

Volunteer Abroad / Intern Abroad / Under 18 Volunteering / Service Learning / Group Volunteering / Study Abroad

HORIZON

WHAT'S YOUR
PLAN?

20 YEARS
CREATING
IMPACT

WHAT'S BEYOND
THE HORIZON?

IT TAKES A VILLAGE

**TO SAVE
THE PLANET**

JOURNEY OF A

NOVICE MONK
IN LUANG PRABANG

INDEX

04 What's Happening Globally?	
34 How I Became Who I Am Today	
43 Knowledge Empowers	
Start with Plan 'A'.....	6
Changing Course.....	14
It Takes a Village to Save the Planet.....	26
Finding my Natural Habitat.....	50
What's on the Other Side of your Limits?.....	60
Bridging Culture with Curiosity	72



06
START WITH PLAN A
 INTERVIEW WITH FOUNDER;
 RICHARD WALTON



26
IT TAKES A VILLAGE TO SAVE THE PLANET
 BY GVI CEO



14
CHANGING COURSE
 I WAS LOOKING FOR
 AN ADVENTURE

OVER
5% OF ALL THE WORLD'S SPECIES CAN BE FOUND IN COSTA RICA



WILDLIFE EXPEDITION

On Costa Rica's Caribbean coast you will join a team of international volunteers as an expedition member. Our expedition base camp is located in the Tortuguero National Park of Costa Rica.

LEARN MORE

www.gviusa.com



...AND THEN...



Everything starts with a decision. To try something new. To have

an adventure. To do things differently. And then the real work begins. Lives and careers change as a result. The choice to partner with GVI has been that decisive, life-changing moment for so many people over the course of the past 20 years, as indeed, it was for me (Read my story on page 26). In the next few pages, we've made an effort to honour not only this choice, but what these change-makers have gone on to achieve.

STEVE GWENIN
GVI CEO

WHAT'S HAPPENING GLOBALLY?

JUN GHANA PROGRAM LAUNCH

Increase access to education and work to improve gender equality while completing an international development internship in Ghana, Cape Coast.

JUN PERU PROGRAM LAUNCH

Teach, work on women's empowerment initiatives, or choose to complete a three-month community development internship in Peru.

SEP CAMBODIA PROGRAM LAUNCH

Teach Buddhist novice monks, help out with gender equality and public health projects launching this year in Kampong Cham.

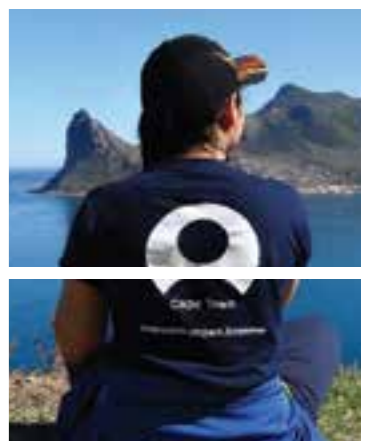


DO THE GROUNDWORK FOR YOUR FUTURE

BUSINESS INTERNSHIPS WITH GVI IN CAPE TOWN



Prove your worth to future employers. Help entrepreneurs in a developing economy solve real-world business challenges.



“LIKE A LOT OF YOUNG PEOPLE, I DIDN'T KNOW WHAT MY PLAN A WAS,
AND I THINK THE ONLY WAY TO FIND OUT IS TO DO SOMETHING DIFFERENT
THAT'S OUT OF YOUR COMFORT ZONE.”

START with PLAN 'A'

INTERVIEW WITH FOUNDER

RICHARD WALTON



**RICHARD WALTON,
FOUNDER OF GVI
SHARES THE STORY
OF THE FIRST GVI
EXPEDITION AND WE
FIND OUT A LITTLE
MORE ABOUT THE BOY
WHO WOULD SPARK A
GLOBAL VISION.**

**WHAT DID YOU WANT
TO BE WHEN YOU GREW UP?**

Some type of explorer. I have always been interested in going out and seeing the world. Probably more of an ocean explorer. My big passion has always been the ocean and the marine environment. I love anything to do with the ocean and exploring the ocean. And actually that was GVI's first program. It was a marine-based expedition on the island of Roatán in Honduras.

**WHAT WERE SOME OF
YOUR PASSIONS GROWING UP?**

It's funny you ask that because, I just spent the weekend camping with my son and was doing a lot of the things I loved doing when I was younger like bushcraft, survival, building camps in the woods and rainwater collection. I had this handbook called the SAS survival handbook, and I must have read that book a hundred times, and I absolutely loved it. Any time I could get I would be outside with my mess tins cooking up some soup, just anything that could get me outside. I was born in England, so even if it was raining that was a chance to make a shelter.

**WHO HAD THE BIGGEST INFLUENCE
ON YOU DURING YOUR CHILDHOOD?**

I would say my mother. She was born in Zimbabwe and my earliest memories are of us going on holiday to Zimbabwe, Botswana, Tanzania and Kenya. She had a huge passion for Africa, for people, for wildlife and really from escaping the normal kind of international holiday. I can't ever remember going on a holiday to Europe. We were always going away to live with rural communities in Kenya or Zimbabwe, travelling around seeing wildlife. I didn't really ever know of any holiday that was different from that and that obviously had a huge impact on me for the rest of my life.

**TELL US ABOUT YOUR FIRST
VOLUNTEERING EXPERIENCE?**

I volunteered with an organisation in Patagonia, for three months, which was, and still is, one of the most amazing experiences of my life. I had just turned 18 and went with about another 120 young people on a youth development expedition. We split up into small groups and basically explored Patagonia. For an 18-year-old who was passionate about bushcraft and survival it was heaven. I really really loved it.

18 YEAR-OLD
WHO WAS
PASSIONATE
ABOUT
BUSHCRAFT
& SURVIVAL

“The projects that we were doing didn't really seem to have any community benefit.”

But, even though I had an amazing experience and I would recommend it to anyone, what affected me was that the projects that we were doing didn't really seem to have any community benefit. There seemed to be no purpose of them. There seemed to be absolutely no benefit to anyone apart from keeping us active. For example, we built a bandstand in a remote village and I remember thinking as I was chopping up logs for this bandstand, 'Why are we building a bandstand?', and 'Why is no one in the local community coming to see this bandstand?', 'Why are they not involved?', 'Is this really necessary?'

I just thought you could do both. You could develop young people, show them an amazing time, grow their leadership skills, and get all the other amazing things I got, but you could also have a real impact. For me, that was really, why I thought getting the local community involved with these international organisations is so important.

Richard and his son on the beach, exploring.



WHAT WERE YOUR TEENAGE YEARS LIKE?

Frustrating, too much time stuck in school. Being stuck in school is the opposite of being able to travel and explore the world. I mean I enjoyed school, but I was desperate to leave and actually, as soon as I left school, my first expedition by myself was to go off to a remote part of Malawi where I bought a beach from a local chief. So at the age of 18 I was living on a remote beach in Malawi with a friend of mine which you could only get to by boat every month, trying to work out what the heck I was doing there. I spent a lot of time with the community there and became very passionate about working with them. My dream of creating a backpackers didn't go very well, so I kind of flipped it on its head, and decided to help the community that I had become a part of.

AT WHAT POINT DID YOU DECIDE TO MAKE THE IDEA OF GVI HAPPEN?

When my backpackers in Malawi was failing. No, that's not true. It's more that the longer I stayed in Malawi, the longer I spent with the local community, the more I decided this was what I wanted to spend my life doing, helping local communities.

Getting rather fed up with the normal tourist trail, backpackers just coming in and leaving, not actually being part of the local community, not really seeing what it was really like to be there, not really helping the community that they were a part of, I called a friend of mine, Ben Greig, who worked on an island called Roatán in Honduras, which was just after hurricane Mitch in 1996. I was living in Malawi and I said to Ben, 'Look I just built this backpackers (I say built, it was four lean-to bamboo huts) and I'm getting very fed up with these backpackers who just want to sit here and drink beer and lie out in the sun. How about bringing in volunteers, there are tons of projects here we can do out in the community, they're very keen on the idea as well.' He thought it was a fantastic idea, and so we set out to plan the first GVI expedition in lake Malawi.

But after doing quite a lot of risk assessments we actually decided that a volunteering expedition to my island in lake Malawi would be a very bad idea because the boats only come once a month which meant that if there was an emergency we'd be in big trouble. There were also other issues like malaria and limited access to fresh water, so we decided that it was too harsh a climate to be involved with for our first expedition. Instead we decided to talk to the people Ben was running the research project for in Roatán and moved our first expedition to that island. That was twenty years ago.

WHAT I'M MOST PROUD OF IS THAT OUR VISION FOR GVI, WHICH WE SET OUT TO ACHIEVE IN THAT FIRST EXPEDITION, IS STILL THE SAME TODAY.

**CAN YOU TELL US MORE ABOUT THIS FIRST GVI EXPEDITION?**

It was a great success. The group is still together and I'm still connected to them on Facebook. We still have get togethers and I think there've been two weddings from the 20 people who were on it. We also learnt a huge amount running it. What I'm most proud of is that our vision for GVI that we set out to achieve in that expedition is still the same today. It's all about creating lasting impact on the ground. It's all about getting the local communities involved. It's all about making sure that the people who join the program have a worthwhile immersive experience, that they can develop themselves, and they can have an impact at the same time.

EVEN THOUGH WE'RE 170 PEOPLE IN 13 DIFFERENT COUNTRIES, THERE IS A HUGE BOND THAT KEEPS US TOGETHER.

They can have fun, they can have cultural immersion, and all of those things, in a really responsible way. It was also a very emotional time for me, both because I met my wife (she wasn't an expedition member, but I met her on the island), and unfortunately we lost my partner Ben, shortly after the expedition ended, due to a freediving accident. So I have many conflicting feelings attached to that first program, but I am proud that the vision we set out to achieve is still very much alive today.

AND WHAT WAS YOUR WIFE DOING ON ROATÁN?

She was volunteering as a teacher in Honduras. She's very adventurous as well. At the age of 22 she jumped onto a cargo ship in Miami and hopped off at Honduras. I'm sure her parents weren't too happy about it. She went to teach on the island, and while she was there she worked as a divemaster at the local dive shop. As I said it was marine expedition and we use to fill up our tanks at the dive shop. You know, there is a wonderful quote by Steve Job that goes something like 'Don't start your life with Plan B'.

Before my wife was working in Honduras, she worked for a tech startup in Boston called SpeechWorks, a voice recognition software company. She gave it up and gave up the stock options, because she felt that that was her 'Plan B'. I've always believe in that, when you're young, follow Plan A, follow your dreams, follow your passion, do stuff that scares you, because that's the only time you can do it. Otherwise life gets in the way — Family, children, mortgages, all those types of things, like credit card debit. So you've got to explore when you're young.

WHAT WOULD YOU TELL YOUNG PEOPLE ABOUT MAKING THEIR PLAN 'A' A REALITY?

Like a lot of young people, I didn't know what my plan A was, and I think the only way to find out is to do something different that's out of your comfort zone. That was certainly true for me. I think that's why travel, volunteering, exploration, cultural immersion, doing a course in something that you're not familiar with, anything that pushes your boundaries is really really healthy. The older we get, the more we like comfort and get stuck into doing things that we like to do.

So to find your Plan A, to find your passion, you need to do something different, challenge yourself, get out there, mix with different people. Again that's the other great thing about travel, that's what's so fantastic about volunteering, it's a chance to meet people from different backgrounds from all over the world. I know on GVI projects, for example, the last project I visited in Costa Rica, I was talking to sixteen volunteers from fourteen different countries. So of course you're going to have the local cultural immersion on the project and in the community, but you also get the cultural experience of meeting people from all over the world, and that's an extremely rewarding and incredibly beneficial experience in my opinion.

WHAT DO YOU THINK HAS ALWAYS MADE GVI SPECIAL?

I think it's the same thing from that first expedition in Honduras. It's the people who run it. I'm talking about every single person who is on the ground running the projects, it is the person on the end of the phone helping you with your experience, because we are an incredibly passionate bunch of people and that has never changed. We're a much bigger organisation now, and the question I get asked all the time is 'How do you keep the passion alive?' or 'How do you keep the culture alive?' I actually think it's gotten stronger. Even though we're a hundred and seventy people spread out through 13 different countries, there is a huge bond that keeps us together.

And that bond, that passion, translates into amazing experience for volunteers, because if you don't have someone who is passionate about the program who's speaking to you, you're not going to have a good experience. It absolutely has a massive impact for the communities we work with and for the projects that we do. That passion is what drives people, and at the end of the day, it's what GVI is all about. It's one of core values, but for me it's the most important one.

ISLAND & COASTAL CONSERVATION

Travel to Curieuse Island and join one of the leading marine and terrestrial data collection organizations in the Seychelles. Take part in critical research and conservation research within a national park and help support the creation of conservation policies.

LEARN MORE

www.gviusa.com

20" wide

THE COCO DE MER SEED IS THE LARGEST IN THE PLANT KINGDOM AND CAN BE FOUND ONLY ON CURIEUSE AND PRASLIN ISLAND

The first GVI program was a marine expedition of 21 volunteers to Roatán in Honduras, Central America. Andrea Mackay was one of these first volunteers.

CHANGING COURSE



I WAS LOOKING FOR AN adventure

I HAVE ALWAYS LOVED THE SEA. THERE IS SOMETHING SO SOOTHING AND AT THE SAME TIME EXHILARATING ABOUT SWIMMING IN THE WARM, CLEAR WATERS, FINDING OUT MORE ABOUT THE SECRET LIFE THAT FLOURISHES UNDERNEATH.

When Andrea Mackay flipped open a diving magazine in early 1998 she had no idea that what she found inside would change her life or indeed, the lives of many others. Andrea was one of 21 volunteers to join the first ever GVI program. 20 years later, she considers many of the volunteers lifelong friends but reflects back to the time when they were just 21 strangers suspended in a tiny propeller plane over a stormy sea, while rain and lightning crashed down around them. Andrea took the time to share the story that changed the course of her life.



I have always loved the sea. There is something so soothing and at the same time exhilarating about swimming in the warm, clear waters, finding out more about the secret life that flourishes underneath. I grew up in Hong Kong, which meant I spent many holidays in nearby Thailand — the perfect place to enjoy the ocean. My mom is a nurse and my dad is a haematologist, so I grew up immersed in medicine, but when I was 18 I thought I'd try something different rather than just following my mom into nursing. My brother had

I WAS LOOKING FOR ADVENTURE BUT ALSO SOMETHING MORE THAN JUST BEING A TOURIST IN A NEW COUNTRY.

From there I moved back to the UK and worked in the London's West End from dresser all the way up to wardrobe mistress. It was a fantastic job and exciting because everything had to be done 'Live.' It also allowed me time



studied Hotel Management at a college in Switzerland and I followed in his footsteps because I wasn't sure what else to do. After graduating I started working at hotels and realized one day that I just didn't enjoy working in the hospitality industry. I had a real passion for Drama and English literature because I studied these subjects at school so I looked at getting a job as a dresser. I was lucky enough to get a job on a Canadian touring production of Phantom of the Opera in Hong Kong.



to travel. I would work on a show in the West End or on tour around the UK for maybe three to four months and when the show finished I could choose to find a new show or take some time travelling before coming back to another show. The flexibility was great. My time with GVI was during one of those breaks between shows. I was looking for adventure but also something more

1/1 000
TURTLE HATCHLINGS SURVIVE PAST THEIR FIRST YEAR

MARINE CONSERVATION

Earn your PADI diving certificate when you discover Mexico's Mesoamerican coral reef and its abundant wildlife.

