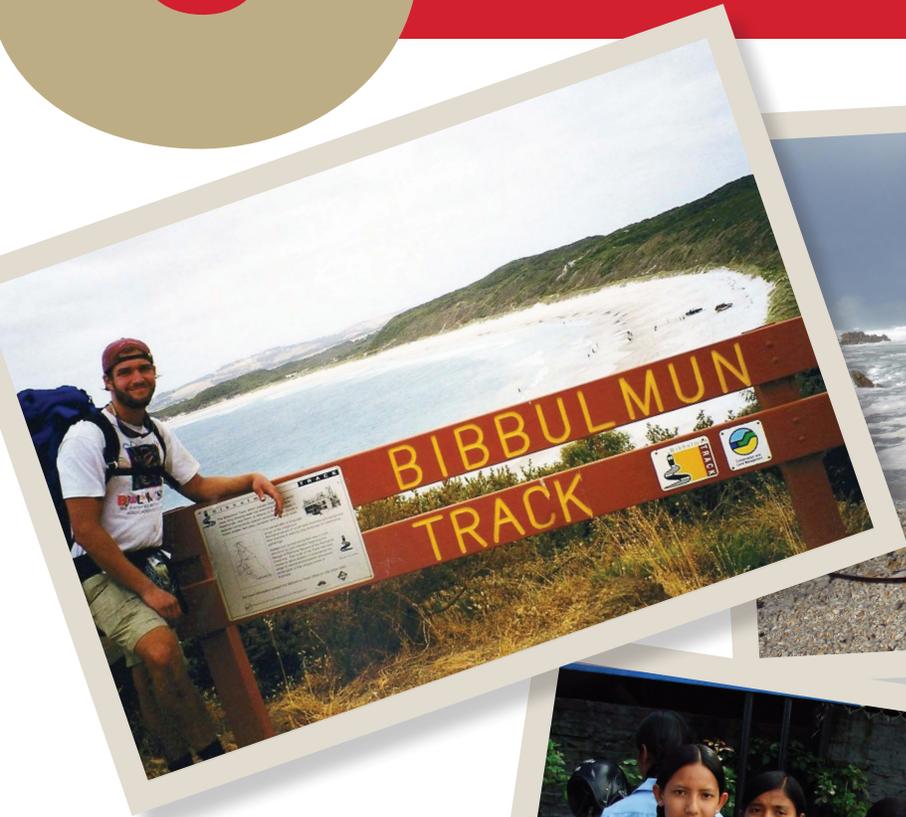




Travel. Teach. Repeat.

Shaker teachers have gone to the ends of the earth to bring life lessons to their classrooms

BY ELLEN SCHUR BROWN



Elizabeth Colquitt in South Africa.

Going to the ends of the earth: It was during a long post-college trip through Australia (above) that Brian Berger realized a career in teaching would allow him to combine his two passions: history and working with teenagers. He now encourages his students to travel and occasionally accompanies them.



Carola Drosdeck in Nepal.

“Travel is fatal to prejudice, bigotry and narrow-mindedness.”

~ Mark Twain

Understanding other cultures, celebrating differences, and welcoming new experiences: These values are a foundation of the Shaker Heights Schools and the Shaker Heights community. Travel teaches us about culture, language, religion, and history. It can also teach us about ourselves. Meet three Shaker teachers who have ventured out into the world and brought the world back to their classrooms.



**Brian Berger:
TRAVEL AS A LIFE COMPASS**

Growing up in Shaker Heights, Brian Berger (SHHS '94) experienced tremendous freedom and rich diversity in the community. That's what he expected the world was like, until he got to college.

"There wasn't a single African-American person in my dorm," he recalls, and some dorm-mates had never met a Jewish person before. He couldn't believe the world was so small.

Travel became the antidote to his frustration with college-town life and the start of his personal journey.

Berger spent a semester with National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) traveling in Arizona, New Mexico, and Texas. Then he spent his junior year abroad in Luxembourg. That brought another kind of culture shock as the transition to life in Europe was shaky.

Despite four years of high school French, he had trouble communicating with his host family. One day, he didn't know when to get off the bus and ended up riding to the end of the line – just as the bus driver stopped for his dinner break. Berger arrived home safely, but many hours late.

"I realized I had to take French a lot more seriously if I was going to last a year there," he says.

Moreover, although he studied European history in high school, learning it in Luxembourg – a country of less than 1000 square miles in the heart of Europe – was altogether different.



Berger, with fellow faculty member Andrea Bradd (second from right), and a group of Shaker students in Germany. (Photo courtesy of Brian Berger.)

His teachers had lived through World War II and one described the day the Nazis marched into town. When the class learned about the Holocaust, they would visit Dachau, a concentration camp outside Munich. When they learned art history, they might visit Musée d'Orsay in Paris.

