



WorldTeach | April 2011

spotlight on ALUMNI



Life after WorldTeach: Alumni Stories

WorldTeach Namibia Alumnus Steven Clark (whose sister, Nancy Clark, also served with us as a volunteer and field director in Guyana!) shares with us below a little bit about his personal story and his fascinating career trajectory since his service.

“ I currently work as Assistant Secretary for Energy in the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy & Environmental Affairs under Massachusetts Governor Deval Patrick. I enjoy several aspects of this job, but one that stands out in particular is the opportunity to develop policies geared towards growing our pioneering clean energy economy both in Massachusetts and nationally. This is a unique opportunity in our nation's history to reduce our negative impacts on the environment while improving our energy, building, and transportation systems, and it's been very rewarding working with so many committed, hardworking, and bright people on this issue.



I grew up in an exceptionally diverse and cosmopolitan community in Cambridge, Massachusetts filled with a wide range of people ranging from South African Harvard grad students to long-time Cambridge residents who were Fourth generation Irish immigrants. Our parents' social network reflected this diversity, and many of the people in this network were heavily involved in international development issues abroad, especially in Africa. This became an area of intellectual interest for me as well, and I studied African Politics in both college and grad school. I became increasingly interested in living and working in the nations I had been studying, and WorldTeach's focus on teaching and programmatic flexibilities (especially regarding length of stay and ability to select host nation) caught my attention.

I worked on a variety of projects while I volunteered at the **Rossing Foundation** in Ondangwa, Namibia, but the focus of my time there was teaching a computer class to young adults, most of whom were young women. Very few high school graduates, especially in Northern Namibia, would ever have the opportunity to attend college, so the Rossing Foundation was a unique and exciting opportunity for them to develop skills that would allow them to enter the workforce. Graduation at the end of the year was one of my most memorable experiences – almost all of my students (or 'learners' as we called them) graduated and progressed on to successful career opportunities. One of them even went to work with WorldTeach a few months after I left for the states!

WorldTeach had a profound and lasting effect on my life and career. I fell in love with Namibia and its people (especially in the North!) and Namibia's natural beauty bolstered my passion to protect the environment. Volunteering as a teacher also reinforced my desire to empower and help others fulfill their potential while developing creative solutions for African nations to increase the economic prosperity of their citizens. What little my students might have learned from me was far outweighed by what I learned from their perseverance, curiosity, and passion to better themselves against many odds. **They continue to inspire me to be a better person, make the most of my opportunities, and change our world for the better.**”

- **Steven Clarke**

*WorldTeach Namibia Alumni
2009*

Alumni Stories

Kat Boisvert

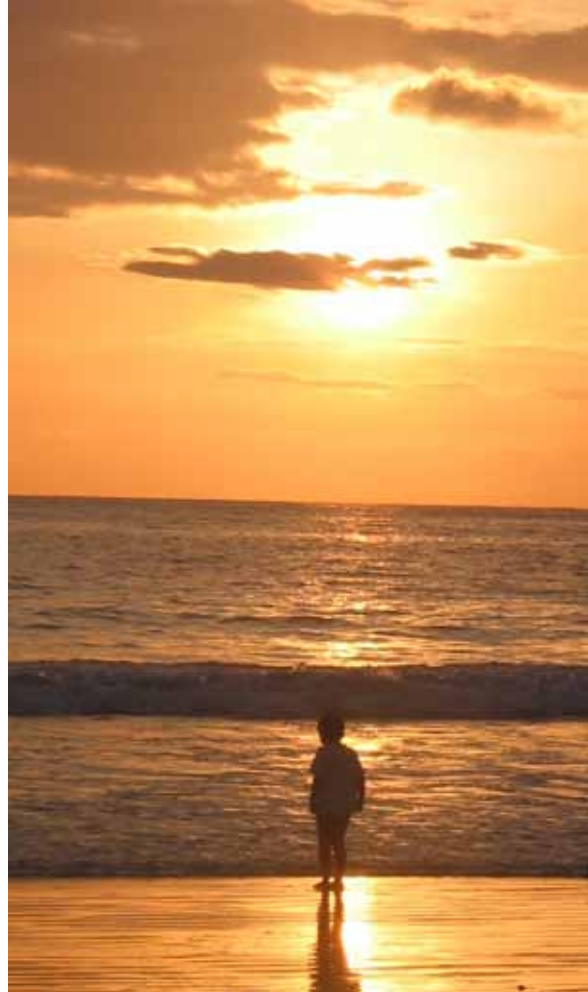
“I am a full-time Integrated Preschool Teacher in the Blackstone-Millville Public Schools at Millville Elementary and I have been employed by this district since September 2007. I absolutely love working with young children with and without disability conditions in the same classroom setting because it allows **all** of the children the opportunity to reach their full potential. It is such a pleasure to watch children grow and even surpass many of our expectations.