[LEARN MORE](#)

www.gviusa.com

than just being a tourist in a new country. I wanted a more in-depth feel of a new place, and I wanted a challenge. I thought I would try to give something back through volunteering. In search for my next adventure I got hold of 'Diver' magazine. It still feels like fate that I ever saw the GVI advert. It had no pictures, just text calling for volunteers on a coral reef expedition in the Bay Islands off the coast of Honduras. I called the number that afternoon and told them I was interested. The advert had mentioned that this was an 'Advance Expedition' but I didn't completely know what that meant until I spoke on the phone to Ben Greig, who would be a marine biologist and dive instructor on the trip. He said that we would be the first group of participants to volunteer on a project with GVI. I



loved the idea of being the first group out there. It was an exciting thought that we would be laying the foundations for subsequent groups. I will always remember the night that we arrived on Roatán. We reached San Pedro Sula on the mainland of Honduras and then transferred onto a small propeller plane to fly over to the island. By this time it had started raining heavily and as we flew across to Roatán we were surrounded by a lightning storm.

Although it was a rather scary trip, we arrived safely on Roatán. Ben met us all at the airport and they drove us to our lodgings in the pouring rain. When we arrived the house was filled with candles due to a power outage. We were all very excited to have arrived and most of us congregated out on the balcony with a beer. It was pitch black so we had no idea what the view from the balcony was like. And then the lightning struck again and the sky lit up as though it were day time. We saw the sea, right in front of the house. It was a breathtaking, an uninterrupted view. Mandy, one of the volunteers who actually ended up staying on Roatan told me she has never seen

I LOVED THE IDEA OF BEING THE FIRST GROUP OUT THERE. WE WOULD BE LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS.

IT HAD STARTED RAINING HEAVILY AND AS WE FLEW ACROSS TO THE ISLAND WE WERE SURROUNDED BY LIGHTNING.

another lightning storm like the one that night. I don't remember what time I woke up the next day, but I do remember waking up and being able to hear the sea while I was lying in bed. I was so excited about that. We started the day with tea and toast and then a fish and coral identification lesson by Ben Greig, whose passion for the work he was doing and his love for the sea was immediately obvious and completely infectious. You couldn't help but be drawn in by his enthusiasm for marine world. When it came to diving expertise not all of us were on par, but we had to get up to speed fast to get to work on surveying the reef.

I was one of the volunteers who still needed some training and practice so I would go with the others in the late morning to the lagoon just outside our house to take lessons from Ben. After being there a couple of months it was almost possible for me to tell if the sea was too rough to going dive before I had even got out of bed just by the sound of the waves crashing. I was even able to complete my PADI Advanced Open Water while in Roatán. Back at the house, you'd often find volunteers on the balcony overlooking the lagoon trading little snapshots of fish and coral, quizzing each other on whether we could get the names right. The view from the base was approximately north-west and afforded us some spectacular sunsets. We'd put on some reggae and take it in turns to make dinner while the others played pool. Sometimes we'd also

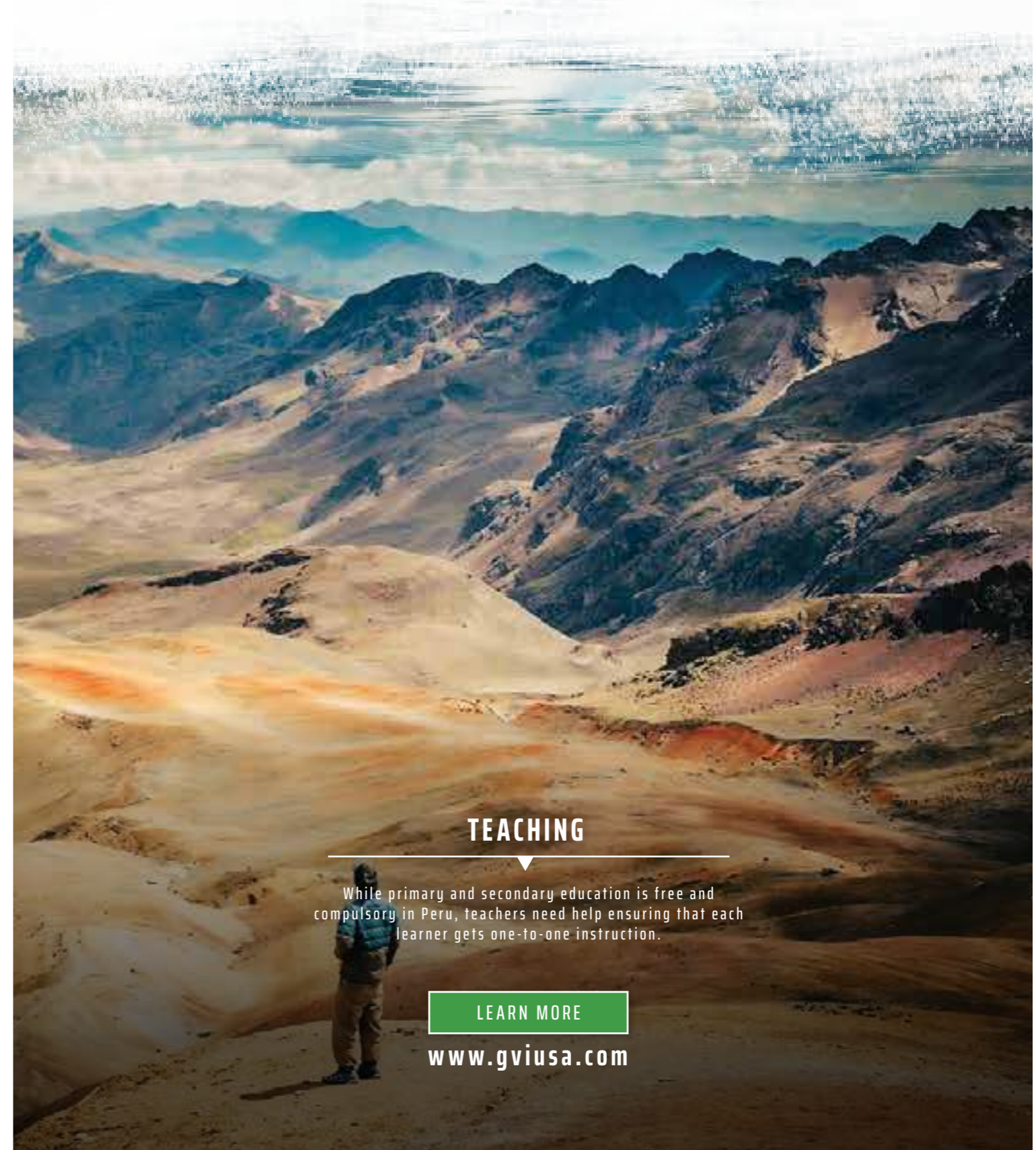
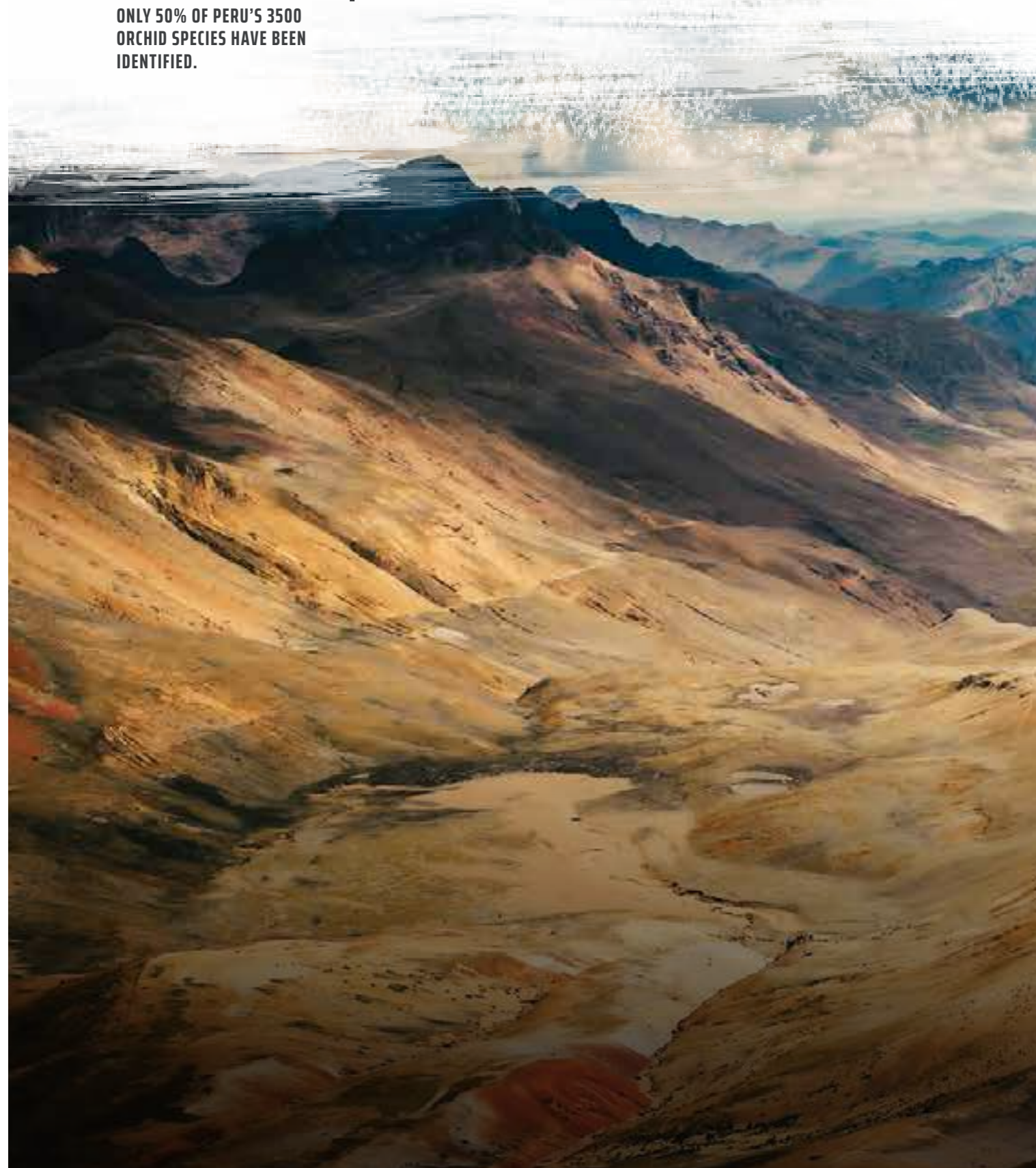


head out to the restaurants and bars at the port. Once we could tell a series of fish and coral species apart and Ben felt confident that everyone could dive safely, we started our work monitoring a section of the reef, which had already been prepared before we arrived. Marker pegs had been hammered into the reef and each day we would go to the dive site with a measured length of chain that was made up of one-centimeter links, which we would hook very carefully over the marker pegs.

To get close to the reef without damaging it, we would dive upside down, kicking our legs above us, instead of near the delicate corals. Diving inverted like this was challenging enough without also needing to also make notes on underwater slates. We looked at a patch of coral just underneath the chain and took note of the types of corals found there and its state of health. Once we returned from our dive we would record the data we had collected on our little underwater slates. The idea was that we were taking a snapshot of the health of the reef. Researchers in the future could then compare their data with ours to see whether the reef was recovering or deteriorating.

PERU | SOUTH AMERICA

ONLY 50% OF PERU'S 3500 ORCHID SPECIES HAVE BEEN IDENTIFIED.



TEACHING

While primary and secondary education is free and compulsory in Peru, teachers need help ensuring that each learner gets one-to-one instruction.

[LEARN MORE](#)

www.gviusa.com

But diving wasn't always about research. Sometimes we would head out just for the fun of it. Life on the reef was abundant and it was not uncommon to spot a tranquil sea turtle floating by; encounter a group of boisterous dolphins; spot an octopus making its way across the reef; be surprised by an eel poking its head out from under a crevice; or glimpse the winged shape of a massive blue-spotted eagle ray in the distance. Night dives, slipping into the pitch black water, under a sky bursting with tightly packed silver stars, were my favorite. Any slight movement of the water would instigate a flurry of glowing, bright blue specks and swirls that would fade as the water stilled. Once you got under the water, you would be surrounded by this luminosity of the phosphorescent plankton. It was absolutely magical.

We were also treated to a spontaneous beach wedding during our trip. Inspired by the romantic beauty of the island two volunteers, who had come on the expedition as a couple, made the decision to get married right then and there. The wedding was a real demonstration of island community. Our neighbors up the beach offered their lush, beautiful garden as a venue and our other neighbors arranged the catering and a cake. GVI hired a band to play at the back of our house after the ceremony and I made Sue, the bride, a wedding veil from a spare mosquito net. While it certainly wasn't the most extravagant affair, the



sense of community, the simplicity of it all, and of course the beautiful setting, made for an unforgettable event. I not only made lifelong friends during those three months but I met my husband, Doug, who was another volunteer on the trip. Doug and I became good friends on the expedition.

Although all of the volunteers and staff often socialized together there were certainly smaller groups of tighter friendships and Doug and me were friends within one of the closer groups. Members of that group eventually became witnesses at our wedding. One even read at our first child's naming day and is Godfather to our son. On the final day of the expedition, most of the volunteers sailed over to the mainland. They would stay there for the night before flying out the next day. A handful of us stayed on Roatán for one last day. The plan was to fly over to the mainland in the late afternoon to meet up with them before going back home. That afternoon Ben and Wendy, his girlfriend at the time, went out in the sunshine to freedive in the lagoon.

Shortly afterward, Ben suffered a shallow water blackout, an underwater fainting episode triggered by not enough oxygen to the brain, and died. It was devastating. Although we had only known Ben for three months we had all adored him. He was funny, supportive, and full of life. For a moment, nothing made sense. We had planned to meet up after leaving Roatán, but not like this.

We met again under the worst circumstances at Ben's funeral. Although it was tough, we all supported one another and it brought us all closer together. In the end, the members of that pioneer expedition to Roatán became something greater than the sum of its individual characters. We became something like a family spread out across the globe.

After returning to the UK I went back to working in the theatre for a while until Richard approached me about working as volunteer coordinator and office manager for GVI. My hotel management course had given me many transferable skills like customer service, languages, and accounting that were useful to my role at GVI. I worked for Richard for about a year before Doug and I moved away and I, unfortunately, had to give up the job. After fighting it for so many years I got a job as a health care assistant at a hospital and returned to university to get my nursing degree. I decided to go into Emergency Services like my mom because it seemed like the most natural place for me to be. I have been working as a nurse ever since. I genuinely feel that nursing is my calling. Like working in the theatre, everything has to be done 'Live'. But now, I feel fortunate enough to be able to help people where I can, much like what my goal was when first deciding to join a volunteer program abroad.