"That's when I realized history isn't boring – it's people and their stories," he says. History came alive for him, but it would take a while before his love of travel and learning converged to form a career path.

Along with people he met during his year abroad, Berger spent a year traveling and living in Australia after graduation. For the next five years, Berger worked at restaurants and plant nurseries to save up enough money for his next trip. He spent summers leading

teen adventure programs throughout the West, and returned to Australia. One day, he realized where his journey was headed.

He loved working with teens and he loved learning the history of places he traveled. He decided to become a history teacher, and earned a master's degree in education from The Ohio State University. After teaching in North Carolina for a year, he returned to his alma mater as a faculty member.

Berger's travel photos are an important teaching tool in his ninth-grade world history class. There's a picture of a group of Shaker students in front of the Reichstag Building from a 2009 trip to Goslar, Germany. He shows the class photos of the Berlin Wall, the Brandenburg Gate, iconic castles and ornate churches, and a reproduction of

a Gutenberg printing press.

“They make all these connections,” he says. (And they always get a kick out of vintage photos of Berger without his signature long ponytail.) Berger uses his experiences to reinforce the curriculum, but also as a way to inspire students to leave their comfort zone and see the world for themselves.

“My goal is to try to inspire them to travel and be risk-takers,” he says. “A lot of kids have never been out of Ohio. They’ve never thought about leaving the country. Now they ask me, ‘How do I get to travel?’” To his delight, two of his students have taken trips with NOLS.

“If I’d never traveled,” says Berger, “I wouldn’t be a teacher today. That’s the beauty of it.”

Elizabeth Colquitt: **TRAVEL FOR UNDERSTANDING**

“How can you teach world literature if you haven’t seen the world?” asks Elizabeth Colquitt, an English teacher at Shaker Heights High School.

This Shaker Heights resident has seen the world through a stint in Yemen with the Peace Corps, a Fulbright trip to Morocco and Spain, and a summer helping researchers track the animals’ movements and habits on a game reserve in South Africa.

Last year, Colquitt took a sabbatical to travel from Cairo to Cape Town and study African literature at University of Cape Town.

She started in Egypt on an overland tour, traveling in a vehicle she



Exquisite and
complicated.

~ Elizabeth Colquitt

Tanzania (Photo courtesy of Elizabeth Colquitt.)

describes as a hybrid between a Greyhound bus and an armored tank.

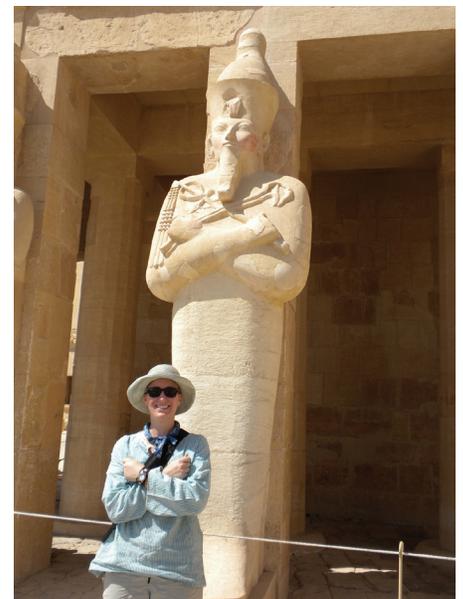
“It’s not for the faint of heart,” she says, “not if you care about a shower every day.”

On an overland tour, passengers ride in a specially outfitted expedition truck, with an itinerary that includes detours and stops at top tourist destinations, such as Victoria Falls. But they also get a ground-level view of the continent’s vast and varied terrain and diverse peoples.

Traveling through Egypt, Sudan, Ethiopia, Kenya, Tanzania, Malawi and South Africa has its challenges. Each country has its own currency, its own banking system and its own cell phone system, so at every stop, Colquitt and her fellow travelers had to scramble to find an ATM or money-changer and a SIM card for their phones.

Overland travelers camp and cook for themselves – there weren’t many restaurants on their rural route – so finding food could sometimes be a challenge.

The food in Egypt is wonderful, says Colquitt, but in Ethiopia, the variety was quite limited: rice and pasta, tomatoes, onions and spices. Sometimes the travelers could only find potatoes. There might not be a



Elizabeth Colquitt in Egypt
(Photo courtesy of Elizabeth Colquitt.)

butcher in the town. Cheese and yogurt are made at home, and not sold at markets.

The scenic trip was “exquisite and complicated, like all of Africa,” she says, and the perfect platform to enrich her teaching of world literature.

When she teaches *Cry, the Beloved Country* by Alan Paton or *Things Fall Apart* by Chinua Achebe, she can talk about colonialism and the impact of Western society and culture on traditional African life. When she teaches



Elizabeth Colquitt in Ethiopia
(Photo courtesy of Elizabeth Colquitt.)

