilling (Teaching kids to play chess who have never seen a board.), beautiful (You should see the mountains that surround my house—every sunset is spectacular.), and happy.

*Rondaval—my house and home. It's a circular mud/dung hut with a thatch roof, about 15 feet in diameter and has no running water or electricity. I draw my water from a Boer Hole, a surface well covered by corrugated tin, and at night my house is lit with candles.

As the Peace Corps slogan goes, “It’s the toughest job you’ll ever love.” I love Lesotho. And now, after a too-long introduction, I’d like to share with you a day in my life here, so that you can see the ups and downs, the joys and frustrations (but mostly joys) that I’ve experienced in Lesotho.

Middle of August 2008

Last night while I slept, it has rained for the first time in nearly two months. As I step out of my rondaval in the morning, I notice about 30 buzzing circles in the small patch of grass that sits as an island in the middle of our dirt lawn. I stoop to peer at one of the vibrations, and it reveals itself to be a fat brown fly. I can only guess as to the reason for their endless loops, but I’m more struck by the fact that they’re present at all. The trees and flowers, as of yet, do not trust the few extra degrees and hint of moisture, and remain hidden and armored. A few more days of even light rain, though, and I can already see the splashes of pink through the mountainside, as the innumerable peach trees flower and bloom.

Best to put that pleasant thought aside. Insects outside mean insects inside. The previous weeks have been windy, and the dust has been creeping in through the cracks in my door and windows. A supply of water, food, and the promise of a respite from the imminent heat must seem pretty attractive to any manner of creepy-crawly. Looks like I’ve got a few hours of sweeping, cleaning, waxing and mopping my hut on the books for Saturday.



I walk by some primary schools on the way to visiting Makhoroana *Likonyana* and see that they’re packed to the gills. Assembly and classes are apparently delayed, and the schoolyard is brimming with Standards 1–7. All the students are clad identically in green, and they are playing various games on the other side of the three strands of wire that comprise the gating.

A group of Standard 1 girls are enjoying a game of double dutch with a rope strung together from plastic bags and twine. Three claps and one girl begins to jump. Two rope swings later, and two girls jump in on either side of her, and then two more. I start laughing, because the five jumpers and the two rope swingers take up so little space. The height of the upswing of the rope wouldn’t clear my chin.

I try to guess their age, and decide that they couldn’t be much older than 7, which would put them at right around Standard 2. It’s hard to know for sure, and I’m well aware that I always inadvertently shave off a few years from any child’s age, as they’re so much smaller than kids back in the States. The kids don’t seem concerned about their under-size, though, and I’m impressed with how long the five of them can jump in concert without letting the rope hit their ankles.

Class started last week on Monday, but it’s only been the middle of this Monday that enough teachers have reliably showed up to make it worthwhile for the students to attend as well. Some of the students came anyway, and they would sit in classrooms with their fellow optimists and stare at empty chalkboards. No accountability for teachers. They’ll often sit in the staffroom and skip class because they’re in the middle of a good gossip conversation. But they’ll tell you that there’s no point in coming to the first week or so of classes, as you can’t be sure of the student rolls. Plowing should be starting soon, so many of the students will be needed at home to help. Sure looks like there are plenty of students in the yard...

E abuti! Na u tseba ho lumelisa? “Little brother, do you not know how to greet?”

I’m pulled out of my reverie by a passing *Nkhono* with a stern look on her face. Thoughts toward improved education are obviously no excuse for forgetting one’s village manners.

“I am sorry, Grandmother, I was only thinking. How did you wake this morning?”

“I am here, *Oanesu*, where are you?”

“I am here, Grandmother, thank you. Travel well, Grandmother.”

“Travel well, young person.”

Custom satisfactorily accomplished we continue on our separate paths.



I make a stop at one of the shops at the taxi rank on the way back from work, as I need a few eggs to make my dinner. I walk in and say hello to Majit who is from India, but will always be harassed for being *MaChina*. The “Chinese” are frequently mistreated by Basotho, because they’re thought to have taken away local work. I’d be happy to buy them at one of the *makuku*, corrugated tin shacks, where I buy my vegetables, but they never seem to have eggs when I want them. I pay two rand, put my two eggs in the same small plastic bag that I’ll see littered about the path on my way home, and exit the store.

Two hundred rand a month barely covers the cost of food, and with a one-year old and a husband off in the mines in South Africa, it’s difficult to find the will to work on your job outside of school hours.

It was a good day at work today. I happened upon a rare treasure the day before. A chance meeting with a school supply unit officer for the Berea District resulted in my obtaining a booklet in English and Sesotho called *A Book of Sounds*. Inside were pictures of donkeys, horses, and rain, things that *bana* have seen and will recognize. It’s a happy divergence from the donated poster board with “A is for Airplane”, and I had been really excited to show my teachers how to read this book to the children.

I showed Me Mamampho how to hold the book with the pictures toward the kids, and to slowly display it with arms outstretched so that all could see, and the kids wouldn’t stand up and crowd each other. I asked kids individually to tell me what animal they were seeing and what sound they made. They were scared at first, so rarely leaving the protection of the group’s mass parroting, but after a little pushing they screamed “Kokolo-kolo” just as loud as the *khoho* that wake up the village every morning.