The trip impacted my life in so many ways. On the simplest level, the addition of voluntary work to my résumé was not only evidence of philanthropic work but also provided a great talking point with future employers. On a deeper level, the trip influenced my perception of my place in the world and my impact on it. I became more conscious of protecting my immediate and wider environment and have brought my children up to respect nature and everything in it. Any volunteering trip is a great opportunity to not only enhance your knowledge and life skills but to give something back and help to change the world for the better in some small way. Employers love evidence of voluntary work – it demonstrates maturity and interest in a higher purpose. And although the idea of joining a group of people you don't know may seem daunting, remember that all the people on your trip will be there for the

same reasons as you. They will be like-minded and its likely that you will have many things in common. Pioneer volunteers are particularly lucky as they get to forge the way. Those looking to prove to employers that they have the guts, critical thinking, problem-solving and management skills to make any project a success should seek out projects like this. You'll play

IN THE END, THE MEMBERS OF THAT PIONEER EXPIDITION BECAME SOMETHING GREATER THAN THE SUM OF ITS INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERS.

a key part in ironing out the chinks that have been impossible to foresee before the arrival of volunteers. While it's probably more of a testing experience than most it will make the end result that much more rewarding, just as it was for me.

Having spoken to many of the other volunteers on the trip over the past 20 years, there is certainly a sense that we were so very fortunate to have been part of that particular expedition. There was a certain magic created by that particular group of strangers coming together at that particular time in that particular place. Those twelve short weeks felt like a lifetime and remain one of the greatest experiences of my life.

Get Exclusive Student Discounts on
FLIGHTS, HOTELS & TOURS

www.studentuniverse.com

 StudentUniverse

32% OF REEFS MIGHT
BE LOST WITHIN THE
NEXT 3 DECADES.

CORAL REEF RESEARCH & CONSERVATION IN THAILAND

Join us in Thailand to conduct coral reef research in the warm waters of the Indian Ocean, as well as contributing to other locally based conservation projects.

[LEARN MORE](#)

www.gviusa.com



IT TAKES A
VILLAGE TO
**SAVE THE
PLANET**

BY STEVE GWENNIN

GVI CEO

IT TAKES A VILLAGE TO SAVE THE PLANET

BY STEVE GWENIN

GVI CEO

[I wanted a career that allowed me to enjoy the ocean.]

Getting away from the icy waters of the Arctic and into the warm waters of the tropics, was all Steve Gwenin, a young marine biologist, wanted. One online search opened the door to unique destinations he could never have imagined. What he found along the way was not only love and friendship, but a shared sense of purpose that connects humanity as a whole.

I grew up in a small house next to the woods. My dad loved spending time in nature so we would often go to the woods to spot foxes and have pretend sword fighting adventures. My dad's other passion was flying which he inherited from his own father who was a pilot in the Royal Air Force.



The summer after graduation, I was on course to follow in my grandfather's footsteps, when I went on a backpacking trip to the beach. There I got into surfing and realized that a career as a fighter pilot was just not for me. While I thought flying was daring and exciting, it didn't want to hurt people or go to war. I wanted to preserve and protect life. I wanted a career that allowed me to enjoy the ocean and where shoes were always optional. That is when I made the decision to study marine biology.

After graduation, I struggled, as so many young people did back then and still do, to get a job in marine conservation. But I was determined, because the ocean was my passion and that was where I wanted to spend the rest of my life. I decided to build up my experience by becoming certified as a commercial diver and work on a whole range of volunteer



IT BECAME RAPIDLY CLEAR TO ME THAT MARINE RESEARCH ALONE WAS NOT GOING TO MAKE THE KEY DIFFERENCE – WE HAD TO FOCUS ON PEOPLE.

projects, first in Britain, but eventually also internationally in Latin America, Africa, and Australia. I even set up my own small organization which advised NGOs and commercial enterprises on issues related to marine conservation.

During those years I worked with smaller NGOs, many of which were run by eccentric visionaries who were determined to make a difference. They usually weren't particularly wealthy or had qualifications in the field, but they knew they wanted to make the world a better place. Sometimes you have to be a little stubbornly unconventional to do good in the world, because no one else is going to take up the challenge.

I FIRST FOUND GVI VIA AN ONLINE SEARCH, LIKE SO MANY PEOPLE DO.

I also worked with big commercial organizations to review their policies and monitor their effect on the environment. It was on one such project, in the middle of the Arctic waters up in the North sea, when I first found GVI via an online search, like so many people do.

When I studied marine biology I had dreams of working in tropical waters, and while I had done some of that, my work had mostly involved working in Arctic waters for a couple of years. I had a little time between watches to do some research about how I could get more involved in tropical marine biology when I stumbled across GVI's website. In an effort to get closer to warmer waters, I offered to do some training for staff



teams, for about four to six months, without any cost to GVI. Richard Walton, GVI's Founder, wrote back, and when I flew back to the UK he met me at the airport. We sat down to chat about GVI's mission, specific values and ethical approach to marine conservation. I had reached out to other organizations and was reviewing other options, but in the end it just worked out better with GVI. Richard wanted to start a project in Mexico and I was looking for a position in South America. I shut down my own little organization and joined him to set up and run the first ever GVI marine conservation program in Mexico.

The objective of the program was to find NGOs across the Caribbean that would benefit from the sorts of resources, like project funding and staffing, we could provide. We were looking to collaborate with them to expand their work and their impact by bringing in our skills and knowledge. As my work continued in Mexico, it became rapidly clear to me that marine research alone was not going to make the a key

WE HAD TO CREATE A HUGE PUSH TOWARDS ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION.

difference in conserving the Earth's natural marine resources — we had to focus on people. I understood then that empowering people to know the value of their local environmental resources and how to take charge of the mission to protect them is the only way to create sustainable impact. We had to create a huge push toward alternative income training and environmental education. That is when I started to watch my core focus expand outward, from marine conservation to community development. I started to see the bigger picture. Over the next 16 years, I not only got my wish of studying



tropical underwater landscapes but also so much more. Not only did joining GVI give me the opportunity to visit amazingly diverse habitats, but it has pushed me to do so. I visited the Amazon to conduct terrestrial wildlife and habitat conservation projects and saw some animals I could never have dreamed of. I travelled all over Africa and Asia and saw a wide range of different ecosystems. And, most importantly, I met some truly inspirational people along the way. One of them is my wife, Britt. She was a GVI staff member who'd lived and worked in the Amazon. We got to know each other when we worked together for a few months. Later she was asked to set up a GVI program in Costa Rica and I moved there to be closer to her. After some time I starting planning a proposal, but just never found the right time. I finally found the perfect moment over a glass of wine after a dive in Borneo. We held a private ceremony on the beach in Costa Rica, and in true Danish style, we also held a Viking ceremony in the snow back in Denmark. We ended up having three boys, all with very Viking-sounding names, Asbjorn, Valdemar, and Magnus. We lived in Costa Rica for a while, but moved down to Cape Town when GVI relocated operations from the UK to South Africa. Richard is a good friend of mine and we've worked together now for 16 odd years. We live on the same street here in Cape Town. My kids play with his kids and they are best mates. Our wives are best friends too. I think GVI has been life-changing for so many people for exactly the same reason it has been for me. We bring together a collective of people from many different countries, with different cultural baggage and alternative ways of doing things, who are really passionate about engaging with global issues. We challenge them to find solutions and answers to these issues, which are some of the biggest humanity, as a global community, have ever faced. I think in life, the things you remember most and are most proud of are those really tough challenges that you have to solve with others. This is what creates such strong



intercultural bonds. That is how it has been for me. My eldest two kids think they're Costa Rican, while the younger one is definitely a South African. We're a real international family. I think part of what GVI brings out in people is that international perspective. Working with cultural differences is not only a lot of fun, but it helps you see how interconnected many of the world's issues are from region to region, and how we need to grow and work together to find solutions.

This is what GVI experiences do for people. Yes, they help you develop your career and yes you will get to see and experience many amazing things, but you'll soon understand that it's the connection you have made with other people that is of real lasting value. Building relationships with people around the world is not just about growing your global network because of the career benefits this affords you. As time goes on you'll notice that these relationships have been key in shaping your life.

I am proud of what we have been able to achieve with GVI. One of the biggest impacts we've had over the past 20 years is what our alumni, staff, community members and partner organizations have gone on to do. We've seen countless volunteers who first started their work with us continue making a difference across the globe. So many interns overcame their own personal challenges to gain qualifications and win their dream jobs. Many of our staff have achieved their professional goals and have gone on to start their own organisations, and several of the small, one person, local NGOs we have partnered many years ago have massively expanded their impact.

We're crystal clear about our goal of making as much impact as possible by supporting all stakeholders to empower themselves and achieve their goals. This is not just the environment or the community members, but to also our staff, those who participate in our projects and our partner organizations as well. We're asking questions like 'Are we learning enough from each other about what the issues are and how they can be solved?' 'How do we facilitate this

How do we equip them with more skills?

exchange of knowledge and skills so that everyone grows in the process?' 'How do we build confidence in anyone who comes in contact with GVI so that that they can continue making a difference past their time with us?'



I'm more positive than ever about the future of GVI. I don't think we've ever really had a clearer plan for where we want to be in 20 years time and I don't think we've ever had a better group of people that will help us get there than we do right now. In my work, I still get to preserve and protect the ocean environment. The difference is, I've expanded my view and found a more holistic approach that includes the human element. I've developed more of an awareness of how entangled the human and environmental elements are, exactly as they are represented by the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. I still get to live and work near the sea, and although I am now officially office-based, I encourage everyone at GVI, even our office-bound staff, to be like me, and see shoes as optional.



HOW I BECAME

WHO I AM TODAY

BY VALEE ISIN-XIONG

GVI LUANG PRABANG COMMUNITY LIAISON





I WAS TO BECOME A novice

IT HELPED ME BECOME WHO I AM TODAY. NOW I AM A PERSON WHO GIVES BACK TO THE TEMPLES HERE IN LUANG PRABANG, TO THE COMMUNITY IN THE CITY AND IN THE COUNTRYSIDE, AND, OF COURSE, MY OWN FAMILY.

After graduating from a temple school in Luang Prabang, novice monk, Valee Xiong, didn't know where life would take him. What he knew was that he didn't want to commit to a full monastic life, but finding a job to support himself, food, running water, and accommodation outside the temple, wasn't easy. He'd spent his school years working hard to perfect his language skills, now speaking six languages, and earned the role of translator and teacher with GVI, making him the first person in his family to secure a paying job.

Today he uses his success to help his siblings, and wider community. He tells us the story of how he became who he is today.

I grew up in a small village in the mountains of Northern Laos. About thirty families lived in the village and like many other people living in the Laos countryside, they weren't formally employed, but raised chickens and farmed rice in order to eat. It took about an hour's walk to get from our village to the farm. While the walk was arduous, it wasn't without its merits. Laos has a beautiful lush green landscape, and in the countryside, you get to really see that.

My village school offered only first and second grade, so I had to travel to another village far away to continue schooling. First, I had to

walk three to four hours down the mountain to a village called Hatsa on the Nam Ou River. In the rainy season, the journey was made all the more difficult and slower by the seeping mud that clung to your feet. There, I had to wait for a boat which would take me to Nong Khiaw where I studied grades four and five at primary school and grade one at secondary school.

As the journey from our village to Nong Khiaw took about four hours, my two brothers and I left the village to stay in a small hut in Nong Khiaw. We didn't have much money to buy food in Nong Khiaw so to eat we had to fetch rice from our parents in the village and bring it ourselves to Nong Khiaw. We also had to

one too. I didn't know what to do. I was very close to my mom. Often, when she walked to the farm to work I would walk with her and keep her company. My mom didn't want me to go because she didn't want to lose me, but my dad and my other brother said I should go to continue my studies. Finally, my mom acquiesced and that is how the decision was made — I was to become a novice.

A lot of people don't know this about Laos but here, there are many different cultures, other than Lao. My family is Hmong and so are all the people from my village. Traditionally there is a tense relationship between Hmong and Lao people. We have

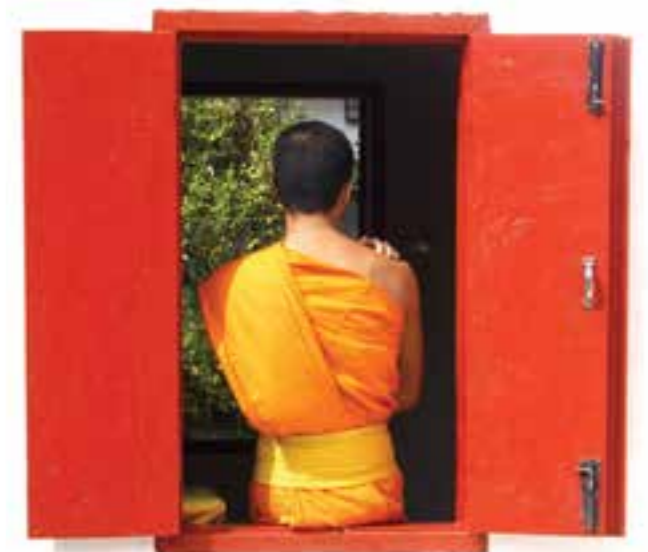
[In the rainy season, the journey was made all the more difficult and slower by the seeping mud that clung to our feet.]

go into the forest to collect food and to cut wood to make a fire so that we could cook. Sometimes we would also go fishing at the river to catch food for dinner.

After I graduated from grade one at secondary school, my parents didn't know what to do. They had limited means because they were farmers and also had to support my ten other siblings. They couldn't pay for us all to go to school.

My dad spoke to my cousin, who he knew had become a novice in Luang Prabang. At the temple, food and lodgings are free and there is greater access to education and future opportunities in Luang Prabang. Afterward, my dad came home to speak to us. One of my older brothers said he didn't want to go to the temple school, but my other older brother, Vue, said he'd like to go. At the time, he wanted to join because he saw that a friend of ours in Nong Khiaw who was a novice, had a phone and Vue wanted

different languages and different religions. Hmong people speak Hmong and Lao people speak Lao. Hmong is a little bit like Chinese and Lao is similar to Thai. Hmong people are animist — they believe that animals, plants, rivers, and everything else in nature have a unique spirit. When they need help with their





I GRADUATED FROM HIGH SCHOOL AND I JUST DIDN'T KNOW WHAT TO DO. MY PARENTS DIDN'T HAVE THE FUNDS FOR UNIVERSITY.

38

problems they go to a medicine man or shaman, a spiritual leader who can connect people with these spirits. In my village, if someone got sick the family would go to the shaman to find out what was wrong. The family would perform a ritual guided by the shaman to get rid of the negative spirits and welcome the protective ones. Lao culture is Buddhist and the people follow the teachings of the Buddha.

MY NATIVE LANGUAGE AND CULTURE ARE HMONG. I HAD TO LEARN TO SPEAK LAO AND ADOPT BUDDHIST PRACTICES.

My native language and culture are Hmong, I had to learn to speak Lao and adopt Buddhist practices. While my feet and knees are still used to the long hours spent meditating and chanting in the temple, when I go to the market here in Luang Prabang I still sometimes have to ask people 'What do you call this or that in Lao?' because I've got the Hmong name stuck in my head.

I took the three-and-a-half-hour bus ride from Nong Khiaw to Luang Prabang to become a novice in 2009. Life in the temple follows a strict schedule. We would wake up before dawn to meditate and then go to collect alms. This is where locals donate food to the novices and monks before dawn. The rest of the day is spent at monk school and extracurricular classes such as English. After lunchtime, both novices and monks would not eat until the next day in keeping with Buddha's doctrine of moderate living.