I also work at UMass Boston as an Adjunct Instructor in their Special Education Vision Studies Program, as well as in the Early Childhood Department. I enjoy being able to share all of the wonders of teaching with individuals who are new to the field of education.

My personal goals [at the start of my service] included trying to regain some of the energy I had back when I first began to teach. I remember the first time I entered a classroom setting and how I was so overwhelmed by the responsibility that teaching presented. I wanted every day to be the best day these children ever experienced. I wanted learning to be a wonderful journey, no matter what level of functioning my students had. I know I am a very motivated teacher... but I wanted to reignite the fire in my belly and hoped that by challenging myself with an experience like this, it would allow me to challenge my students even more when I returned home. It has!

“Why did you volunteer teach in South Africa...three years in a row?” This is the question I heard most often after I arrived home from South Africa. I would tell people how I was able to go on an amazing safari, climbed Table Mountain, kayaked over cool blue water with a stunning mountain view on the horizon, met baboons face-to-face, and visited Robben Island, but more importantly, that all of that is the hope that I made a difference in a child’s life!

It was my third time being involved in the South Africa WorldTeach Program. During the first few weeks, we worked with the Masiphumelele Library creating a program for high school students that explored career opportunities and the path that they must take in order to obtain these types of jobs. There were many professionals from the community that supported the program and came to speak to the learners.



Alumni Stories

Kat Boisvert



The learners heard from local artists, military personal, business men and women, as well as many educational institutions. We also went to a few educational campuses to help the learners understand more about the application process and the overall expectations of higher learning institutions. The system of education is different in South Africa as compared to America, so this was a learning opportunity for the volunteers as well!

In the second part of the program, we volunteered at many community schools. I was thrilled to be able to work at the **Learners with Special Educational Needs (LSEN) School** in Overview for the third year in a row. I was allowed to create a craft/sensory program for the learners, as well as work on the current curriculum with the educational teams to assist in developing some modifications, as well as offering recommendations. The students and staff were incredibly responsive to the suggestions, so it was a pure pleasure to work with them.

While working at the LSEN School, I was especially intrigued by a young boy with significant physical disabilities. I was told that he had not been able to really paint on his own because he was unable to hold a brush without assistance. I felt compelled to work with him with lots of different materials to build up a paint brush so that he would be able to move it across the paper with greater independence. We also worked with longer brushes to see if he would be able to maintain his grip with additional length on the brush...and he was so open and enthusiastic to all of the accommodations I offered!! I was just as excited to be working with him on this issue because it was like working on a puzzle that needed to be solved.

Although it took many attempts, we were able to finally come up with a solution that worked. **I am not sure who was more thrilled about his ability to paint independently: him or me.**

I think that my experience as a WorldTeach volunteer has really helped me balance my life and to take time to focus on my personal development and not just my career. I feel like my life has a new direction and that I am heading down the right path now, **as an active member of my local and global community!**”

- **Kat Boisvert**

*WorldTeach South Africa Alumna
2008*

Alumni Stories

Mike Tobias

“Currently, I’m back in school, going for a Masters in Public Health. After 20 years of building Access databases, my job is disappearing out from under me. Rather than learn web programming to keep my job, I decided to learn something more interesting. Going back to school in my early 60’s is invigorating and exciting.