The activity was a success and Me Mamampho was visibly excited at how rapt the children had been. Instead of attributing this success to engagement of her little children, she gave it to the physical object of the book. As I walked toward the door, she asked me to give it to her. I didn’t answer for a moment, disappointed for a few reasons. Aware of Ministry workers’ tendency to hoard, I had no doubt that there would be at least one taped up box packed with the same booklets at the school supply office. But there aren’t enough guns in Lesotho to liberate those literary POWs. This woman and this school, like every other underpaid teacher in every other overflowing classroom, deserved the book. I didn’t give it to her.

I was wary of her making the gift into a golden calf, and stuffing it into a corner of a desk, to protect it from getting dirtied by kids actually using it and learning from it. I told her that I would help her to make a book, and that we could tailor it to just what she wanted her particular children to learn. The light went out of her eyes as she realized that this meant extra work for her. Two hundred rand a month barely covers the cost of food, and with a one-year old and a husband off in the mines in South Africa, it’s difficult to find the will to work on your job outside of school hours. But she eventually agreed to sit down and think about ways in which we can raise the 70 rand for flipchart paper and markers to write our own book. This is a small victory, but a happy one, and I leave the *likonyanang* with a smile on my face.



On the way back from shopping, the older children have just been let out of school, and kids are already playing. One *abuti* sprints by rolling the rim of a cart wheel in front of him. He is sprinting, and keeps the wheel alight by guiding it with a length of pencil-thin rusty iron. Trailing him, and frantically trying to keep up, is a younger (or smaller) school mate with a rag soccer ball clutched to his chest.

A tiny little girl walks alongside me, but on the other side of the road. This worries me as you can’t see the Kombis speeding at you from the left side. They’ll be approaching her back. I frown and notice she’s not

wearing a school uniform. She's wearing a ratty sweater, more hole than anything else, through which I can see an equally worn t-shirt that advertises an '80s hair band. Children walk on foot alone such enormous distances, without shoes, at such a young age. Home could be six miles away for this little girl.

She sees me looking at her and her face erupts into a broad innocent smile.

"*Lekhoooooaa!*" she yells from across the road.

"I have a name, little sister, I am Ntate Teboho Lebone. What is your name?"

"Ke Lerato Rapapa"

I tell her to travel safely, and she runs ahead, this time on the correct side of the road. Up ahead, at the bar, I see an older man sitting on an empty plastic crate wearing a blanket. He turns, hearing my voice, and shouts.

Ha re ee! Ke tla u shapa! "Let's go, I am going to give you a beating!"

Ntate Pow Pow is my favorite billiards opponent. He has one of the less typical bridges, to put it nicely, that I've ever seen in my life, and yet he can still shoot the eyes off the balls. He's almost never hanging by the *joalang*, which I take as a good sign for his employment, so when he's there I feel we owe each other a game.

I look up at the sky. The sun is decently overhead, and the days have been getting a little longer as of late, but those clouds in the distance look menacing. If they sweep in and it rains, the sun will be swallowed up. I've dishes to do, and in the dark it's a lot less pleasant. I have to draw water, too, or I'll be thirsty in the morning. My daily chores take up a chunk of time every day, and I'm not sure if I'll be able to get them all done if I dally with a game of snooker.

Making the obvious choice, I leave the clouds to destiny, and follow Pow Pow into Ntate Taelo's two-room store/bar. Goods on the right, the pool table and floor refrigerator (assuredly stocked with quarts of Carling Black Label beer) to the left. I deposit the one rand into the table and rack the balls. I'm the challenger, so I'm forced to both pay and rack, but at least I am conceded the break. It's good to be a winner on a Basotho snooker table.

I lean over the table, my hand on the splintered butt of the only house cue, and let loose with a real whopper. It's a good break, and the balls spread all over the table, but as can happen on these old tables with their slow-as-dirt felt, nothing drops. I might be in trouble.

Ntate Pow Pow elects to be littles.

"*Senyane*," he says and proceeds to prove his nickname, rifling balls into every pocket. He cuts the four-ball into the side, a real tricky cut, and celebrates the shot by slamming the cue butt onto the ground (Wonder how it got broken?), and tapping his chest.

"*Mbona!* Look at me! Did I not say?

I am going to give you shapa!"

He's really feeling it, and I'm getting the business. Even if he weren't in dead stroke, though, he can still be a tricky devil. Snooker rules in Southern Africa make for a much slower game than in the States. If I pot my opponent's ball, it's a foul, so a large part of the strategy is to slow roll your balls and jaw them in the pocket. This allows you to control the table and pick off your own balls when you feel like it, while the opposition is left frustrated, never with a shot. This makes for games that last a deathly long time, and especially if you're the one whose been put in jail.

But not today, boy. Pow Pow is knockin' 'em dead, and before I know it, I've lost two maloti. I've been in the bar for 10 minutes.

I take this as a sign that maybe I ought to do my chores. I give Ntate a big grin and tell him he plays well. I walk out the door still smarting and a little stunned at the whupping for which I've just been present. Today at least, the scoreline reads Ntata Pow Pow 1, Makhooa everywhere 0.



When I arrive at home I test the pump. I wasn't really expecting it to work, and had already resigned myself to the tenth-of-a-mile walk to a dammed part of the stream that we called a well. The sudden unexpected moisture on my palm makes me whoop with joy.