At the time I arrived in Luang Prabang, GVI had only a small presence in the city. I first came into contact with the volunteers in 2010 when they started teaching at my temple. I then

joined their classes for novices at the Luang Prabang Library and eventually at Xayadeth college and the Mekong English Centre. Overall, I studied with GVI for five years. Learning English was challenging because both Hmong and Laos languages don't have the 's' sound in them while English can't exist without it. By listening to how the volunteers, who were mostly native English speakers, talk, I was able to perfect my listening skills. Practicing my English with them also helped me to develop my confidence. Later, a GVI volunteer actually sponsored some of my classes at a local English center.

The volunteers also shared many other skills, like computer competency, with us. Before they taught me about computers, I had never touched one in my entire life. Being able to speak English fluently and knowing how to use a computer are very valuable skills in Laos, as they are in many other places in the world. Tourism is becoming more popular here and having these skills makes it easier for locals to find a good job.

In July 2015, I graduated from monk high school and I just didn't know what to do. I wanted to go to university, but also wanted to

use my English and gain more work experience. I knew I wanted to leave the temple, but I needed to get a place to stay first and to find accommodation. I needed a job so that I could pay the rent, but finding one wasn't easy. I asked the monks if I could stay at the temple for another two months so that I could find a job and save up some money. They were kind enough to say, 'yes'. I would eat after the monks and novices had all eaten and wash the dishes after meals.

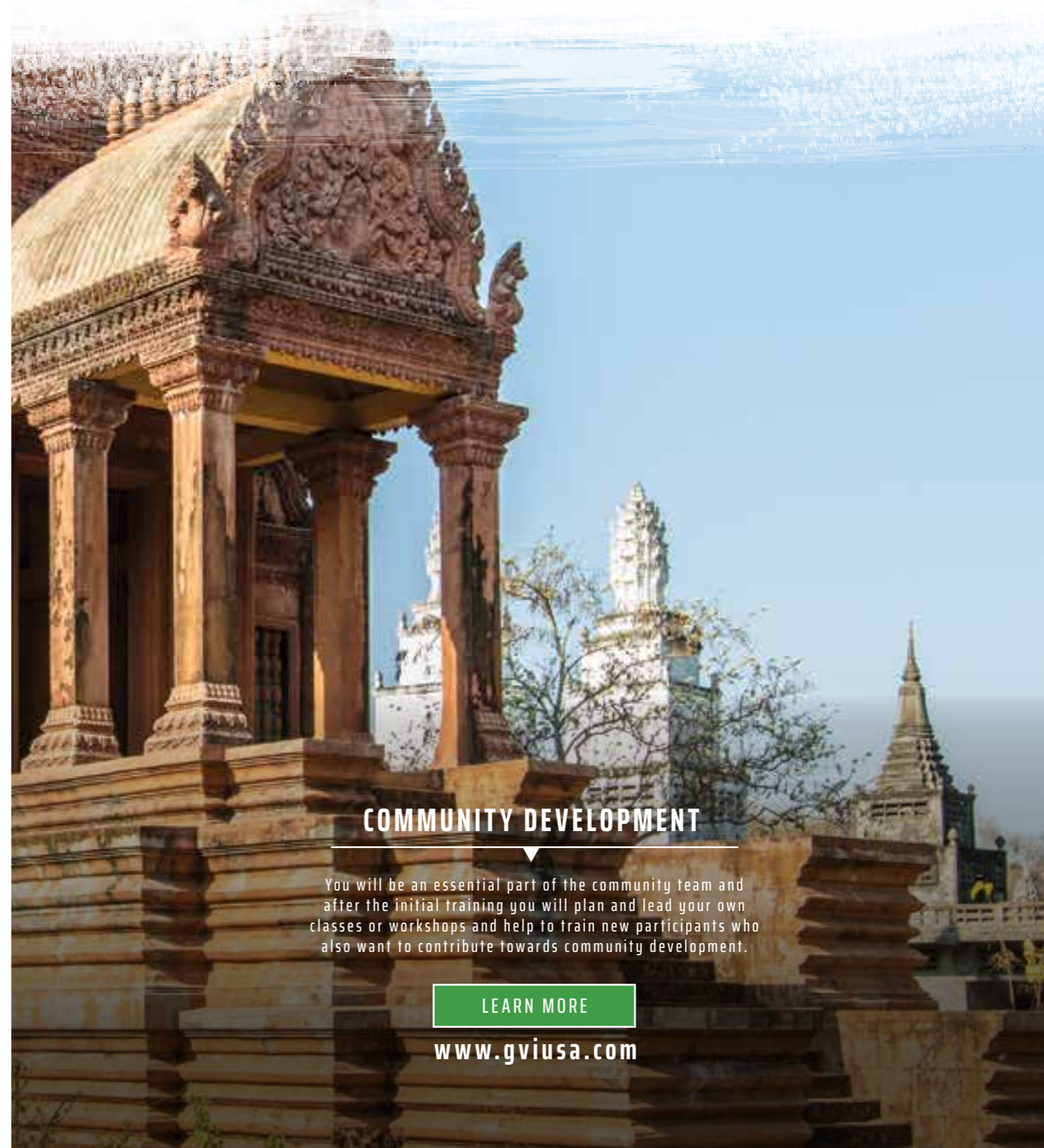
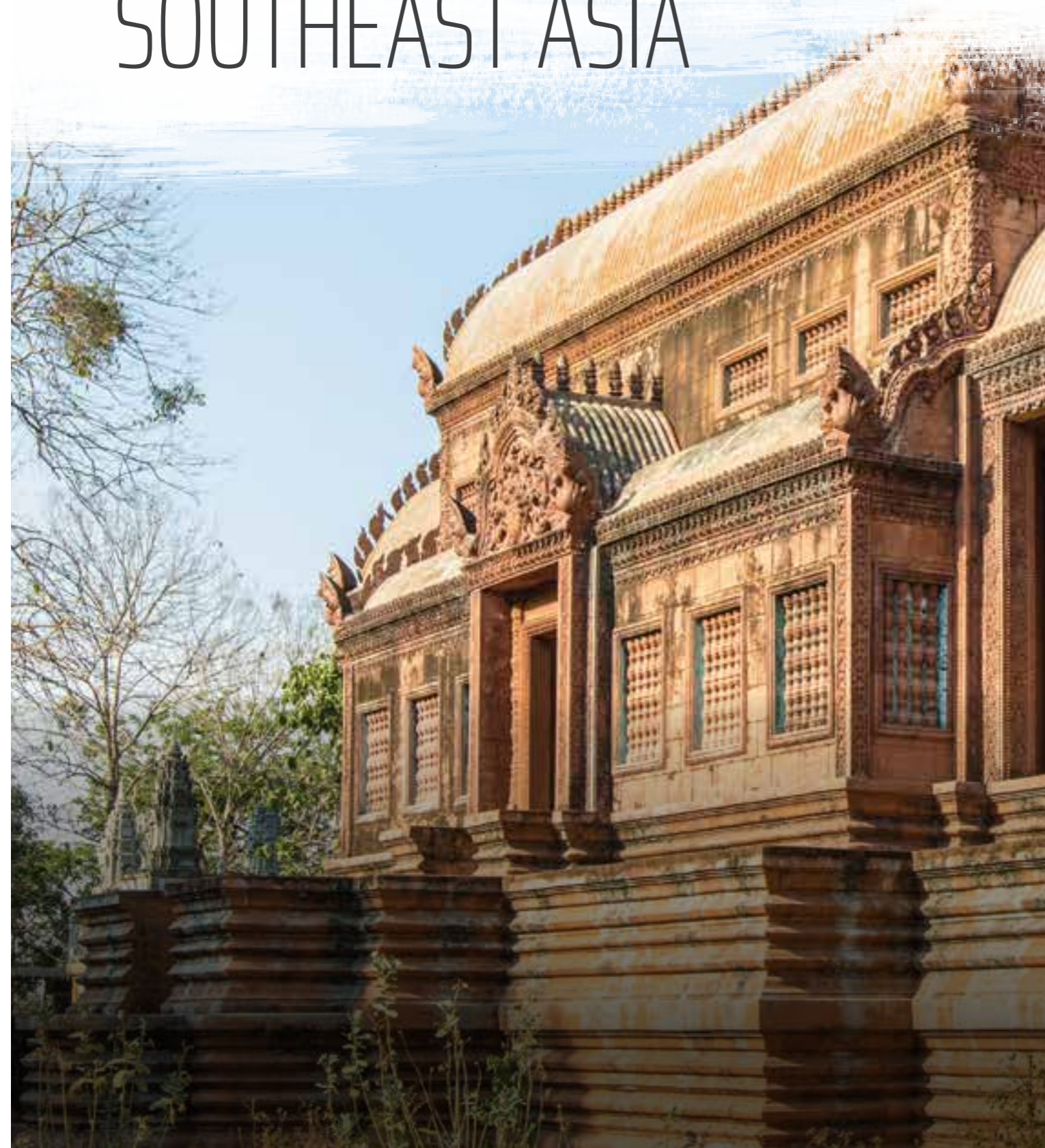
Finally, I found a job as a night guard and auditor at a hotel, but it didn't pay much. I was still attending GVI English lessons at a local college and one day the manager of the GVI Luang Prabang project at the time asked me if I would like to become a GVI translator so that they could communicate better with the students. I said that I would be happy to. I went through GVI's training on teaching and translating and then joined the GVI staff team as a casual translator, using English, Lao, and Hmong on a daily basis. While I worked with them, I began to develop my skills as a translator and a teacher and found a passion for teaching and education in Laos.

39

CAMBODIA

MEASURING 402 ACRES,
ANGKOR WAT IS THE LARGEST
RELIGIOUS BUILDING IN THE
WORLD.

SOUTHEAST ASIA



COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

You will be an essential part of the community team and after the initial training you will plan and lead your own classes or workshops and help to train new participants who also want to contribute towards community development.

[LEARN MORE](#)

www.gviusa.com

My days were very busy back then. In the mornings, I would study at the college from 8:00 to 11:00. After that I joined GVI to translate for younger students from 1:00 to 2:30. From 4:30 to 7:30, I would study Chinese and from 7:45 until 9:30 I would teach English to my friends. At 10, I would go to work at the hotel until early in the morning.

For two months, I worked like this and lost a lot of weight. My novice friends at the temple asked 'Why do you look so skinny? Are you taking drugs?' I told them 'It's because I need to work to save up some money so that I can move out of the temple. You don't understand because you still live at the temple where everything is provided. I need money to pay for a place to stay, buy food, and fill up my bike with petrol so that I can get to my job.'

After two months, I saved up enough to rent a dorm with my cousin from the village. He paid half and I paid the other. We stayed together for maybe a year when our friend joined us so that we all paid a little less. For another year we shared this very small dorm room. Now I live with my wife in a small flat.

In October 2017, I was promoted and became the first full-time Lao Community Liaison with GVI. As well as teaching classes and translating with GVI at both temple schools and women's empowerment classes, I received training in working with foreigners and how to liaise between GVI and the local community. I also completed the GVI Introduction to TEFL training and studied to become First Aid certified with GVI.

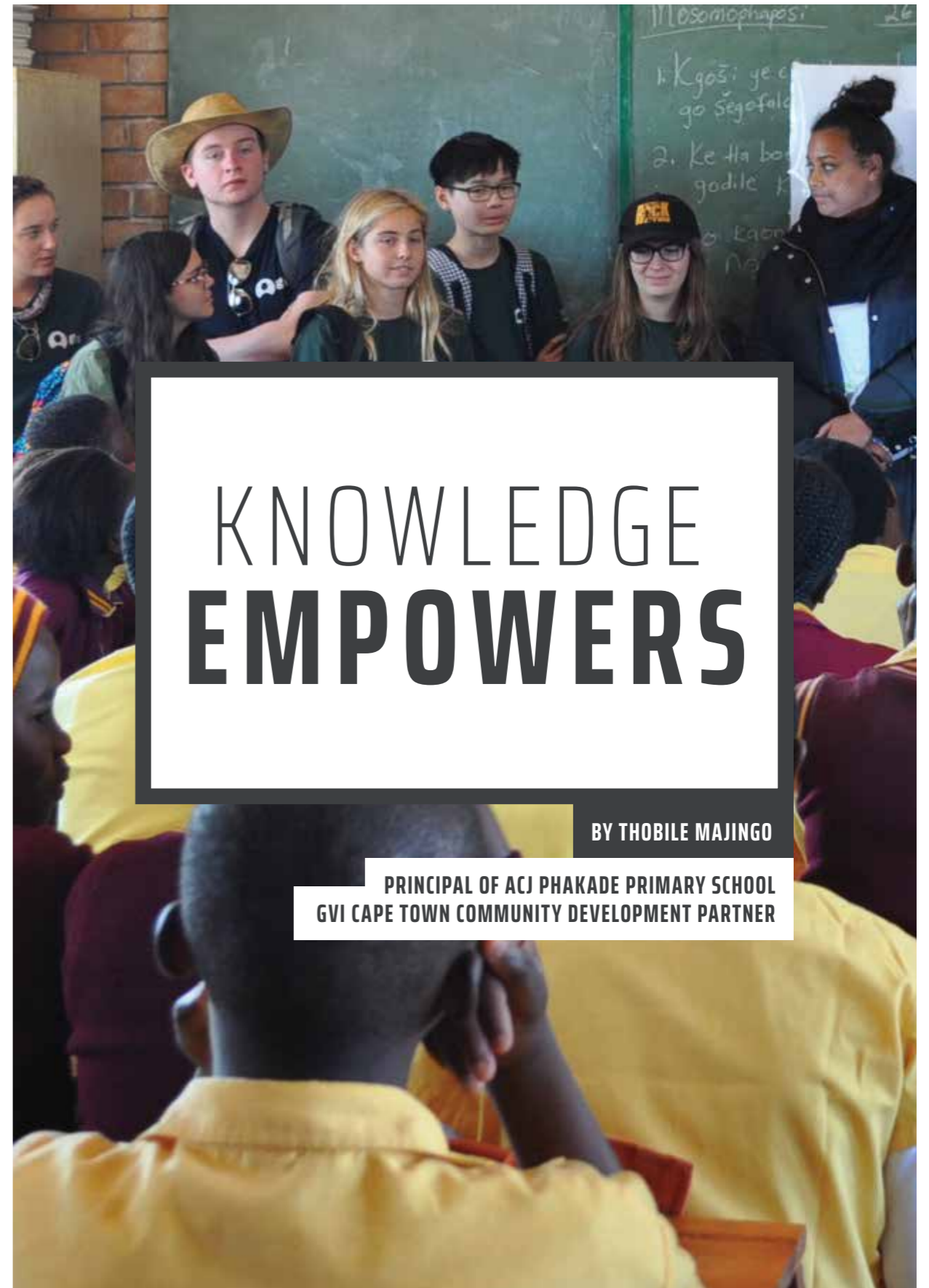
Now, in addition to teaching classes and translating every day, I help develop and deliver workshops on topics such as gender equality. I teach Lao lessons to volunteers and staff and lead orientation walks, temple tours, and cultural experiences. I give talks on Buddhism, life as a novice monk, and Hmong

culture. I also help maintain our existing international and local partnerships and develop new ones. I love that I get to work with people from all over the world every day. One of the most important things I learned is to be on time. People here in Laos aren't really that punctual. It's just not the culture. If they say they will arrive at 13:00 you can expect them to be there only at around 13:30. This often confuses foreigners, which means that time management is an important skill when working with tourists.

