

Desiree Kosciulek, '05 BA, has lived and studied around the world, giving as much as she takes.

global learning and caring

BY MATT
SCHWARTZMAN - STUBBS

courtesy Desiree Kosciulek

It started with a television program. It took her as a teenager into some of the remotest corners of Amazonia. It sent her to South America, the United Kingdom, Germany, and now South Africa. Between far-flung adventures Desiree Kosciulek earned a bachelor's degree at UNM (in anthropology and Portuguese) and completed two international internships. She is currently working on her master's degree in development studies (as in the development needs of societies) at the University of the Witwatersrand ("Wits") in Johannesburg. Eight years after she boarded her first international flight, she has matured from a curious exchange student to a committed humanitarian activist, working in communities wracked by HIV/AIDS. What was sparked by a vague fascination has become a mission.

HOPEFUL HIKER: In December 2007, Desiree Kosciulek, '05 BA, participated in a 500-mile Rotary-sponsored hike to benefit children with HIV/AIDS in South Africa, stopping in that country's Valley of 1000 Hills for a photograph.

Waving the Flags

As a child, Desiree stared at flags from around the world displayed at her church in Denver and watched episodes of "Where in the World is Carmen San Diego?" They piqued her interest to travel at a young age.

"I don't think I could even explain today, but it was then that I began to understand something about the world outside the United States. All of those different people with different ways of life fascinated me," Desiree says.

She found support to travel early on in the Rotary Club, which gave her her first opportunity to go abroad. As a 16-year-old high school junior she arrived in the remote state of Mato Grosso, Brazil. There she immersed herself in the language and the culture. Something more than the rice and beans must have stuck with her into college.

Zest for Exchange

At UNM Desiree dove into her new environment with the same zeal that had taken her to South America as a high schooler.

"Desiree took advantage of every international offering UNM made," says Margo Milleret, Desiree's Portuguese professor, including a semester at the University of Wales Swansea, followed by a semester at Universidade Estadual de Campinas in Brazil.

As an undergraduate, Desiree worked at the Office of International Programs and Studies (OIPS) where, she says, "every opportunity came

across my desk." She developed an extensive working knowledge of the possibilities for travel and study abroad. And, in 2004, she chartered the UNM Study Abroad Association.

The SAA works to raise awareness among students of the opportunities available for study abroad and advocates for study-abroad funding. It also seeks to raise the profile of international students studying at UNM, for whom Desiree had seen a void in services.

"Some people had no one to meet them. Some people had no place to go when they arrived," she says.

Desiree wanted to leave students who came to New Mexico to study with a positive impression. Members of the SAA began meeting incoming international students, assisting them to their new homes, and even inviting them into their own. Additionally, the group sponsors social events like movie nights and excursions to some of New Mexico's natural wonders, such as White Sands.

The SAA's efforts have paid off. According to Ken Carpenter, associate director of OIPS and faculty advisor to the SAA, the number of students on long-term exchange programs went from 97 to 120 in three years, and the number on short-term study programs increased from 327 to 482.

Even now, Desiree says her work with the SAA is not yet finished. She plans to establish a direct exchange between UNM and the University of the Witwatersrand.

album

Tracy Alexis, '03 BA, is the new development director of St. Martin's Hospitality Center of New Mexico in Albuquerque. St. Martin's mission is to assist homeless and near-homeless people by providing resources, opportunities, and hope.

Paul Bogard, '03 MA, earned his PhD in English from the University of Nevada, Reno, and is now visiting professor of English at Northland College in Ashland, Wisconsin, "... a long way from green chile."

Robert G. Cutchen, '03 MD, has joined First Choice Community Healthcare in Albuquerque.

Matthew Philip Traucht, '03 BA, of Sandia Park, New Mexico, has joined the Peace Corps and has been sent to The Gambia in West Africa.

Dimitri Pavlakos, '04 BBA, '07 MBA, a staff accountant at Pulakos & Alongi in Albuquerque, was part of a team that recently won second place in the annual 2007 Cadillac Case Study Competition.

Megan M. Backsen, '05 BS, has graduated from the US Coast Guard Recruit Training Center. Megan's home is in Albuquerque.

Sharon T. Shaheen, '05 JD, has joined the law firm of Montgomery & Andrews, as an associate. Sharon lives in Santa Fe.

M. Cathrene Connery, '06 PhD, is now at Ithaca College where she assists in the development of a graduate childhood education program emphasizing language, literacy, and socio-cultural Studies.

Jaime R. Kennedy, '06 JD, has joined the law firm of Montgomery & Andrews, as an associate. Jaime lives in Los Alamos.

Jessica Locker, '06 BBA, has joined Atkinson & Co., in Albuquerque, as a member of the tax department.

Alejandro Alvarado, '07 BARC, has joined Studio Southwest Architects, in Albuquerque, as a project designer.

Daniel Cancilla, '07 BARC, has joined Studio Southwest Architects, in Albuquerque, as a project designer.

Jenny Marlowe, '07 BUS, competed in the Miss America pageant as Miss New Mexico. The Albuquerque resident won the reality TV show contest, "Miss America: Reality Check."

John Miller, '07 MA, has accepted a position with Albuquerque Public Schools as a communications specialist.

Germanely German

After graduating from UNM, Desiree was accepted for the Congress Bundestag Youth Exchange for Young Professionals. Carpenter thinks the 12-month program in Germany marked a change in the focus of Desiree's education. As an undergraduate she had built a solid linguistic and analytic foundation. After her experience in Germany, she shifted



HELPING HAND: Part of the proceeds from the Rotaract AIDS 2007 hike in which Desiree Kosciulek, '05 BA, participated benefited HIV/AIDS orphans and vulnerable children living in Johannesburg's Itsotseng settlement.

more toward comparative politics and international studies.