Carola Drosdeck:
TRAVEL AND HUMANITARIANISM

Woodbury's Carola Drosdeck has spent two recent summers volunteering for Nepal Orphans Home.

Nicknamed "Papa's House," it creates a real family out of a collection of more than 140 rescued children in five houses. The youngsters have little in common beyond their need for love and a better life. Not all of them are orphans in the traditional sense: Some were sold as servants, some escaped abuse, and sometimes impoverished parents beg the home to take in their child.

Drosdeck learned about Nepal Orphans Home from founder Michael Hess, a relative by marriage. Hess was so moved by the deplorable living conditions of the abandoned or neglected children he met in 2004 that he sold all his possessions and moved to Kathmandu to care for them. He asked Drosdeck to join the organization's American board of directors to bring her educational expertise.

Her first trip, in the summer of 2010, was a way to see the operation she'd been advising from afar. What she saw gave her a real education.

Drosdeck recalls the day one girl was talking about her mother's death. The child was asking, in her broken English, if she could call Dros-

Persepolis, Marjane Satrapi's graphic novel about a rebellious teenager in Iran, she draws on her experiences in the Middle East to help high schoolers understand Islamic culture.

Shaker students ask a lot of questions about Islam, says Colquitt: What do the women wear? What does an Islamic culture look like? Do they really pray five times a day?

"I want to get across that it's not as different as they think," she says. She hopes to inspire a few of her students to study other cultures further and perhaps pursue a career in international relations.

The next phase of her sabbatical targeted some of the cultural and political questions she struggles with. Colquitt registered for classes in African literature and political history at University of Cape Town. She wanted to discover African authors and understand local politics so she could bring that perspective to her classes. She came home with a stack of books and hopes to teach an African literature class someday.

"Shaker tries very hard to graduate informed citizens and intelligent voters, and that's important for everybody," she says. "I have never been on an international trip where I have not brought some part of it back into my classroom. It works its way into my teaching somehow."



From Cairo to Cape Town



"Exquisite and complicated": High School English teacher Elizabeth Colquitt traveled by bus through Africa's vast and varied terrain, concluding with study of African literature and political history at University of Cape Town. Her travels – including prior experience in Morocco, Spain, and Yemen – enrich her teaching of world literature. (Photo courtesy of Elizabeth Colquitt.)

“Those kids are forever for me.”

~ Carola Drosdeck



The look is familiar: Girls at Nepal Orphans Home sport T-shirts collected by a Shaker Heights High School student as a community service project. In her two working trips there, Woodbury teacher Carola Drosdeck has become close to the children.

(Photo courtesy of Carola Drosdeck.)

deck ‘mom.’ Of course she said yes. It seemed overwhelming at the time, she recalls, but now she and this young woman (whose English has gotten much better) exchange letters.

When Drosdeck returned in 2012 she realized, “It’s not just a visit. Those kids are *forever* for me.”

The clincher for Drosdeck is watching how they all work together and how grateful they are for things many American kids take for granted: a bed, nutritious food, school and school clothes. When they talk about their futures, it’s about how they will help other people, not themselves.

Nepal is a tiny, land-locked country between China and India. The youngsters there want to know about Drosdeck’s school, her home and her American family.

Of course, her Woodbury students ask about her travels, too. They are shocked that school in Nepal is six days a week. But mostly, they’re interested in connecting through pop culture.

In fact, Drosdeck’s Nepali group *does* know about Justin Bieber and Valentine’s Day – mainly through the other volunteers at Nepal Orphans Home. “We have to ask, which parts of our world do we want to export?” she says, expressing her deep respect for Nepalese culture.

This school year started with a slide show from her two trips to Nepal. Around the room are photos from Nepal and a previous trip to Japan. She wants the fifth-graders to understand and appreciate how fortunate they are, and she thinks they get it.

Drosdeck’s travels help her reinforce important values for the fifth graders. When Woodbury’s student council held a drive for UNICEF, she found a video featuring the organization’s efforts in Nepal, forming a tangible connection to the fundraiser.

“One person can make a difference. Saving the world is something *you* can do,” Drosdeck tells her class. She doesn’t just talk about global thinking and volunteerism, she lives it.

For her 2010 trip, Drosdeck paid her own travel expenses and volunteer fees, which support the home. In 2012, she received a grant from the Shaker Schools Foundation, sponsored by the Classes of 1950/1951.

There are many opportunities to help through Volunteer Nepal. Visitors can work at the orphanage, or on farms, in rural communities or medical centers. Sometimes potential volunteers, high school students or graduates ask Drosdeck about the trip. She’s frank about the realities of visiting Nepal. The trip is difficult, the traffic is noisy, hot showers are rare, she says, and you have to be able to roll with the punches. The greatest risk is, like her, you’ll want to return again and again. 🌱