I am now the first person in my family to be employed at an organization and earn a salary. Although my other brothers studied maths, after they graduated, they couldn't find a job. When I went home to my mom and told her, she was very happy. 'It's good that I let you go study,' she said. In June 2016, I brought my two younger brothers to Luang Prabang to become novices at the temple where I used to live. They are now studying at the monk school and are learning English and computer skills with GVI too.

I also brought my younger sister, who is 14 years old, to live with me in Luang Prabang. Usually, Hmong girls who live in the countryside get married very early because parents don't have the funds to pay for their schooling and because of the local cultural beliefs around gender roles. Now I pay for my sister to go to school and take her to GVI classes so that she can have more options and opportunities in the future.

Perfecting my language skills in GVI classes helped shape my life. It helped me become who I am today. Now I am a person who gives back to the temples here in Luang Prabang, to the community in the city and in the countryside, and, of course, my own family.



KNOWLEDGE EMPOWERS

BY THOBILE MAJINGO

PRINCIPAL OF ACJ PHAKADE PRIMARY SCHOOL
GVI CAPE TOWN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PARTNER

KNOWLEDGE EMPOWERS

BY THOBILE MAJINGO

PRINCIPAL OF ACJ PHAKADE PRIMARY SCHOOL
GVI CAPE TOWN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT PARTNER

Becoming a teacher was always Thobile Majingo's goal. Becoming a leader in his workplace and community was never an option until he was offered a management position. He accepted the challenge and in 2014 was awarded the post of Principal at ACJ Phakade School. What he found when he arrived, were a couple of fresh-faced volunteers looking to make a difference. Sceptical of their value to the school, he nonetheless invited them to his office to let them make their case. Today, he advocates international partnerships for local organizations and even enjoys the company of some of the volunteers who have come to work at his school. Thobile shares his journey below.

For many people, it is difficult to choose a vocation. For me the choice was easy. I knew I wanted to become a teacher. In primary school, I thought teachers were smart and stylish people, but it was only in high school that my English teacher really inspired me to become an educator. She was a kind of parent to us and had a way of motivating her learners that really worked and it impressed me. After being in her class I started to think that maybe teaching is what I would want to pursue as a career.

When I finally got my teaching diploma and could stand there in front of the class, it was like a dream come true. Being able to work with kids and be part of their learning experience

is a great privilege. They are naturally curious and it is that inquisitiveness that helps them expand their knowledge of the world. Every day I would love hearing all those little questions, which help them little by little uncover more and more of the unknown. For me, those moments in the classroom are ones that I will cherish forever. After a few years, the school I worked in at the time was growing and the staff was being split up into two groups of morning and afternoon teams. It was essentially a new school in the afternoon, which meant they needed new management. That was when the acting principal asked me to be a Head of Department (HOD). At first, I was a bit shocked. I was happy as a teacher and didn't think

I needed anything more. But, if I was being honest, I was probably a little unsure of my abilities and doubtful of whether I was up to the task. Then I started thinking that maybe there might be something good on the other side of this for me. I got curious about what might happen and decided then and there to accept the challenge. To fully commit to my goal and make sure I excel in my new role I knew that I needed to equip myself with additional skills and knowledge. That is why I decided to enroll in an Education Management course. I needed to change my mindset quite a lot when moving from primarily a teaching role to a more managerial one. I was no longer working with young learners, I was working

AT FIRST I WAS A BIT SHOCKED AND IF I WAS BEING HONEST I WAS UNSURE OF MY ABILITIES.

with adults, but in many ways, I was still expected to be a kind of father figure even though the way you communicate with them is different. The challenge for me was to get to know each and every teacher, because as a manager, you need to know your people for them to deliver. Whenever you see that there is a work problem, it might have a personal aspect, and as a manager, you need to check in with your staff, sit down with them and give them the guidance they need to work through the problem. You can only do that if you know them well. After two years, I completed my Education Management degree and it was then that I realized that the administrative side of education was where I wanted to be. Not only was I enjoying my role as HOD, but the teachers under me and my manager were very supportive and encouraging. 'This is the right fit for you,' they said. That was the turning point for me. Soon afterward, I was promoted to Deputy Principal. After eleven years as Deputy, I knew that I wanted to be the head of my own school one day. But I also knew I needed to fully prepare myself by furthering my education. That was when I registered at The University of Cape Town (UCT) to



I've always dreamed of being a teacher.

study Education Management and Leadership Development. In the first year of my course, I spotted a job that caught my eye. It was for the post of Principal at ACJ Phakade in Nomzamo near Gordon's Bay, Cape Town. I applied and was called in to interview in December when the school was closed for summer holidays. I was fortunate that the course I was taking at UCT had really prepared me for an interview of that kind. I felt at ease because I was equipped with the right kind of

knowledge. Then, come January, I didn't get any call from the school. February, March? Nothing. It was only in April that I heard back, April the 1st to be exact. It was a Sunday, and I was in church when I got a call from the District Manager in charge of ACJ Phakade. He said 'Mr. Majingo, you have topped the list of candidates. Please report to ACJ Phakade on the 7th of April as the new Principal.' I thought it was an April Fool's joke and told him so. He said, 'No, no, I am in earnest, please report on the 7th of April.' I was very excited and shared the news with my wife. The day came when I had to report at the school. Because I was not a teacher at the school who had simply been promoted, The District Manager came to introduce me to everyone. We started at the assembly. Everyone, both the kids and the staff, were very welcoming.

Afterward, I began tackling the problems. My approach was to call all the teachers first from foundation phase, to sit down with them and ask them, 'What do you have in mind, what are your expectations of your new Principal, and I will share with you all my expectations'. Then after that, I called the intermediate and the senior phase teachers and I did the same. Then I called the cleaning staff and I did the same. Doing this afforded me a chance to sit with all the negatives that they came up with and make my own plan about how I was going to go about approaching these things going forward. This was a valuable exercise and since then I've been able to ensure that my staff know exactly what I want from them. I've implemented many changes over the years to ensure that this school is better than what it was in 2014. I

am happy to say that my teachers tell their colleagues 'When I dreamed of being a teacher, this is the school I imagined.' When I got here in January 2014, I found GVI here. I saw these international volunteers working in the school and I was honestly a bit skeptical about them. 'What do they think they are doing here? Do we even need them?' I thought. But I sat down with Shayle, who was heading the GVI project here in Cape Town, and some other people from GVI, so that they could make their case. They explained to me what GVI does, how the organization works and what they were hoping to achieve here in Nomzamo and in ACJ particularly. After some time, and much to my surprise, I actually started to believe in the GVI volunteers and their cause, the GVI mission. I even started to like them. Now we have built such a strong working partner





ship that when one of the long-term volunteers leave, you feel that pain, you wish to have them stay longer. Even now I still keep in touch with many of them on Facebook. I think It's important to open up to international organizations. Their contribution to a school can be huge, both in terms of educational value for your learners, benefits for your school and

work taught in English in the future. GVI volunteers are also those helping learners whom the school teachers identify as having trouble keeping up in the classroom. They will sit with the learner to go over English or Math work they might not yet understand. This helps teachers who might not always have the time to give the kids that one-on-one instruction that boosts their confidence. Teaching the physical education aspect of the curriculum is another contribution the GVI volunteers make to our school. While the students love going to the field to play sports and it helps them stay fit and healthy, for us teachers, these lessons help us with maintaining discipline and focus in the classroom. Not only does it help them get rid of excess energy, but the volunteers teach them appropriate behavior when asking them to line up quietly to go to the field.

Our school now also boasts more extramural facilities thanks to our partnership with the GVI Trust.

worldwide awareness of your own work at the facility. In South Africa, the curriculum asks that we transition away from primarily using a home language to teaching more in English during the primary school phase. Most of the teachers at ACJ are isiXhosa speaking, as are the learners, which means that students often want to speak isiXhosa with the teachers. But with GVI volunteers, an isiXhosa speaking learner has no option but to answer in English, which expands their language range and might help them better understand and retain any

Our school now also boasts more extramural facilities thanks to our partnership with the GVI Trust. We have more sports equipment, which other schools make use of as well, and have added a piano so that our learners can learn more about music. One really great thing about having GVI on board, I think, is that they are telling the world about our school. Now people everywhere can know that there is a school like ours here in Cape Town, South Africa.

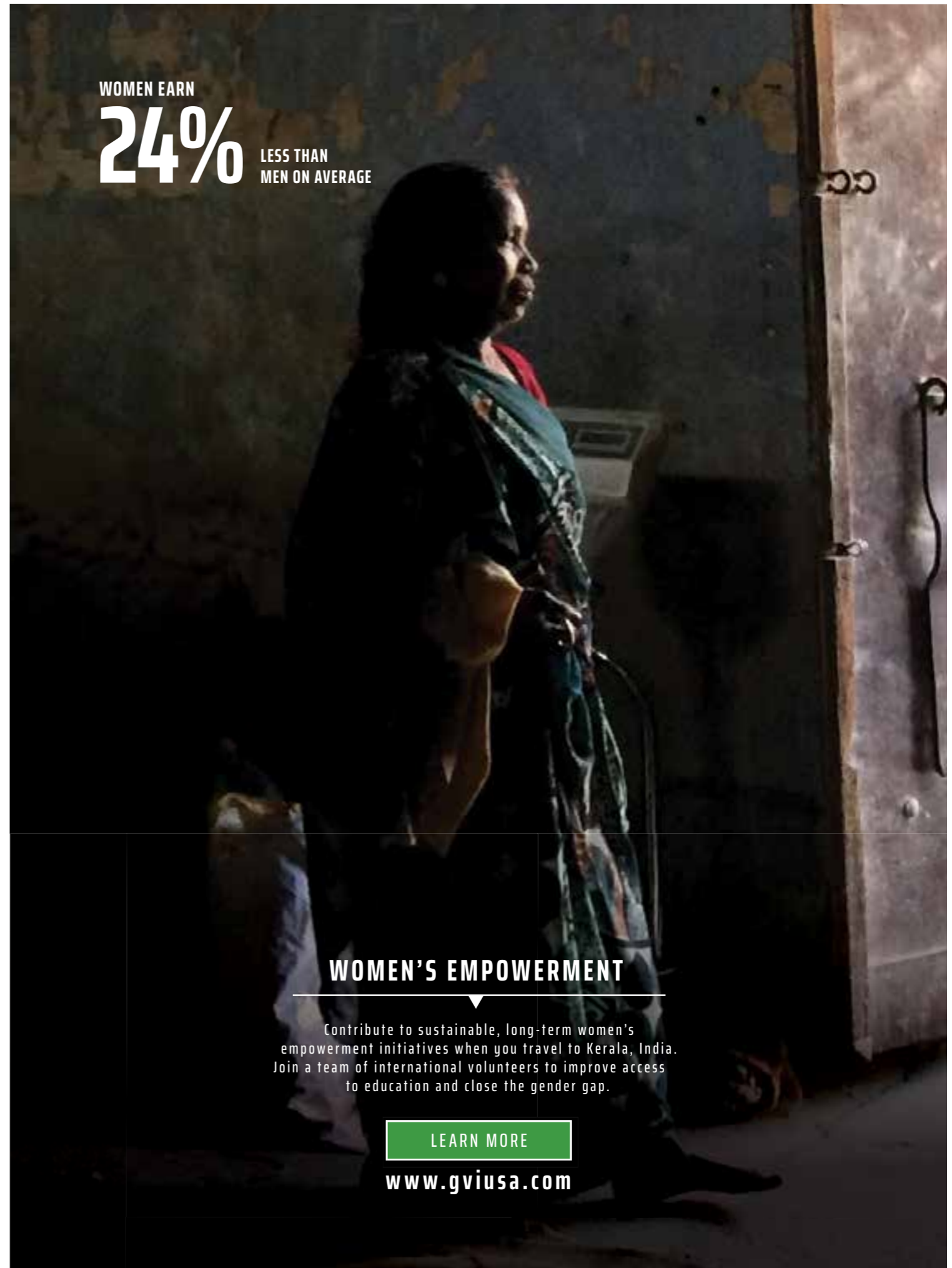
WOMEN EARN
24% LESS THAN
MEN ON AVERAGE

WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT

Contribute to sustainable, long-term women's empowerment initiatives when you travel to Kerala, India. Join a team of international volunteers to improve access to education and close the gender gap.

LEARN MORE

www.gviusa.com





FINDING MY
**natural
habitat**

LEAH BROWN, THE MANAGER OF OUR WILDLIFE CONSERVATION PROJECT IN SOUTH AFRICA'S LIMPOPO REGION, TALKS TO US ABOUT HER CAREER JOURNEY AND THE BIG CAT THAT STARTED IT ALL.

WHAT FIRST INSPIRED YOU TO GET INTO CONSERVATION?

Like many people, my first interaction with wildlife not native to my own country was at a zoo. I grew up in Adelaide, Australia, and our zoo did not house leopards or cheetahs. It was the magnificent lion that I first laid my eyes on. I used to sit for hours outside their enclosure. I connected with them more than something like a giraffe or a meerkat as I loved to watch the similarities in their behavior to my own pets. They moved the same way and even played the same way, but on a different scale. I could sit and marvel at the sheer beauty of these magnificent animals for hours, even if they were only sleeping.

Many people in conservation hate zoos, and I agree with their sentiment. However, I think that in order for people around the world to feel moved enough to want to protect animals not native to their country, being able to see that animal face to face makes a key difference. Excitement isn't created through a television screen or on the page of a magazine. You need to be in their presence. This is why I think zoos still play an important role in conservation like they did for my personal journey. Being at the zoo influenced my decision to work with animals and I dreamt of working there one day. Little did I know that I could be a field guide, observing these animals in their natural habitat.

Although my parents did not work with animals in their daily jobs, they saw that I came alive when I was around animals. They encouraged that passion in me and helped me cultivate it.

They were never the kind of parents who were worried about the size of the paycheck I would bring home at the end of the day or whether I went to university or not. They wanted me to be happy and weren't interested in forcing me into a career that was not for me. They knew that I was clever enough to not make the wrong choice and self-directed enough to create my own journey. Being stuck indoors was not for me. I didn't fit into the traditional schooling system, and when I graduated I knew I was not going to jump right back into studying without knowing that I was following the right path. For me studying was going to be a full-time commitment and I was not ready to make that important choice yet. I eventually decided to take a gap year which gave me the time to sit back and prepare for what was next.

FINDING MY natural habitat

DID YOU CONSIDER ANY OTHER CAREER PATHS AND HOW DID CONSERVATION WIN OUT?

I considered the role of a veterinarian but after some work experience with them, quickly changed my mind. Vets don't really have the chance to engage with the animal and their wellbeing. The vet simply comes in when there is a problem, spends time carrying out surgery and then disappears. The role of the veterinary nurse appealed to me more because they play a nurturing role which better suits my personality. The vet nurse is there for pre and post op care, monitoring the entire progression of the animal and ensuring a quick recovery.