Metsi a teng! "Water is here," I shout to no one in particular. But nothing goes unheard in village, and Nkhono from across the street

yells back at me, “Eeee, *abuti*.” Maybe I’ll get my chores done before cloud cover after all. I run inside and pull my basin of dirty dishes out and go to work.

A ‘M’e is walking down the road, blanket wrapped around her waist, a bag of cabbages perched on her head. She sees me washing in the grass and walks up to me. She clucks her tongue at my efforts, “Aaaatch,” and asks me if she can work for me and wash the dishes.

This is not the first time I’ve ever heard this pitch, and usually I decline. I find the task to be somewhat relaxing, and I like it when *bo-abuti* and *bo-ausi* see a man doing housework, which is another reason why I wash outside. I notice ‘Me’s toes poking through a hole in her shoes, and I guess I’m still feeling badly for not giving Me Mamapho a book for her classroom, and I accept. I tell her that I will only let her work, though, if she lets me sit by her and learn Sesotho. She agrees immediately, happy to be seen sitting with a *Lekhooa* by all who pass.

I find out that her name is ‘Me Mamope Matekane, and she turns out to be a really good teacher. I’m learning the words for dishrag, basin, water pot, steel wool, pots, pans, clean and dirty. She speaks slowly and makes me repeat more and more difficult sentences. Our conversation progresses, and soon we’re laughing and joking loudly and unselfconsciously. The noise causes my normally reticent *Nkhono* neighbor to wander over and join in with us. With a big toothless grin, she spreads her arms wide.

Pula ea na.

She looks so happy as she is saying this that I can’t help but smile, nod, and repeat the words, “Rain is coming.”



The words prove to be prophetic as sparse raindrops begin to fall. One splashes my cheek, and another leaves a mark on one of my pots, which are cleaner than I’ve ever seen. They look almost newer than when I bought them in Maseru months before. ‘Me Mamope has done a stellar job.

She’s just about finished, and rain is imminent, so we weave our conversation toward the elaborate farewell. I thank her for being such a patient teacher, and am forced to promise to come visit her. She lives near my *Abuti Napo*’s school, *Ha Ramakoro*, and I have a little difficulty understanding her directions. No matter, I’m sure I could find a roving gang of children who would like nothing more than to lead me to where I want to go.

I thank her again, give her 10 rand, and shout a travel well to her as she continues her journey, this time with the blanket stretched across her head instead of her back. I bring my dishes inside, and not a moment to soon, as the sky opens up and rain pours down. Inside my *rondaval*, I am immediately engulfed in blackness. I light a candle and send a fish moth scurrying into the shadows. Damn, they’re back already?

The rain causes me to worry for a moment because of my cat, who is nowhere to be found. I don’t worry long, though, *Mohale*, true to his name, is a warrior. He’ll hole up somewhere, and during a let-up I’m sure I’ll here his constant meowing outside the door, begging to be let in. I’ll just have to remember to wipe his paws, otherwise he’ll track prints.

Oh yeah, and now I’ll need to check for ticks and fleas, too.

I boil water for rice and for the red speckled beans that we’ve grown in Me Mamolemo’s—no, now it’s Me Keneoe’s garden.

The pitter patter of rain on my thatch, and the heat and aroma wafting from my clean pots puts a smile on my face, even as I see out through the corner of my eye, another fish moth skitters—across the mud wall and vanishes—into a crack in the floor.

Rejoice Grandmother! Brothers, sisters, *batho kaofela*, rejoice! For all of her flaws and troubles, spring is here.

Sincerely,
Teboho Lebone

15

Using cell phones to promote healthcare

Prentiss Darden '02 is working on the Botswana Project, a health care initiative in that is developing a system using cell phones to help healthcare providers and HIV patients communicate better.

I HAVE BEEN IN SOUTHERN AFRICA for two months now. During the 30-hour trip from Atlanta to Johannesburg, South Africa, I traveled the length of Africa during the daytime. Flying over the vast expanse of the Sahara desert, I looked down upon the ridgelines of the dunes that appeared as if sets of concentric circles made of pine had fallen out of the sky and broken into patterns of overlapping curves. I drifted into sleep as the desert sands ended and the land shifted to vegetation. As the flight came to an end, I looked out into the darkness at the interlacing grids of bright yellow-orange lights of Johannesburg and was filled with the sensation of excitement in the face of newness, of the unknown. Having never been to the cities and countryside of the land below nor met its inhabitants, the grid of bright lights represents the emptiness of the next six months of my life. I have very little idea of what lies in wait, of the people I will meet, the stories I will hear, the sentiments of this land's inhabitants, and the feel of the climate on my skin. The lights below and the communities and city centers that create a network within southern Africa is what I will be getting to know. I am based in Gaborone, the capital city of Botswana, a six-hour bus ride outside of Johannesburg.

I am arriving to work on the Botswana Project which proposes a solution to the issue of treatment adherence for people taking ARVs for HIV. We are a public-private partnership between the Ministry of Health and Mascom, a major telecommunications provider in Botswana. We are developing a system that sends text messages to cell phones as reminders for people to take medicines, go to clinic

appointments, and refill prescriptions. The patients can also text in for medical information and to report any side effects. The service is free for all patients and doctors involved.