Desiree completed a two-month intensive German course and a semester at Ruhr Uni Bochum. At the same time she lived with a family in Essen and went on to do two internships in Dusseldorf, first for InWEnt—an NGO (non-governmental organization) dedicated to human resource development worldwide—and later for the government of North Rhine Westphalia's Ministry for

Generations, Family, Women, and Integration. Her work included research on “post-conflict situations and the role of the African diaspora in various countries in Africa.”

HIV/AIDS Pandemic

Perhaps Desiree's experience in Germany and in Brazil—living among the descendents of the large West African slave population that once

(approximately 500 mi) hike from Johannesburg to Durban. The Rotaract AIDS Hike 2007 and the documentary borne of it were part of the Rotary Club's effort “to raise funds and awareness for HIV/AIDS Orphans and Vulnerable Children” in Africa.

The hike lasted 20 days and took Desiree and her friends through communities like Kwa-Zulu Natal and Gauteng that, Desiree says, “have the highest rates of HIV in South Africa.

“HIV/AIDS is a huge crisis, one which truly does affect everyone in every part of society. From school child to bank president, you are affected. Your teacher, your mother, your brother, your gardener might be infected.

“There is no assessment for the long-term impact this pandemic is having on South Africa and sub-Saharan Africa, but one thing is sure, even if a cure for AIDS was developed tomorrow, the economic, health, and social consequences of AIDS will be felt for generations to come.”

Finding the Positive

And yet, in the face of such a seemingly desperate situation, Desiree says the experience has been enlightening and, surprisingly, positive.

“I saw a lot of things people are doing for themselves,” she says. “For the most part what we see is that children are taken in by another family member or a neighbor once their parent or parents are too sick to care for them or die. You see that there are countless local NGOs—such as NOAH (Nurturing Orphans of AIDS for Humanity)—and CBO's (community based organizations), usually comprised of women from the local community, that are working not just to feed these children, but also to

make sure they attend school, provide after-school care and activities, and help them to be somebody. At some of the NOAH sites they are running their centers out of old, refurbished,

Immersing herself in other aspects of the culture, Desiree has also been listening to local musical acts. “One of the best concerts I have ever been to was for ‘Freshly Ground.’ It was so

“To see what some people are able to accomplish with so little is enough to give anybody hope.” —Desiree Kosciulek

shipping containers. To see what some people are able to accomplish with so little is enough to give anybody hope.”

Playing, Just a Bit

Despite the high status and rigor of the programs Desiree has participated in, it hasn't been all work and no play. In South Africa she enjoys going to *braai*.

“At *braai*,” she says, “you traditionally have *boerwoers*—South African sausages—and *pap*, which is a maize starch, a bit like grits. People love spending afternoons together ‘*braaing*’ meat, eating, and drinking with friends and family.”

Desiree was invited to her colleague Malebo's wedding — “celebrating the whole day with traditional dance and more food than anyone could eat in a lifetime!”

amazing to see such a diverse crowd of people enjoying music that mixes South African languages like Zulu and Xhosa with English. Apartheid did a lot of horrible things to people, but at this concert I really felt like the new generation is eager to embrace a new South African identity, unified in its ‘Rainbow Nation.’”

Make It Better

Desiree knows full acceptance of a multicultural identity in South Africa will be a long struggle, made more difficult by the pervasive spread of HIV/AIDS on the continent. Still, she is driven to make the world better. “There is a lot to be done, but each person can make a difference,” she says.

Here are some Internet sites Desiree suggested, linking to information about the AIDS Hike and to some organizations that are doing amazing things in desperate places. Perhaps *Mirage* readers will decide to “make a difference” also.

- www.noahorphans.org.za
- <http://www.1000hch.charishealth.co.za/home.html>
- www.rotaryaidshike2007.blogspot.com
- <http://rotaryaidshike2007.googlepages.com/>

album marriages

Correction: Tom Rutherford, '70 BBA, '82 JD, married Charlene Beth Smith

Elyssa Baca, '03 BS, and Jacob Bland

Kay Langley, '79 BBA, '99 BSPH, and Tim Gifford

Michael Rivera, '81 BBA, '90 MAPA, and Rosita Valdez

Tonna Rieger, '93 BED, '95 MA, '99 EDSF, and Marcos Burgos

Carlene Sanchez, '98 BA, and Anthony Boisselle

Margaret Maier, '99 BA, and Quinn Cornelius

Gabriel Garcia, '00 BA, and Shilla Weese

Jason Julian, '00 BBA, '07 MBA, and Miriya Goertz, '01 BA, '06 MA

Jennifer Breneiser, '01 BA, '04 MS, and Jesse Campbell

Brisa Urquieta, '02 BUS, and Richard Hernandez

Miranda Katz, '04 BFA, and Philiop Ziegler

Hugh Brock, '05 MD, and Hilary Brown, '05 MA

Jovonne Lopez, '05 BA, and Adrian Roybal, '07 BA

Benjamin Pedneau, '05 BA, and Jennifer Blythe Secret, '06 BA

Amy Aragon, '06 BA, and Reuben Trujillo, '05 BA

Emily Boudreau, '06 BFA, and Paul Ortega

Jaime R. Fontaine, '06 JD, and Patrick Kennedy

Heather Howard, '06 BBA, and James Loftis