I worked in animal husbandry for a while, but I didn't find it fulfilling. I was working in the medical field with smaller animals like guinea pigs and mice, but that was not where my passion lay. I still couldn't shake the idea of working with African wildlife. Serendipitously, I was scrolling through my news-

feed, and some pictures appeared in my newsfeed. First, it was a lion, the next day it was a cheetah, and the following week an elephant. My friends were liking the pictures of a mutual friend, who was posting these pictures. This was my wakeup call. I realized I was selling myself short. I didn't want to have a job just because it was easy and it brings home a paycheck. I wanted something meaningful, which I was passionate about. That was my first step towards working in conservation. I sent this mutual friend a message to ask him what he was up to that was allowing him to see such amazing things every day. I found out that he was on a six-month internship with GVI in Limpopo, South Africa. It turned out that he was actually from Adelaide and when he returned home, we met up to chat about his experience over coffee. He told me he loved every minute of it and I was sold. I started saving and once I had enough funds, I packed my things, spent all my savings and headed to South Africa. That was the first time I had ever crossed Australia's borders.

AFTER ARRIVING IN SOUTH AFRICA, WHEN DID YOU FIRST SEE A LION IN THE WILD?

Although I had seen lions before, my most memorable experience was near the end of my internship. We decided to go for a game drive in the Kruger Park National Park which is about an hour's drive from Karongwe, the private park where GVI operates and where I completed my internship. We headed out on the dirt roads early in the morning because that is when the animals are most active. Rather quickly we found a lioness sitting on a small termite mound.

We waited, because patience is key in observing wildlife, and about half an hour later, another lioness appeared behind the first one. With her came a tiny little lion cub. He must have been only about two months old at the time. He walked over





from the female in the bush to the one on the mound and sat there in full view for a few minutes. At the time, I had never seen a baby leopard or cheetah cub before. This was the first feline cub I saw in the wild. Immediately my nurturing instinct kicked in and I just melted. To see this sweet, innocent creature before it had the chance to become a fierce predator moved me to tears.

Another powerful moment was when I was able to be in the presence of a cheetah while on foot. Experiencing being close to this animal in its natural environment filled me with a sense of awe that I will never forget. I had a similar experience when I saw a caracal in the wild for the first time. I was also overcome with emotion.

HOW DID YOU BECOME THE GVI BASE MANAGER IN LIMPOPO?

After completing my six month internship and earning my field guide qualification, the staff on the base asked whether I might like to take some of the volunteers and interns on a game drive to see if I like the role. I loved it and two months later I was offered the role of assistant base manager. While this might seem like a rather quick progression to some people, I see it more as an eight-month-long interview, which is an even more lengthy probation period than at some organizations.

I think this is often the underestimated value of volunteering. That organizations pick staff from people they know and who do they know better than the volunteers who have been working alongside them. No one can gauge from a one-hour conversation, what someone is really like, you can only know by working with them. Then you know every facet of them, how they behave when they are excited or frustrated and how they will react under pressure. Yes, it is true that GVI hires

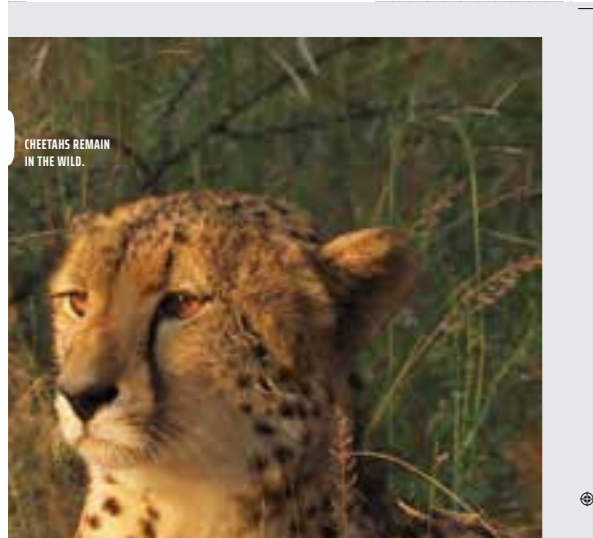


from their alumni, but that is not just because the training we provide is of such a high standard. It is because when you have put someone through the ropes, you can really learn to know and trust them.

Our Director of Programs, Shayle Havemann, told me 'Always hire on personality' and I think of that often now that part of my responsibilities include hiring staff members. Rather take someone with the get-up-and-go to make things happen than someone who has all the 'right' qualifications and work experience. I think that is maybe what Shayle saw in me, and it is what I now look for in my staff.

IN YOUR DAILY WORK, HOW DO YOU HELP BIG CATS NOW?

GVI runs broadly two big cat projects in Karongwe. The reserve is very predator dense, which means there are many lions and leopards in the park. We track both of these big cats to help reserve managers and researchers better understand their movements and behaviors. The second project we run is the cheetah kill utilization study where we observe how often a cheetah kills and reasons as to why they abandon their prey.



The cheetah is a weaker predator compared to others, like the lion and the leopard, and is often chased off their prey by these other predators. We are finding that cheetahs in the park often abandon their kill in order to prevent a fight to protect it. However, this has implications for managing the reserve as more antelope are needed to support the predators.

Another project we are involved in is working to increase the cheetah population in the park by integrating three new cheetahs into the reserve. That is why although lions will always be my first love, being more exposed to cheetahs, means that my interest in this species has grown significantly over the years. Part of my work also involves helping volunteers and interns acclimatize, guiding their experience and educating them about local wildlife and issues in conservation. In working with volunteers I get to relive that moment when I first saw a lion cub every few weeks. Taking volunteers on a drive, sensing their excitement and watching their faces come alive when they see the wildlife for the first time reminds you of what it is all about.

After a while, a lot of the knowledge about being in this environment becomes second nature to you, but the curiosity of the volunteers forces you to share it. A lot of this knowledge

is like pure gold to them, and seeing how they hang on every word gives you a glimpse of just how eye-opening it was for you the first time, which is inspiring and a fantastic reminder of why I am here. It also gives me the opportunity to help make and shape that personal connection to wildlife, which I first formed with the lions in Adelaide. When a volunteer spots a hornbill or impala, that is a magical moment for them. Directing that experience to a deeper understanding is my goal. The more that the volunteer learns about wildlife, the more they will want to invest in it. The more their passion builds, the more they'll want to make a difference after their time with GVI and contribute to the cause.

IF YOU COULD CHOOSE ANOTHER LIFE WHAT CAREER WOULD YOU CHOOSE?

I would be a wildlife veterinary nurse. In my daily job, I am able to get up close to these animals and really appreciate their beauty, but I sometimes think it would be even more fulfilling to transfer my veterinary nursing skills to wildlife like lions and elephants. However, competing for that job is perhaps even harder than competing for a role in conservation. These kinds of animals are very valuable and there is a lot of pressure around working with them. Playing veterinary nurse would be challenging not only because of the work, but because of all the controversy around it, but I think it would be incredibly fulfilling as well. For a short time, when I was younger I also considered a job as an interior designer, because I loved to create beauty, but that idea quickly faded because I wanted to work with animals. I still get to use my visual skills, just in a different way because part of my role involves photographing the wildlife here in Karongwe. GVI then uses this material to recruit more volunteers. It can be quite fulfilling to see my work on a GVI brochure, blog or quiz, because I know designers have deemed my images worthy.

WHAT IS YOUR ADVICE FOR NEW GRADUATES LOOKING TO BREAK INTO CONSERVATION?

Conservation is a very competitive field. Part of the reason for this I think is that there are just so many candidates available from an employers' perspective. Many students are looking to make a difference and don't actually know how, what to do or where to go. Studying biology and looking to go into conservation is the easy route. There is also a lack of knowledge concerning the jobs that are actually available. In conservation, people tend to stay in their roles for a long time, because it is, understandably, a fulfilling role. Unfortunately, this means opportunities don't open up very often.

My advice for those looking for a career in the field, would be go outside your comfort zone and work with people from different backgrounds. Everyone, from hiring managers to admissions officers want to know if you have life experience, and that you have not just lived a sheltered life that helped you get good grades, with no understanding of the real world.

DO YOU THINK THERE ARE ANY SPECIFIC CHALLENGES FOR WOMEN IN CONSERVATION?

Conservation is a male-dominated field. In South Africa, more so than in Australia, there is a perception that a women's role is to look after the home and the children. However, there are several women who have come to the fore recently in South Africa's conservation field. Some, like Michelle Hendley of Elephants Alive, are doctors who are heavily involved in saving key species on the decline. Her dedication to leaving no elephant behind is truly inspiring and her drive seems endless. Even after a full day's work she will still be on the front line at midnight preventing elephants from crossing a boundary to which the other side may present an unpleasant fate.



A group of women, calling themselves the Black Mambas, are another inspiring group. They are an all-female anti-poaching team who have proven that they can hold their own against poachers and protect animals just as well as any male ranger. There are also a number of women holding senior positions in the Endangered Wildlife Trust (EWT) who we partner with on occasion. They have the authority to direct important decisions that affect the operations of the trust and thus the future of wildlife under its protection. I think it is important for conservation to open up to women so that the topics can be viewed through the lens of a woman's eyes. We have the ability to look at things differently and come up with new, potentially more effective solutions.

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO INSPIRE YOUNG WOMEN, SPECIFICALLY THOSE INTERESTED IN CONSERVATION?

In the community areas near the park where we operate, women play a vital role. They are truly the heart of their communities. They are the ones raising the children and collecting the firewood for dinner every night. The girls in these communities need to be made aware of the other opportunities available to them. They need to be shown that women can create their own destinies and shape their own futures, regardless of the role society thinks they should play. There is only one way to do this and that is by creating awareness and providing the necessary support to these young women to help them achieve their goals. I believe this can only be done effectively by bringing female role models into these communities. Luckily, South African organizations like Rock Girl are doing just that. They bring strong women into these communities to provide the girls with role models that they can not only look up to but engage with. Showing these girls key women who have achieved their goals provides a spark for a dream and deters them from feeling disheartened by challenges they may face; with hard work and determination comes reward. This is the

only way we will get more people to be ambassadors for conservation in these communities. People back home have told me that what I did moving to South Africa to pursue my passion has inspired them to go on to do other things, not necessarily in conversation. I think that is sometimes all it takes, seeing that it can be done, that achieving your dreams isn't unobtainable - you have the power to take that leap into something more fulfilling that will leave you with a smile at the end of each day.



THERE ARE
50% LESS ASIAN ELEPHANTS
THAN THERE WERE 75
YEARS AGO

VOLUNTEER WITH THAI ELEPHANTS

Support community efforts to help reintegrate elephants into their natural habitat, from their previous lives in tourist camps.

LEARN MORE

www.gviusa.com

WHAT'S ON THE

OTHER SIDE OF

YOUR LIMITS?

BY SHAYLE HAVEMANN

DIRECTOR OF PROGRAMS



Our thrill-seeking Director of Programs, Shayle Havemann, took time out of her extremely busy schedule to speak to us about what sparked her quest for adventure and ethical volunteerism. She also discusses how working for GVI has allowed for a deep integration of her parenting and work life.

I remember watching my dad run The Comrades Marathon when I was younger. The Comrades is one of the world's oldest ultramarathons and also one of the most grueling. Runners cover about 89 kilometers, between the South African cities of Durban and Pietermaritzburg, about twice the distance of a traditional marathon, in one day. As I watched him running, I recall thinking to myself, 'One day, I am going to complete that race.' I've always had a very competitive streak and was involved in just about every type of sport growing up. I didn't just want to do well, I wanted to do the best I could. I have always enjoyed the outdoors and any kind of terrifying challenge. I always knew I wanted the Comrades to be my very first endurance experience.

I expected to push myself past my threshold and to the point of physical exhaustion in this race. What I didn't expect was the camaraderie. From fellow runners to spectators, everyone helped each other through the experience. It was during those dark moments when all you want to do is give up and everything hurts that there was someone there to help me along, lift my spirits, and make me laugh. It was just a moment and then I was back on track ready to go the distance.

I expected to push myself past my threshold.



Seeing that side of humanity was even more powerful than completing the race. Crossing the finish line was an incredibly emotional experience for me and a truly significant moment in my life. The achievement for me was getting through the physical and mental exhaustion. But, more importantly, it was about having the opportunity to be part of the collective human spirit driving everyone on. It was about being lifted by others, and putting a smile on someone else's face whenever the opportunity presented itself. That was when the bug bit. Today, anyone who knows me will tell you that I am a true adrenaline junkie. When I went overseas for the first time, my mom said to me, 'Shayle don't tell me where you're going or what you're doing until you're back safely, because I will just worry.' I've done every extreme sport you can think of,

one step short of base jumping, which I would love to do, given half the chance. I've also taken on as many endurance sporting challenges as I am able. The bigger the challenge and the greater the distance, the greater the temptation. My next endurance challenge is to complete the Joburg To Sea which is over 900 kilometers of mountain biking in 9 days. Overcoming obstacles and challenges makes me feel alive. The bigger the challenge and the more difficult it is to achieve, the more I want to do it. The harder I need to push past my boundaries both physical and mental, the more I want to get there. For me, this is an integral part of personal growth. Pushing past my own physical limitations provides the best platform for me for personal growth. You strip away everything until you are down to the absolute core. Then you just have to find it deep within yourself to get to where it is you want to go. You have to reach deep into your reserves. Use your mental strength to get past your physical exhaustion. It is in these moments of extreme physical exhaustion when I surprise myself and realize the true capacity locked inside. When I succeed, it's the most incredible, liberating feeling. Not everyone understands this. My husband thinks I am stark raving mad, but still supports all my crazy quests.

My work experience has been very diverse. I've done everything from corporate medical sales to living out in the middle of the Okavango Delta running high-end lodges. Strangely enough, the first ever educational project I set up was for one of the lodges I worked at in the Okavango Delta. They had a staff village of about 60 or 70 people employed at that remote location. There was a great need for computer skills in the community so I set up a computer lab and ran development sessions on a weekly basis in the evening for those who were interested. When we decided to start a family, I was tempted to become a stay-at-home mom. I wanted to provide my children with the support my parents weren't always able to

give me. I wanted to create a supportive family environment and spend as much time with my children as possible. I wanted to be there to provide the support that I felt should be given to every child if it was economically viable and that sadly so many children are not fortunate enough to receive. But being a stay-at-home mom just wasn't a good fit for me. Going from a very challenging, high-intensity workspace to being a stay-at-home mom was incredibly difficult, even though I felt such a strong connection with my daughters. At the time, I had a friend who worked for a big international volunteer





I learned that some volunteers, when put into that situation, felt uncomfortable and nervous.

add the most value. They suggested I work at a special needs center in Cape Town conducting physical exercises. I loved working there. Getting to know each child and their preferences as well as discovering unique ways to communicate with one another was very rewarding. However, I also came to understand that working with special needs children might not be the best fit for everyone. I learned that some volunteers, when put into that situation, felt uncomfortable and nervous. Their worry was that they might do something damaging, which made them sometimes feel intimidated, especially if they only had entry-level training, or none at all. This made me think about the impact we were having at the center and lead me to question how things could be done better. What if volunteers were offered guidance and support? What if we had adequate structure and training courses we could offer to our partners and volunteers run by professionals. Would this increase impact? Would this be a more responsible way of operating?

Another thing I noticed was that I was having a slightly different experience compared to international volunteers, who would come and go. I am South African and was volunteering in my home country. Therefore, I understood the culture deeply and was able to be at the center on a long-term basis. How did this shape my experience and compare to the experience of a two-week international volunteer? It takes time to understand and communicate with children with severe disabilities. I was fortunate enough to have spent enough time to develop relationships and therefore understand and communicate with children at the center in a more meaningful way. This

also made me think more about how the enthusiasm of young international volunteers could be directed in a more responsible and sustainable way. This has led me to debate with many people I have met along the way, whether it is appropriate or ethical to run volunteer programs for children with special needs. If it is appropriate, what would be the most responsible way to design these programs to ensure a sustainable positive impact for all stakeholders concerned? As I became more embedded in the organization and saw more of their operations, I began to ask more questions and became more and more interested in finding solutions to facilitating ethical high-impact volunteering opportunities.