After 10 days in Cape Town, meeting up with project mates, we fly back to Johannesburg and taxi to the bus station. On the bus, I sit next to Yasemin, one of my project mates. With little time before the bus departs, I rush to use the bathroom and buy a bag of chips and bottle of water in preparation of a six-hour ride into Botswana. Back on the bus, a woman steps on and begins a speech to ask for money for her orphanage. She is the first person I have ever met I know to be HIV-positive. She is thin but strong and exudes a fair amount of health, somewhat dampened by the scent of cigarettes and many scars on her arms. She speaks with a full voice and her message is strong, not victimized. Her orphanage collects babies abandoned by their mothers who were HIV positive. She asks if any of us can give money. She says she doesn't want to make her problem our problem, but if we have the feeling to give, please do so and God will thank you. Only a few people on the bus give her money, some grunting negativity as she passes.

I have come here because I want my dreams of living in foreign countries and working in public health to become realities and I think that working for free while living off of my savings will balance out because of this project's potential to have a great impact. I have read about the divide between the world's rich and poor in books by Joseph Stiglitz, Naomi Klein, Zygmunt Bauman, and Albert Schweitzer, and written about labor issues, health care, and globalization in university classes. A professor I had at Boston University, Robert Weller, worked as a consultant on poverty in China for the

World Bank. He told our class about a time when he visited a house where a woman was dying because she didn't have one dollar to go to the hospital. The world is unfair and can be cruel, but it can also be improved. While I had been introduced to the challenges of an increasingly interconnected world through academia, I began to form a deeper understanding of poverty while living in Peru. I left BU and for ten months I worked on a project to rebuild stoves with chimneys in rural homes to reduce indoor air pollution and I participated in health outreach visits. The people I met were intelligent, aware of world issues, and motivated to be activists for their families and communities. If only they had the resources we have in the States, they would accomplish much, I thought. While in Peru, I learned that people get sick and because they are poor, they become sicker, and their work is disrupted and they can't take care of the children, and then the community is affected and suffer. I learned

The people I met were intelligent, aware of world issues, and motivated to be activists for their families and communities. If only they had the resources we have in the states, they would accomplish much

that sickness radiates from a single individual to an entire community. If people have their health, they have more happiness and wealth, both personal and material. All other efforts of development agencies and governments are nullified if people are sick. I decided I wanted to help people to stay healthy and have access to preventive healthcare and treatments so the actions of other social initiatives would be more significant. I thought about a career in public health because of the ability to have a positive impact on many people.

Upon graduating from Lewis and Clark College with a degree in international affairs, I applied for a grant from an American foundation. I was seeking a grant to do a health assessment of a renewable energy project in Peru that would measure the positive health impacts of eco-friendly energy sources. While being interviewed for the grant in San Francisco, I met Katy Digovich.

She was also interested in public health and motivated to create a company in the future. We connected and became friends. I didn't receive a grant, while Katy did. It was clear from the beginning that she would, given the elements of the Botswana Project. A few months later I contacted her. She was getting a team together to work on the project and asked if I wanted to join. Here I am.

In Gaborone, the Baylor pediatric clinic has a teen club that meets once a month. Teen patients at the clinic get together to do activities and talk about what it is like living with HIV. At the end of January, we took the group to a nearby museum. I was the mother hen to a group of five girls, 13- and 14-years old. We walked through exhibits of fossils and evolution, African and colonial history, dioramas of village life and animals, and an exhibit of African musical instruments. A separate building housed an art gallery with an exhibit about HIV/AIDS entitled "Keep the Promise".

The girls had a sheet of questions they were supposed to fill out as part of the scavenger hunt. They were busy wanting to correctly answer the questions and I was a little wary of them missing the big picture of the exhibit. They were eager to move on to the next question. I felt like I was racing the clock as I tried to engage them in the art and its ideas before they ran off to answer the next question. We walked around the rest of the gallery looking for the paintings that said, "Keep the Promise" in them. Before I led them outside and back into the music exhibit where they wanted to go, I asked them what "Keep the Promise" meant. I posed it as if I didn't understand what it meant because I wanted them to think about it and to hear them explain it aloud. "It's about HIV," said one girl. "It's the promise to use condoms," said another, "to keep it from spreading." This all seemed harsh and cruel, because as I looked at their faces, I saw girls that already had HIV and this whole business about keeping the promise couldn't save them from being infected as their fate was already determined.

My perspective, shaped by reproductive classes in the U.S. where HIV/AIDS is not something often seen, was that “keep the promise” was meant to remind the viewers to be safe and to keep from contracting the disease by promising to have safe sex. Naturally, I assumed that the message directed towards me was to keep me healthy. However, I was with five teenage girls who already had HIV. Their perspective was much different. The message to them was to not pass HIV on to people with whom they choose to have intercourse. HIV was predominantly a male disease when it first became an epidemic

As I looked at their faces, I saw girls that already had HIV and this whole business about keeping the promise couldn't save them from being infected as their fate was already determined.

around 20 years ago, and it is difficult for me to wrap my mind around the reality that these 13- and 14 year-old girls are the ones who will need to be responsible for not passing it on to uninfected people. They are at the age where they are curious about sexuality and yet they already have this disease that will be with them until they pass away and can kill others with whom they interact. Tough draw.