I was miserable in school, but couldn’t leave without getting drafted into the Vietnam War. I thought my choices were going to jail or moving to Canada. Then I found out about World Teach, then known as **Volunteer Teachers for Africa**. It was like a ray of bright sunshine suddenly appearing on a very dark horizon.

I was teaching ninth grade science and math in Ethiopia, in English, to kids who had English as a subject through 7th grade, and then suddenly had all subjects except Amharic taught in English. Some of them were remarkably fluent; others could barely put a simple sentence together. One particular girl, whose English seemed to barely exist, did very well in math - she was able to understand the equations and mathematical symbols quite well, bypassing the English. That was quite impressive. We often tend to think of people who can’t speak well as stupid - not so! Then, she really impressed me on the final exam in Biology. I asked some kind of question about the usefulness of science. She wrote an essay, with very little punctuation, spelling, grammar, or vocabulary, about her hopes for her family and community that told me she was thinking hard and with originality about what I had thought were the abstract ideas we had been talking about.

Before I went, I was confused, aimless, and miserable. When I returned, I was confused, motivated, angry, and interested. Serving with WorldTeach gave me a better understanding and appreciation of the meaning of poverty, imperialism, and the outlook of people from other places and walks of life.

I met my (New Hampshire native) wife in Addis Ababa. I have the family I have thanks to my time in Ethiopia! **I definitely encouraged my kids to go someplace else to get a glimpse of a truly different point of view.**”

- **Mike Tobias**

WorldTeach Ethiopia

1970-1972



“ I currently teach 9th grade Civics at a small Chart School in Roxbury. I am half-time teacher half-time Dean of Citizenship. My Dean responsibilities include tracking down students who skip a class or detention and dealing with students who get sent out of class and other general discipline issues. My favorite aspect of what I do now is certainly the teaching. I love being in a class of 9th graders and getting them to enjoy education. Teaching them is always full of surprises and my job is lively and fulfilling.

My interest in teaching and volunteering overseas was twofold. I had always wanted to go to Africa, but I didn't want to go as a tourist; I wanted to live and work there. Also, teaching was something I was considering as a career choice in America, but decided it would be a good idea to try it out before really committing to (and by committing I mean going through a teacher-training program and possibly grad school which I had to do to teaching the United States). I knew about WorldTeach because my older sister had done it, and so I applied!

One of my most memorable experiences from my time as a volunteer is the day that my registered class had art with me last period the day before a holiday. They asked if they could sing for art class that day, and since singing is technically an art form, I said yes. They sang many songs, some in English, most in Rukwangali. The last song they sang included my name. One of the girls told me they were singing a song about me. The song was coming to an end when the dismissal bell rang and my students lined up on either side of the classroom door, making a path for me to walk out between the rows. **I walked between the rows of students and out the door to the sounds of their singing and when I got to the door and turned and waved to them, there was a huge cheer.**