After listening to many volunteers and their stories, I realized that they had all the enthusiasm and energy to contribute, but often lacked the cultural awareness, confidence, and experience to contribute in a really meaningful way without proper support and guidance. I came to the conclusion that the way things were being run at the center didn't align with my own ethical stances, so I took the decision to remove myself from volunteering. I wanted to focus more on the adventure tourism side of things, because I felt I had more experience in this area at the time.

I decided to branch out on my own and set up my own adventure travel operation. I knew the youth travel and volunteering sector rather well at this point, and I knew GVI was a big player. I originally contacted them to see if they would be interested in the concept of combining adventure travel with

organization. She told me that many volunteers didn't know what to do with themselves when they weren't working and I just couldn't help myself. I suggested putting together a trip. I thought that while these volunteers were working hard to empower local communities, they should also take time to just enjoy themselves, and see more of the country they were volunteering in. I thought we could help them experience more while on their trip and maximize on the short time they were in-country. Packages that combined international volunteering with adventure activities like these weren't done in South Africa at the time, about 15 years ago. We were one of the first, if not the first, to put something like this together.

I put together a three-day Cape Town garden route tour. Participants would leave on the Friday morning and come back on the Sunday evening. We would do wine tasting on the first day along Route 62. They would then visit the Cango Caves, quad bike and abseil in Knysna's Featherbed Reserve, bungee jump and zipline in Tsitsikamma National Park, and finally make

their way back to Cape Town, exhausted after an action-packed few days. Once I had presented the concept to the 20 or 30 volunteers, they all signed up. I wasn't planning on doing it. It was just an idea, but they all signed up on the spot. I had to hire a vehicle as well as someone to help me. I embraced the challenge and two weeks later we were on our first trip. From there on every two weeks we had a group. It just grew and grew through word of mouth.

That's how I got into volunteering and sustainable development. It was never planned. I just sort of fell into it. Before partnering with this volunteer organization I had never volunteered, either locally or internationally. Suddenly I was dealing with international volunteers on a day-to-day basis and I wanted to experience what they were experiencing. I was intrigued. I was inspired by their compassion and commitment to come such a long way to help out communities in a country that was not even their own. I made a request to get involved in volunteering one of their programs and asked where I could

their volunteering. When I called I spoke to Chris Ash, who headed up the GVI partners team at the time. We had a very easy, frank, and open conversation during which I expressed my concerns about the volunteer sector as a whole and told him why I was trying to focus more on the adventure travel component.

At that point, he asked me if I would be available to speak to Richard Walton, GVI's Founder. Within an hour Richard called me and, strangely enough, it felt like talking to an old friend. It was such an informal, easy conversation. There was just a good synergy and I realized that I had found an organization that mirrored my values. About two weeks later I was on a plane to meet Richard in Costa Rica to discuss setting up a program in Cape Town. At the time, GVI had no community programs in South Africa. Richard gave me the freedom, flexibility, support, and guidance to try and set up programs in a way I felt was more ethical and would have a greater impact. This was my opportunity to really make a difference by setting up projects that provided volunteers with training, support, and guidance. I could engage the community to provide guidance on how volunteers and GVI staff could contribute in a meaningful way. Many big international volunteering organizations

were already working in larger informal communities in Cape Town like in Kayamandi or Masiphumelele. I wanted to work in a smaller community that was not already being supported. The community of Nomzamo stood out to me because it is a smaller community on the outskirts of Cape Town, which wasn't already receiving assistance from volunteers. Not only was it a place where volunteers could work together with the community to address challenges, but it was also set in the quaint beach village destination of Gordon's Bay, which would be a great place for volunteers to stay.

One of the first partner organizations that I met with in this community was IkhayaIthemba, a residential care facility. At the time, the facility supported about 60 children. There were several little homes on the property, arranged around a playground, and there was a caregiver assigned to each home. I really loved this approach as it did not feel like a traditional orphanage with big military-style dormitories, but more like a cluster of small families in a village. IkhayaIthemba had a very strong board of trustees at the time, and a benefactor, who had significant input in the running of the program. Very few volunteer organizations had worked with IkhayaIthemba. The benefactor was very protective about

allowing people access to the property to prevent any harm coming to the children. However, they did not have any formal child protection policy at the time. I wrote the benefactor a letter requesting a meeting and was invited to his office which was not on the property, but in a business park. In the middle of our cup of tea, he asked me, 'How much time do you have?' I said, 'As much as you need.' 'Come, let's get in the car,' He replied, 'We're going to the community now.'

A few minutes later, I was on the site of IkhayaIthemba and met Mama Lumka, the inspirational woman behind the facility. Mama expressed concern about how caregivers were not equipped with the skills to facilitate learning, and how there was no structured educational system in place. I realized that this was an ideal opportunity for us to assist these children and others in the community to reach developmental milestones. I found that I could relate on a personal level with what young children in disadvantaged communities like these are exposed to on a day-to-day basis. I understood the great desire for educational support to springboard yourself out of poverty and secure a future. I suggested that we set up a preschool educational program on the site, utilizing input from

**I don't see this as a job.
It's just my life.**

both local and international teachers. 'You have the perfect facilities,' I said to her. 'We can provide the human resources. Let us open the gates to other members of the community and run an educational early childhood facility that engages as many members of the community as possible.' Mama Lumka was a qualified preschool teacher herself and loved the idea. So our journey began. GVI also helped the IkhayaIthemba and the benefactor put together and implement a formal child protection policy.

As the project grew we started getting requests from parents in the wider community for their children to join the program. They were looking for their children to benefit from interacting with international students who could teach them skills to which they would otherwise not have access. That's when we started to expand our work, working not only at IkhayaIthemba, but also at other centers and schools in the area, including the local primary school, ACJ Phakade, and from there the project has grown, directed by teachers and leaders in Nomzamo. These projects are still running today and I am incredibly proud of what we've all been able to achieve together.

In my later work with GVI, I've been involved in the set up of sustainable development programs all around the world, including India, where I worked with volunteers and staff to build a tank to harvest rainwater. As I started being more drawn into work, I was, of course, concerned that it would detract from my ability to create the family environment I knew was so important for my daughters. But it wasn't like that at all. Being a





I wasn't planning on doing it. It was just an idea.

a parent naturally became intertwined with my work life. My children often influence and contribute to my thinking at work, and similarly, I look at how much our volunteers have grown by going to different countries, integrating with different cultures, working in different communities, and pushing themselves outside their comfort zones. This is why I have made sure that my children from a very young age have experienced as many diverse cultures and experiences as possible, not just superficially but at a deeper level.

They've always been very engaged in what I do. They've come on trips with me. They've been to Mama Lumka's hometown and house in the Transkei, an area designated for separate development during South Africa's apartheid era. They've been traveling through China. I encouraged them to stay in homestays. I encouraged them to track orangutans in Borneo, and we debated the increase in palm oil plantations and the effect this was having on primate behavior.

We went to Cambodia and spent a morning visiting an orphanage where my children had been invited to come meet and play with the children there. After our visit, we had a discussion about how they felt about visiting the orphanage. We talked about how they thought the children they had met felt about the visit? Did they enjoy playing with children the same age from a different culture? Was it difficult to communicate as they could not speak the same language? Did they think the children at the orphanages were happy and well taken care of? I encouraged the visit because I wanted my children to understand the different ways in which children live around



the world and to encourage them to think about what they feel is important to children from different backgrounds. I discussed with them the value and importance of family, love, and security. They instantly recognized that these things were of utmost importance. The conclusion for them was that family was the thing they cherished most and they decided that they would never take it for granted. I found this astonishing as they were only six and eight years old at the time. They said that they thought it was important that the children at the orphanage got visitors and they felt the children there were really excited and happy about their visit. They felt it would be very lonely and isolated if the children did not get the opportunity to see and meet other children.

While I was managing our conservation base in Northern South Africa, Fynne-Leigh, my youngest daughter, came on a visit with me. I was so busy I didn't see her in those first few hours. Turns out that while I was away, she had walked into the dorm with the other volunteers, dumped down her little backpack on a bed, and went straight to work. She was determined to be part of the project. When I met up with her a few hours later, she knew her chores and was part of the daily routine. I hardly saw her that whole trip, she was too busy being an integral

part of the conservation team. She is now a strict vegetarian and a fierce protector of our environment and animal rights.

I also drew my eldest, Erin, into a fundraising campaign for the GVI Trust. Erin is adamant that she wants to pursue music, singing, and songwriting as a career. I thought this was the perfect opportunity to test this idea out and see if she liked the work. If she had the grit to handle the pressure and criticism, and most importantly, if she could channel her talent into something worthwhile and not just be drawn in by the glamour and fame. We arranged with ACJ Phakade for their choir to sing John Lennon's song 'Imagine' as an awareness campaign to promote the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals. Erin would lead the song and the GVI Trust would fund the filming and recording. Erin wrote the score, worked with the teachers at ACJ and the choir of 70 primary school students, and produced an adapted version of 'Imagine.' It was a tough job for her. When we were filming, she had to get up early. She experienced the pressure in the studio, and during filming, of having to do multiple takes. We had to go to ACJ a lot and I had to take her out of school early sometimes, which her school didn't like very much. But when the two of us were in the car driving to ACJ, suddenly she was not my



daughter anymore. We were on a tight schedule, we were feeling the pressure, and we both had to deliver, in different ways. Suddenly we were interacting with each other like colleagues on a stressful project as opposed to mother and daughter. It was unbelievable to see her growth during that project. When we arrived at the school the children would flood into the hall and her face would light up. I would just stand back for half an hour while she was setting up and watch them play together. They would teach each other songs and dances, she would sit down and teach students and teachers chords on the piano. It was truly an integrated learning experience for all.

Unfortunately, one day she missed a test at school because the filming went on too late. I had to prioritize. I said, 'Don't worry about it, I'll talk to the school. They'll understand.' They didn't. She still did the test late and got 90%, but they refused to let it count on her report, which reduced her overall mark. We had a good discussion about it. I said, 'Look, I know you know the work and so do you. So it does not reflect on a report card, but you know you can achieve the results and you have successfully fundraised enough to give the ACJ Music Department a piano. In the greater scheme of things what is more valuable? Look at what you have shared and achieved. Here is what you have lost.'

In life, we need to make sacrifices and we need to make choices.' It was a difficult lesson, but one that I think will help her in the future. I believe they've had a fairly unusual upbringing as a result of being so integrated with my lifestyle. For this reason, the traditional educational system has been

a challenge for us in the past and still is at times, but we discuss it and try to manage challenges as they come. I truly think that they show a certain level of maturity for their age. They've been exposed to a real work environment while still having that safety and support available to make sure they are comfortable. This is the same thing we strive to provide our interns and younger participants. My children have been very fortunate to experience the opportunities they've had so far. I would love for as many other children and young adults as possible to have the same safe encouraging opportunities for growth and development.

In some ways, as they've grown older it has become easier to juggle. I can go away for longer periods of time. Of course, it also helps that they have a good relationship with their dad, who is very involved. I think in a lot of families, a mom is definitely more heavily involved in child-rearing, whereas as I can honestly say that in our family it's a 50-50 split of responsibility between their father and I.

In other ways, it has become a little more tricky as they get older. Erin is now going into secondary school and she needs to build those academic foundations if she wants to go to university. When her report came in last year, I was confused but very intrigued. She got unspeakably high results in certain subjects and really mediocre scores in others. I asked her, 'How can it be that you can achieve these incredibly high scores here, and yet have such poor ones in these other subjects?' She said, 'I know what I want to do with my life. I am channeling all my focus into what I know I need to get me where I want

to go in life. I am not wasting time with anything else.' As I was listening to her I was thinking how similar she sounds to many of our younger participants I have talked to who have chosen our internship programs and know exactly what they want to achieve and gain from the experience. Many are extremely focused and driven.

This just goes to show how integrated my family and my working life is. If I were to separate them out I think I would fail in one area or another. The result would be either be that I wouldn't be there for my family because they would not be part of my work life, or I would not be able to deliver at my job, because I would constantly have to switch off and go home, doing only my 9 to 5, Monday-to-Friday day job.

I think this is made possible because I work somewhere like GVI. It started with Richard, he built a team of like-minded people around himself. They were energized by each other and this almost-magnetic pull attracted more of the same kind of passionate people. Most of us in GVI would be friends outside of work. I am still friends with colleagues who have gone on to do other things. If I see people from GVI, we'll just have a beer or a coffee and have the best conversation ever. I'm comfortable inviting anyone from work to my house for dinner. Steve, our CEO, visited us the other day with his family. I know his wife, Britt, very well and our children play together. It's a deep integration. It's not like I can say 'This is my work,' and 'This is my family.' They are deeply integrated because my own beliefs align so perfectly with GVI's core values. I don't see this as a job. It's just my life.

I am channeling all my focus into what I know I need, to get me where I want to go in life.

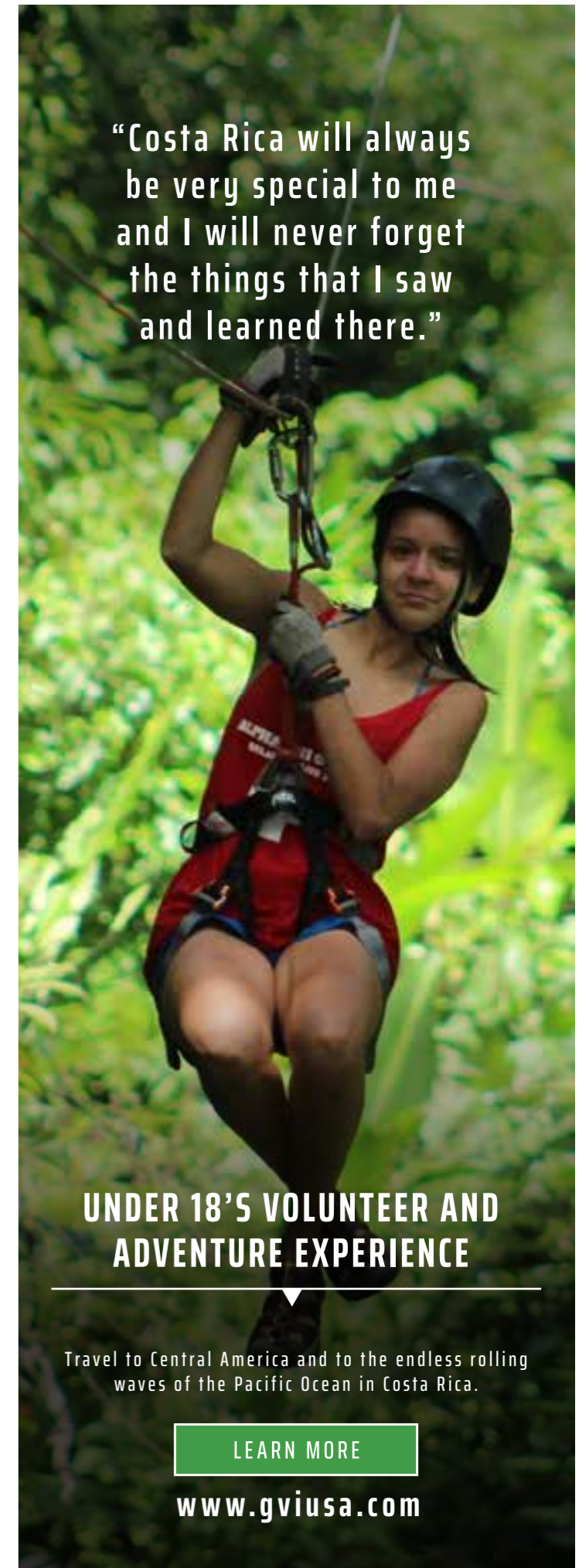
"Costa Rica will always be very special to me and I will never forget the things that I saw and learned there."