Last month, we met with employees from the Botswana network of people living with AIDS. We met at their office around a large wooden table that took up most of the room. It was hot and too bright, but we couldn't close the blinds because then the air wouldn't circulate throughout the room. We talked about their organization and ours and ways we could potentially collaborate. A doctor in the group said that there was a lack of communication between doctors and patients and many people in this country are in denial about the problems surrounding HIV/AIDS. Our project fills this large gap and many people will be happy about it, he said.

This doctor also spoke about the challenge in rural areas of people not having money to go to the clinic. He asked what we would do about this in relation to our service once we scale up. Our response was that the service would bring those issues to light. The patients can text that they didn't pick up their meds because they couldn't afford to go to the clinic. Then this message, and others like it, will be delivered to the Ministry of Health where it

can be recognized and addressed. The doctor, while encouraging, also wanted us to be aware that with increased communication comes conflict, and that we must be prepared to deal with this conflict. The people at BONEPWA were supportive of the project and I feel elated knowing that the project is well suited to its environment. We have a solution to an existing problem and it has the potential to make a significant impact. There will be bumps and hurdles but given that we are passionate about what we do and that there are other people who believe in what we are doing, we will be able to adapt and improvise to overcome these challenges.

The responses of people I interact with in Gaborone have me feeling like I am involved in something that has the potential to be powerful and have a large impact on HIV/AIDS in Botswana. The work I am doing here means a lot to me. I have something to focus on and work towards. I am prepared to commit to it because I am passionate about it. The ambition of the project and the responses and support I hear from others keeps me motivated. Not only am I learning first hand about the realities of HIV/AIDS in Sub-Saharan Africa, I am working to launch a service intended as a solution for people involved in treatment. About a decade ago, ARVs were not readily available for people in resource-poor settings. Currently, they are available, but there needs to be more support for people taking the treatment to keep the virus from building up resistance. It feels like the work I am doing is going into something larger than me, a collective effort that endeavors to have a large social impact and for this I am grateful. I am fortunate to be working with bright and motivated people. I see this project as my first “real job” after college and I think that it will prove to be an invaluable learning experience on both a personal and professional level. I am happy to be learning through experience and to have the freedom of working on a project that is a start-up initiative. As I move forward in this project, I want to ensure that I am exploring the human side of it, talking with people to get feedback on our project and to gain a nuanced understanding of HIV/AIDS in Botswana.

While some people may wonder why in the world I am attracted to working in the area of HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa, I realize that everyone in the world is interdependent. The more I travel, the more I realize that the world is a small place and we are all interconnected. For instance, one of my project mates, Will Scheffers, a Motswana, is friends with Mitchell Clement '02, who was my classmate in Jonny Poulton and Kate Padgett's class my first year at Paideia. As much as some people think that our nations

As much as some people think that our nations and states are separated and that there is a first world and a third world, these constructions are artificial. Belief in the concreteness of such imaginary notions is dangerous.

and states are separated and that there is a first world and a third world, these constructions are artificial. Belief in the concreteness of such imaginary notions is dangerous. In Stacy Lewis' sophomore history class, I learned that colonists created the borders of African states. This disrupted Africa's inhabitants and created conflict. This also happened in the Middle East where French and British powers divided the land into states, ignoring the social networks that were already in place. Diseases are often evidence of the vulnerability of these artificial constructions. I feel strongly about giving attention to people with fewer resources because by strengthening these areas, the whole becomes stronger. It is essential that we understand the holistic nature of the world as we face increasing challenges from a growing population and diminishing natural resources.



*Children at
an HIV/AIDS
day care center in
South Africa.*

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Measuring progress on a different scale

Jessie Kaplan '03
is in Nepal working
for eight months
as a volunteer
peer educator for
Student Partner-
ships Worldwide.

ONE OF THE HARDEST cultural differences I've been facing and learning to adapt to is the incredibly slow pace of life in Nepal. As one of the teachers at school said, "We have a meeting to have a meeting." Inevitably that meeting will be rescheduled and then start two hours late. "Nepali time!" they say. Nepalis generally feel no urgency, and really, there's not much need to rush. Life carries on here, day after day. People cook, they work in the fields, they walk slowly, they sit and visit and drink tea—or sometimes just sit, and things eventually get done. But no one stresses about it. I've taken to going for morning or evening walks up on the hill where we live. At first I'd try to time my route to see how long it took me, so I could figure that amount of time into my "schedule" for the day, but soon learned this is counter to everything Nepali! I always run into people who ask me to sit and talk, and occasionally I'll stumble across a meeting to which I'll then be invited. In short, I have no idea how long my walk is, but I've learned to set aside 20–60 minutes.

This pace is sometimes refreshing, but to Americans who are used to a frantic pace of life and busy schedules, it can be maddening. I sometimes imagine a rural Nepali being plopped down in the middle of New York City and it frightens me—and I thought my culture shock was difficult! December was especially hard because we were settling in, meeting people, arranging and re-arranging our teaching schedule, sitting and having tea. Granted, we needed time to get to know the community, but it was frustrating, feeling like we weren't doing much in the first month. I'm happy to say things finally got underway in January, but this gap in action made me think about how we measure "success."