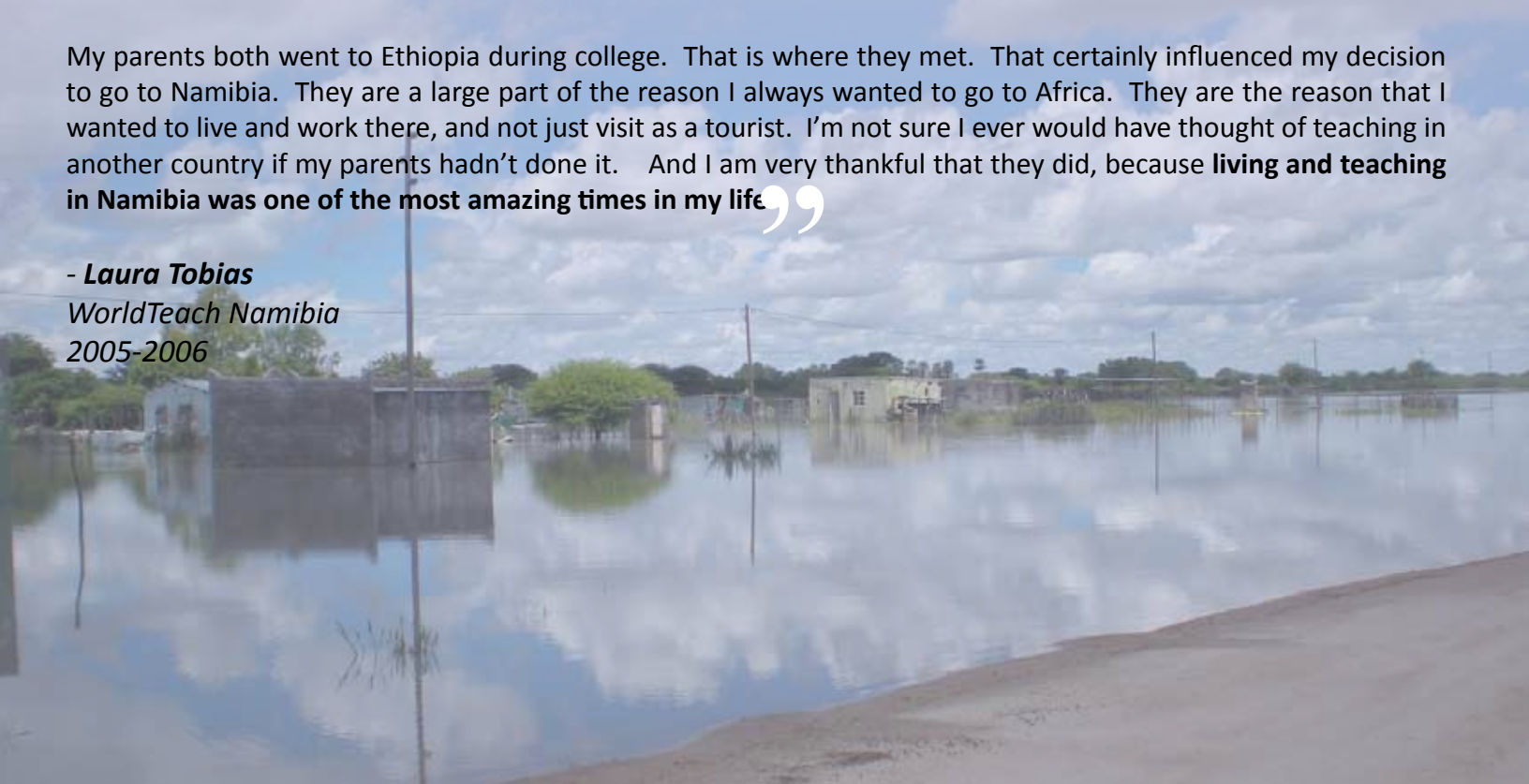
My experience as a volunteer It certainly opened my eyes to another way of life besides my own. **Growing up, I was taught that different groups of people lived differently, but experiencing it for myself was, like I said, eye opening.** I not only opened myself up to new ways of thinking and doing things, but it also tested the limits of my open-mindedness. I decided after that, that I **DEFINITELY** wanted to be a teacher back home, and that I wanted to go to school to learn how to be a teacher before teaching anymore. I learned just how much I didn't know about my life and my job and I set out to learn as much as I could. I try to bring some of my experience in Namibia into my current classroom, to try to open the eyes of my students the way mine were.


My parents both went to Ethiopia during college. That is where they met. That certainly influenced my decision to go to Namibia. They are a large part of the reason I always wanted to go to Africa. They are the reason that I wanted to live and work there, and not just visit as a tourist. I'm not sure I ever would have thought of teaching in another country if my parents hadn't done it. And I am very thankful that they did, because **living and teaching in Namibia was one of the most amazing times in my life**”

- **Laura Tobias**

WorldTeach Namibia

2005-2006





We would love to hear more about you! Please send us your stories and photos from your time in country and your continuing journey at alumni@worldteach.org

for inquiries regarding alumni affairs please contact:
alumni@worldteach.org

visit our alumni network at:
<http://worldteach.org/alumni/>



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