UNDER 18'S VOLUNTEER AND ADVENTURE EXPERIENCE

Travel to Central America and to the endless rolling waves of the Pacific Ocean in Costa Rica.

LEARN MORE

www.gviusa.com





BRIDGING CULTURE WITH CURIOSITY

BY PEERAYA CHAIWISET



Peeraya Chaiwiset was born a global citizen. An inner hunger to learn more not only about other cultures, but how these cultures are experienced and shaped by individual people, inspired her to master a language she could use to speak to the many international visitors who make their way to Thailand each year. She chose English and her dedication won her a place at a top university as well as a scholarship from a prestigious organization. Today, she is a teacher in her home province where she encourages students to practice a new language in their everyday lives and continues her own studies in Italian.

I grew up in a small town on the coast of Southern Thailand, in Krabi province, a popular tourist destination known for its crystal clear waters, expansive beaches, and remote islands. Unfortunately, many of the local people in Krabi only speak Thai, which means most can't speak to the visitors or learn more about them. I'm different. I've always wanted to learn how people from other places live, what their personal

interests are, which movies they're watching, which books they're reading, what they love to eat, and just exactly how they connect with other people. In order to find out, I knew I would need to learn a popular language, like English, because it would give me a good chance of speaking to the most people.

Like other Thai students, I'd been studying English at school for many years. I was very familiar with English language grammar, and could easily pass a written test, but I wasn't comfortable expressing myself in English. One day, in Grade 11, a friend I've had since kindergarten told me about a conversational English class I could attend for free where they would teach me to express myself in English within three months time. He'd been attending for two months already and said it was both fun and helped him learn. This is how I first came into contact with GVI. Before I could attend a class, the GVI staff and volunteers conducted an assessment of my English language skills at the time. I found out that they work on a six scale system of proficiency and they thought I would be best

suiting to a level three class. When I first stepped into the level three class, I was a bit confused. In this same class there was an older lady, a little boy, an older man, and some boys my age. I was surprised by the diversity of age groups because, in school, everyone in a class is usually of the same age. I was intimidated by being in a class with someone who is older than me, because, in Thai culture, it is important to respect your elders. And then, as we all started introducing ourselves, I began to relax because I could see that we were all on the same level and were keen to help one another express ourselves. Besides, when we played games to help us learn, the lines between ages blurred and everyone, including the 60-year-old, quickly started acting like a seven-year-old. I still miss my time in these classes.

Being in GVI's conversation classes also helped me connect with other people from my district. When I would go to the market or on a beach I would see someone from the GVI class and they would be able to give me a lift to school or anywhere else I was going. The classes helped make the community

The classes helped make the community stronger.

stronger. I also made some great friends from around the world in these classes, including Lana from Canada, who's about my age and has an interest in languages. After only four months I moved to level six and felt comfortable holding a conversation in English. People always told me English is very difficult to master and many are scared of learning a new language. But I enjoy learning languages, and when something is fun, you forget that it is challenging. You just relax and talk.

My classmates started to notice that I was good at English and in Grade 12 they'd often ask me to review the work with them before a test. I would get up, stand in front of the board, like a teacher, and do a quick review of the work with them for about ten minutes. In the end, some even got a higher scores than





I did on the test. When the time came to decide what I wanted to do after school, I spoke to my dad and he suggested I become a teacher because he noticed I enjoyed teaching. It was his dream to become a teacher, so he encouraged me to pursue this as a career. But to do that I would need to get into university.

More than 200 students apply to get into Rajabhat university, but only 30 are accepted. During the entrance exam, I was surprised to find that I could comfortably answer all the questions. Almost every second question related to something I had learned in the GVI class. All I had to do was think back to something one of the volunteers had spoken to me about. All my skills were there. That's how I got into university.

In my second year, my professor asked me whether I would like to apply for a scholarship. Although my dad was able to support me, my accommodation was costly, which meant that my remaining funds didn't stretch too far. The scholarship was offered by the Rogetien Foundation, an organization that supports students interested in becoming English or Mathematics

teachers. It is a very prestigious opportunity as only eight students in Thailand are awarded the scholarship each year.

Who gets the scholarship is decided based on an interview so I had to travel to Bangkok to sit with decision-makers at the organization. I was quite confident and relaxed on the way there, but when I went into the interview room, I saw all the other second year students and got a little worried. I thought, 'This is my competition. I need to be on their level. I need to outdo them.'

When I entered the interview room I saw that there were ten people there. It took a lot of effort to calm myself down, focus, and try to answer their questions to the best of my abilities. Luckily, I had brought the certificate I had received upon completing the GVI course with me. When they asked me if I had any qualifications I presented to them and they were very impressed. Right there and then, in the interview room, they said, 'You've got it.' I immediately phoned my dad, and then Lana from GVI, saying 'I got it!'

During my time at university I focused on getting more comfortable speaking English. My friends and I would make a plan to speak the language every day, even when we were chatting online. We found that although progress was slow it helped the work stay fresh in our minds. Even during the time when like we were doing our practical terms at schools around Thailand in our 4th year we stayed in touch over Facebook practicing our language skills.

After graduating I taught at high school level, but found that I was looking for more of a challenge. I decided to try teaching at primary school level and found that teaching language to young learners is far more difficult. When I first conducted a primary school class, I was surprised by how little they

knew. They couldn't understand 'my name is', the alphabet, or numbers. I started at the beginning, teaching them some basic things. I also found I could not explain things to them in English, because they knew so little. However, I still wanted to use as much English as possible to get them use to the language. I would explain the concept to them in English and then I would translate it into Thai so that they could understand the meaning and finally I would have them repeat the English translation after me. Things take longer this way, but now, five months later, they can use many of the basics. They also aren't very motivated to come to class on their own so I read a lot of psychology books about younger students to find out how to get them excited about the work. Whenever I hear 'hello' or 'how are you?' I try to give them a compliment so that they will learn that it's a good thing to practice their language skills.

My passion for languages also doesn't stop at English. A short while ago I heard a song in a language I thought was very beautiful. I found out that the song was called 'A Chi Mi Dice' by Blue and the beautiful language was Italian. Around the same time I also saw 'Letters to Juliet' a film set partly in Italy which introduced me to Italian food and culture. I decided to start learning Italian, first the alphabet and then counting, like children do at the beginning. I have been finding it challenging, but very rewarding. I recently found a site that allows you to



My passion for languages also doesn't stop at English.

partner with someone who can teach you the language you would like to learn. It's a kind of language exchange program where I teach Thai and learn Italian.

I will soon be co-teaching with an American as well as an Italian teacher and I am very much looking forward to the experience because I will get to practice both languages. It is not always easy finding people who are willing to practice with you, especially at a local school. I have found that the more you practice, the faster you improve, but that if you don't practice you start losing parts of your vocabulary.

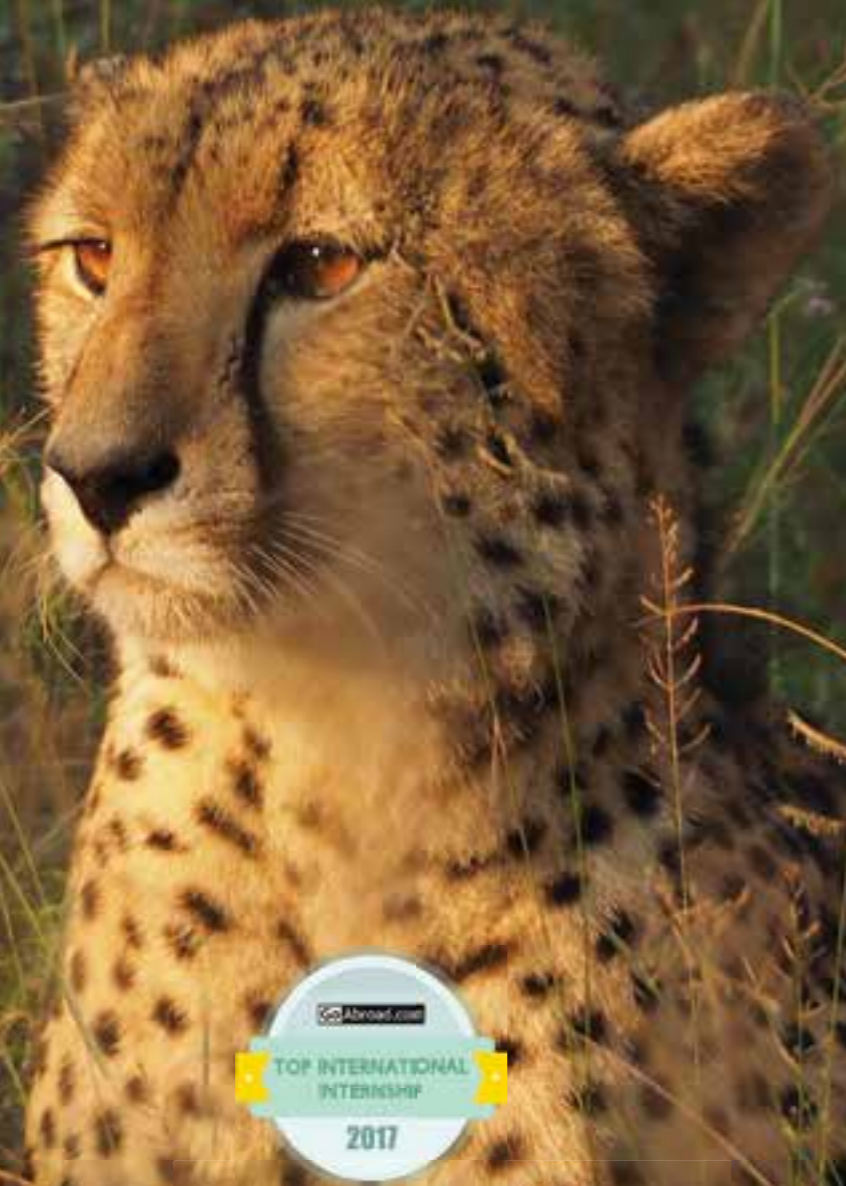
I would like to one day teaching abroad, but I haven't had the opportunity yet. I would like to know more about the education system in other countries and compare these to the Thai system. I would also like to explore the rest of Asia and learn more about the similarities and differences in cultures across the region.



APPROXIMATELY

7100

CHEETAHS REMAIN
IN THE WILD.



SAFARI FIELD GUIDE COURSE IN SOUTH AFRICA

Join us in South Africa's Lowveld region,
one of the world's best big game territories and
train to become a qualified field guide.

LEARN MORE

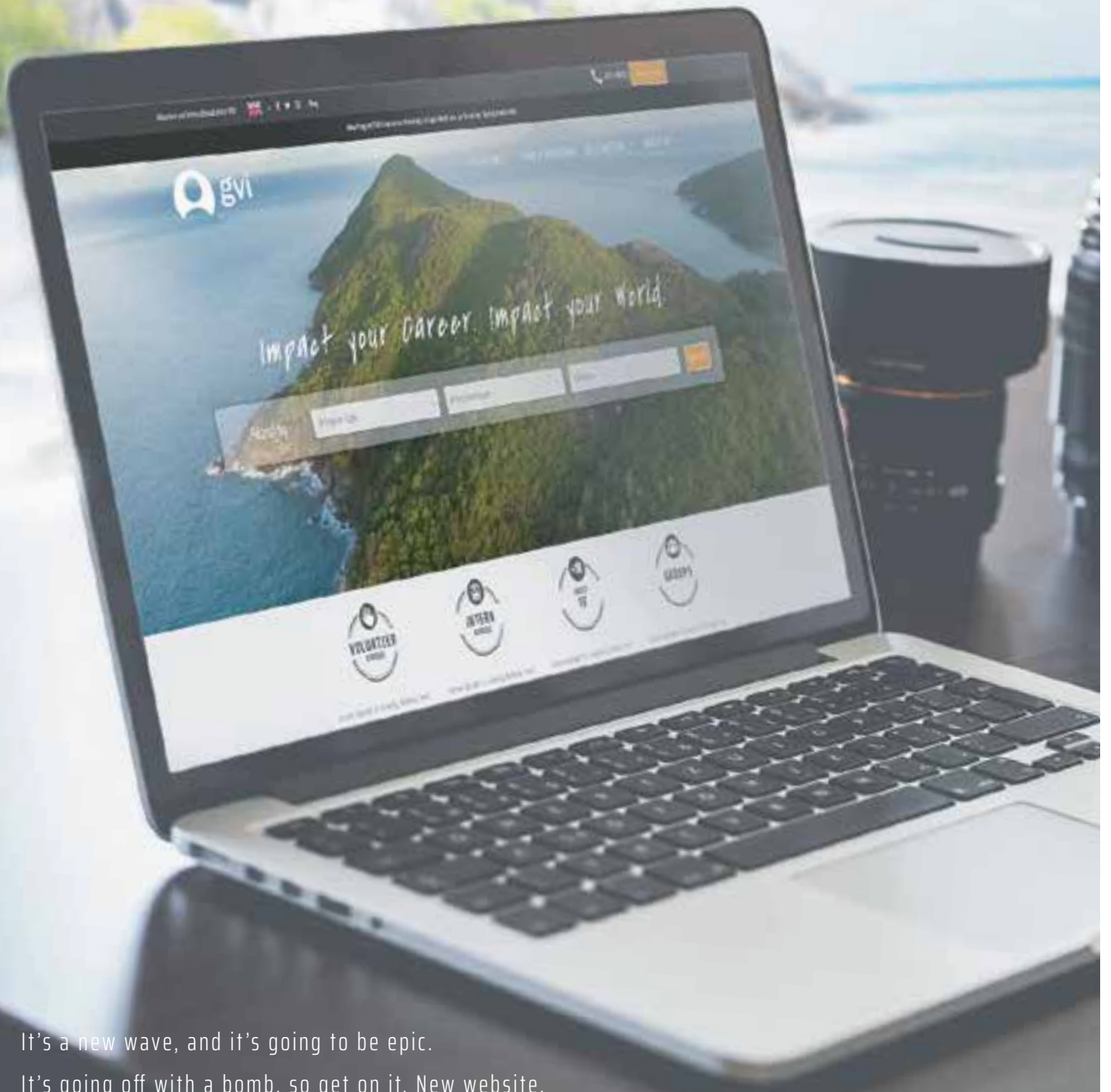
www.gviusa.com



GoAbroad.com

MEANINGFUL TRAVEL
STARTS HERE

SURF OUR NEW LOCATIONS



It's a new wave, and it's going to be epic.
It's going off with a bomb, so get on it. New website,
new programs, and new locations. Surf's up!

www.gviusa.com | www.gvi.co.uk |     