In the U.S., we often look for accomplishments, tangible goals: did the company make a profit this month, was this program started, was this article published, were this many people enrolled in the study, was this exam passed, etc. I definitely have this mentality, and it was hard to stomach the fact that we can't possibly give the school and village everything they need by the time we leave, six-to-eight short months later. But what exactly does it mean to "check" an event or program from the SPW curriculum off the list? Development is all encompassing and a rather vague term, so how do you measure success? I was thinking about this because a few people have asked me whether I think we're having an impact—again, a word up for interpretation! Perhaps, after SPW is gone, if only one of the seeds we've planted takes hold, then that is a huge success. It's not the success I'd envisioned before, but I'm now realizing what a big step that would be. As a very goal-oriented and success-driven person, this has been hard to get used to. But like everything in Nepal, slowly, slowly, I'm learning to adapt.

Teaching 60 Rowdy 7th Graders

My two Nepali partners and I are finally regularly teaching classes at school. We mainly teach the SPW curriculum (health, hygiene and sanitation, HIV awareness, environment, and general confidence-building and motivational skills), but we also teach the school's health curriculum. I'm very much involved in the planning and preparation of the SPW classes, but since they're obviously in Nepali, my role in class is fairly limited. I've taken on a few English classes, however, and it's really exciting to have a class of my own. I'm really enjoying teaching! It can be challenging teaching English to 60 rowdy 7th graders, but students in Nepal generally love anything we do, which is great for a novice teacher like me!

The thing that strikes me the most about kids and teenagers here is just that—they're just kids. Just like youngsters in America, they like to laugh and play, they are extremely curious and stuff our question box full in our sex education and health classes.

The thing that strikes me the most about kids and teenagers here is just that—they're just kids. Just like youngsters in America, they like to laugh and play, they are extremely curious and stuff our question box full in our sex education and health classes. Yet it baffles me to think how their lives will probably be so different from the youth in America. In a few years, many of them will be married, some of these girls (who still giggle and bury their faces in their friend's shoulder when pictures of male genitalia are passed around) will have

given birth to their own children. But they're just kids! This concept alone is difficult to understand.

We're starting to build good relationships with the kids at school through teaching and hanging out. The Green Club (youth club) president is the same boy who comes to our house to teach me to play the madal (Nepali drum), and the kids are the same ones who hang out by the water taps and critique me when I'm washing my clothes. This is one of my favorite parts about being here, and one of the ways in which I think we're having the most impact. Ahh, there's that word "impact" again. What we're accomplishing here is a little different than what I had expected. Some of the things we teach them may not stick later on. For instance, the kids cleaned up litter during the school cleaning campaign, but they have a lifetime habit of throwing garbage on the ground.

However, the purpose of this particular SPW program is the Community Youth Empowerment Program (CYEP). Though this is a little harder to measure and evaluate, I feel fairly confident that we're having an impact here. The power and potential of youth spans across cultures I think, and I'm a firm believer in the ability of young people

to be passionate and work towards what they believe in—sometimes they just need a push in that direction. As SPW volunteers, being good role models is important, since youth in all cultures are impressionable and look up to their elder peers, but an equally important part of the program is the youth club SPW sets up in schools, called the "Green Club." The GC is a way for the students to be active and have a voice in their school and community by planning and executing street dramas, debates, rallies, speech competitions, etc. covering sexual and reproductive health, nutrition, hygiene and sanitation, and the environment. Right now we're helping them quite a bit, but the ultimate goal is that they can fundraise and plan events by themselves, when SPW is gone.

After elections, only one of the old GC members had been re-elected. During the first meeting, he spoke for a long time about the problems they had last year communicating with one another. He said that after the SPW volunteers left, they had a hard time getting anything done, and he emphasized the need for the new GC to be a strong team and work well together. This was later translated to me, as he spoke for a good 30 minutes in Nepali, but even without understanding everything I could easily see his leadership skills and was very impressed. His name is Siam, and he is 16 years old. If this were [the summer outdoors program for teens] Adventure Treks, the first hat would go to Siam! All of these young Nepalis have the potential, and many of them have the desire to be leaders in their school and communities. If we are giving them the platform for this leadership and involvement and helping them realize what they can initiate and accomplish, well then, I think we are indeed having a strong impact here.

In other areas, this impact is hard to assess right now. In the community, we formed a mothers' group that has started its own savings group. We did a nutrition workshop and gave information on maintaining a balanced diet with locally available foods, as well as which vitamins and minerals are essential for pregnant women to eat.

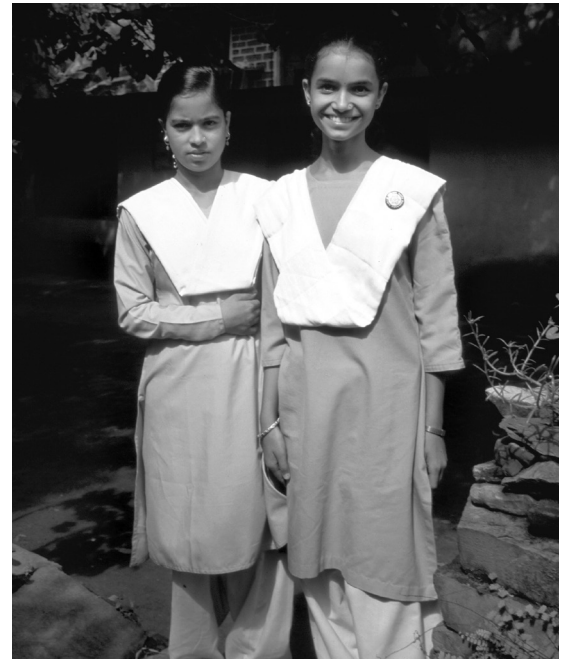
We helped with a sexual and reproductive health workshop in another village, in which we showed the village women how to put on condoms. We also formed an out-of-school youth group, and a few days ago some of the GC members performed a street drama about malnutrition for kids and members of the community. Overall, a busy month! Will providing this information change habits? Well I'm not sure, but raising awareness is the first step in that direction.

Thinking Outside the Book

Another way I feel I'm having an influence here, and one I did not anticipate, is the influence I have on my Nepali partners, and they on me. The government curriculum in school is taught straight from the book, and Nepali students are never encouraged to think creatively or critically. They learn one way of doing things, whether it's cooking or playing a game or working in the fields, and they never question it. They are baffled if I don't agree with something written on paper, or if I think of a different way of doing something (like an educational game for a lesson plan). I feel like I can model this skill of creative thinking for them. After all, these young Nepalis are the people who will continue to work towards the development of their country, and development work needs creative thinkers! Of course, I'm learning much (if not more) from them in return. They are extremely patient, flexible, excellent public speakers (with minimal preparation), and can easily command the attention of 60 students in a classroom. I'm often in awe of them while they're teaching a class or leading a community event.

Other quick updates of January happenings: the international volunteers had four more days of language training in Kathmandu—we asked for it and it was excellent! We'd had enough time to master the basics, but in Kathmandu were able to learn more grammar and complex sentence structures. Also, the two Nepali volunteers from last year came to visit. We'd heard so much about them and getting to meet them and hear in person what they'd done last year, what had worked and not worked, was extremely interesting and helpful.

In addition, my friend Jeff [Holzberg] recently came to visit Dhading. He's currently working in India right now, completing a fellowship in public health and primary health care, and I took him to my village and introduced him to my family. It was interesting hearing his questions about health and his perspective on the differences between India and Nepal. Finally, I just got back from being interviewed by Radio Dhading about my experience here. They love talking to the international SPW volunteers. Yes, the interview was in Nepali, but thankfully they kept it simple! However they did make me sing a song in Nepali at the end, by myself...



Nepalese school girls.

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Last spring, Paideia alums **Moses Rifkin, '97** and **Miranda Roth, '00**, members of Ultimate for Peace, were a part of a group of elite American ultimate Frisbee players and coaches who went to Israel and Palestine to help promote peace through ultimate Frisbee by teaching Israeli and Palestinian youth to play the game. Ultimate Peace was founded in 2008 to use the sports and its ideals of sportsmanship to promote understanding in areas of conflict. The group worked with a sports program run by the Peres Centre for Peace, an Israeli non-governmental organization aimed at promoting peace and reconciliation among Israeli and Palestinian youth.

Both Roth and Rifkin, who played varsity ultimate at Paideia and at the college level, are multiple award winners in their sport and continue to play competitively. Co-incidentally, both teach science in Seattle, Wash., Miranda at the middle school level and Moses at the high school level. We talked with them about their experience in the Middle East.

What did the experience mean to you?

Roth: We got a lot of people interested in ultimate Frisbee in Israel and Palestine. The kids were very excited about it and had an amazing day with us in Tel Aviv. The Palestinians we got to see on our village visits, I think were particularly touched by our presence. It was also really nice to feel like we were a reinvigorating force for Israeli ultimate, which has been dwindling in recent years.

Rifkin: I was once again struck by how ultimate, a sport I fell in love with as an awkward 14 year-old, has led me to amazing places and to meet, coach, and play with such amazing people. I know that sounds corny, but I had that thought at least a dozen times: touching down in Tel Aviv, looking out over a West Bank valley with Palestinian kids who had just learned to throw, etc.

The experience, selfishly, was about getting to hear perspectives and see things that I wouldn't have been able to otherwise. Traveling into the West Bank, seeing what it was like and talking to Palestinian kids and adults about their experiences, was, for me, the most valuable part of the trip.

Lastly, it felt good and important to do something with the skills that I have. In this case, I know how to play and coach ultimate...and having an opportunity to use those skills to connect to people, to expose them to one another, felt wonderful.

Do you think learning to play ultimate had an impact on the kids?

Rifkin: I think that the one unqualified success of the trip was the sport of ultimate. Everyone we introduced to ultimate—Israeli kids on our first day there, Palestinian and Israeli basketball players together on our second, and then Palestinian kids who hadn't been at the clinic on the fifth—seemed to love it. As Mike B [Baccarini] used to say (and likely still does), there's just something about a disc flying through the air that seems to capture people's enthusiasm and interest. They loved throwing, running and catching and, at the clinic, they seemed really excited to play. It was total pandemonium on the field, but they loved it.

I think ultimate was an ideal sport for what the Peres Center's Sports Initiative is trying to do for three reasons: there's a low skill threshold that you need to be able to play, it's cheap to play, and it revolves around a notion of mutual respect between players. I was surprised and thrilled to see how my group seemed to quickly buy into the last reason, the notion of Spirit of the Game. I was expecting to have to really work with the kids to convince them...but they quickly started calling their own fouls and resolving the disputes. It was awesome, and it reminded me of the power of sport and the inherent goodness of people.

How did the coaching experience compare?

Rifkin: In some ways, my experience there was no different than coaching beginners here; there are drills that always seem to blend fun and learning well, regardless of the audience, and that was true there too.

There were, though, some differences. The kids we worked with on the day of the Peres Center clinic came from a basketball background, and were on average more athletic than what I was used to. That was fun for me, trying to translate the sport to their experience and seeing them pick it up so quickly.

Due to a surprising lack of translators, much of our coaching had to be non-verbal. This was tough, as you can imagine, but I enjoyed the challenge. If I had it to do all

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over again, I would have tried to be a little better prepared for this.

The social and cultural separation between the kids meant that it was hard to break them out of their Israeli and Palestinian groups. I wish I hadn't treated that day as just another coaching day, with skills and drills, but had made a much more conscious effort to do non-verbal icebreakers to start and focused on breaking those groups up throughout the day. It happened organically to a degree, but I wish it'd been more.

What was it like as a female coach?

Roth: I was not the only woman on the trip—there were many female coaches. I was also not the only woman to travel to Tulkarm [in the West Bank] on our village visit. Hannah was an amazing companion/ultimate Frisbee player/Arabic-Hebrew-English translator.

That is not to say that I was not conscious, at times, of being a foreign woman. In Tel Aviv, the differences were not noticeable as Tel Aviv is a very forward-thinking, modern city. However, when the Palestinian kids came to visit us, some of the young girls were wearing traditional dress under their jerseys

and I was fairly aware that the few female coaches who accompanied them were not experienced athletes and were playing more of a chaperone role.

More obvious was the role of women in the Palestinian community that we visited in the West Bank. As we drove in there were some women in traditional dress walking around shops and some young girls playing around storefronts but once we got to the outdoor basketball court where we taught the clinic, there were no women in sight (even though it was an all-girls' school). Only boys participated in the clinic and there were only male coaches. After the clinic when we were invited to Salim Ibraheem's house for dinner, we first were sitting with the coaches in his living room and then went for a walk in his lemon grove. When we returned, a lovely dinner had magically appeared on the table. It was only then that I realized there must also be women (Salim's wife and sister-in-law in particular) in the house. These women never actually spoke with us except when we asked to thank them as we were leaving, at which time they were very happy to speak to us and were all smiles as we departed.

In addition to this experience with the women of Far'un, it was also very interesting to be a woman in Far'un who was not Palestinian. The teenage boys were particularly taken with me as I don't think they had spent much time with women my age, in particular blonde foreign women my age. Some of them even asked me to help them get American citizenship...it became clear after many giggles that this meant they were hoping I would marry them so they could get a green card! In any case, the Palestinian boys with whom we interacted were very respectful and interested in us as Americans, me as a foreign woman and ultimate Frisbee as a fun, new sport.

The coach we worked most closely with, Mohamed Ibdier, also sat next to me at dinner and was incredibly kind.

What impact did the program have?

Rifkin: I mentioned that ultimate was an unqualified success. I think that the program of Ultimate Peace was, then, more of a qualified one. It was hard not to fantasize beforehand of this being some huge peace-building effort when, in reality, things are way too complex to reasonably expect visible “success” after such a small thing. Success was, therefore, pretty small and quiet: Israeli and Palestinian kids exchanging e-mail addresses at the end of the day or taking a team picture together, cheering for one another in drills, etc.

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Will it be long lasting? Will it be more successful because we did it, rather than local ultimate players? These are the questions that challenge me, and I don’t think we can have the answer to. There seems to be a commitment to keep those kids playing ultimate, and I do believe in the power of sports to bring people together to have a

shared experience in spite of cultural differences. And I think we certainly gave it our all by putting some of the U.S.’s best players and coaches in contact with the kids. But, again, it’s unrealistic to expect anything other than the slightest effect.

Then again, it certainly made an impact on me in how I view the region and its complexity. And I think we brought a positive experience with Americans to many of the kids who might otherwise not have had that, which—while it doesn’t seem as important as bridging Israeli/Palestinian divides—it was another windfall benefit.

Roth: As long as more people are playing spirited ultimate, which they are, this trip was a success. However, I don’t think we should rest on our laurels. We are already thinking about how to keep this program going in Israel and Palestine so that the kids can grow up with ultimate rather than just having had it for a short time. We want them to have good coaches and programs and to be able to continue using ultimate as a bridge between individuals within cultures and between cultures.

I will always remember watching the sun set from the high vantage point of the basketball court in Tulkarm. We watched with the kids as the sun went down over the Mediterranean Sea. We could see the beach and Netanya from where we were, but the kids have never been to the beach because they are not allowed to cross the border. I hope that some day it is as easy and comfortable and safe for these kids to go to the beach or for Jewish Israelis to come visit their basketball teammates in Tulkarm as it was for us as Americans to travel between Israel and the West Bank.