

Lumos Final Report

Even now, I can hardly believe I spent eight months in South Africa. While I was there, it seemed like such a long time but now that it's over, it seemed like it went by in a flash.

It wasn't my first time to South Africa. I had been there during my junior year at Belmont. I studied abroad there for four and a half months and fell hopelessly in love with the country, its people, its beauty and all of its complexities. So when I left I knew I was coming back. How many people do you know that have ridden both an elephant and an ostrich? Well I did both and so many other amazing things.



Fast forward to July 2011, almost two years exactly after I left for South Africa before, I was on a plane headed to South Africa and strangely, I felt like I was going home. Sure, I was going to a different part of South Africa, but it was still South Africa. I was landing in the same airport I had landed in before and consequently landing around the same time: at night. I remember the first time I was saddened to learn I was landing in the dark, but the next morning, I was utterly thrilled by what I saw. It was so beautiful.

So I landed in the dark, again but this time I had a remote idea where I was going. I knew we headed away from Cape Town which left me a bit distraught. Even though I had landed in the same way, at the same airport, the next eight months were drastically different from my first time.

Like I already said, I wasn't living in Cape Town. Instead I lived in Gordon's Bay, a small city about two hours east of Cape Town. The living situation was also quite different. Last time I had my own room. This time I once shared a room with three other people. That in itself gave me a shock.

Besides that, the major difference between this time and last time was what I was doing. Last time I was studying abroad so I was the one being taught. This time I was the one doing the teaching, but I still learned a lot, maybe even more than the first time.

My sponsoring organization was Global Vision International (GVI) and as the name suggests, it has programs all over the world. I chose my particular program because it was in South Africa and it involved teaching. My first time in South Africa I volunteered at a primary school and loved it. I was thinking about becoming a teacher but I wasn't sure if it was the right choice for me so GVI's long term teaching program was a perfect fit for me.

During my first two weeks, I worked as a regular short term volunteer. In the mornings I did one to one math tutoring sessions with sixth grade students and then in the afternoons I had reading focus groups with four sixth graders and then a school-wide workshop. We could only take 15 students and usually we had a line of students waiting for us. We almost always had to turn students away but it was awesome to see how many students were eager to learn (the workshop was completely voluntary).

The one-to-ones were probably my favorite because you really got to focus on one child and you could really see the difference in just two weeks. One-to-ones also allowed me to get to know the children really well which made my job easier. I could discover what worked and what didn't and we were able to make lots of progress.



Me and Onke one of my one-to-ones

After my first two weeks, I switched to my actual program. I worked as a teacher's assistant in sixth grade classrooms. My subjects were English and math so I worked closely with the teachers who taught those subjects.

The change from short term to long term was dramatic. As a short term volunteer, the schedule is fairly strict. You get the students you work with and bring them to the GVI classroom, work with them for the allotted time and then go back and get another student. As a long term teacher, it was completely different. The schedule was flexible, to say the least. Class periods were only supposed to be forty minutes but usually ended up taking two hours and topics that were supposed to be taught, weren't. I was often thrown into the ringer, asked to teach a topic I wasn't even told I was going to teach. It was very challenging.



Having too much fun creating 3D shapes from toothpicks and candy

There was some structure to my days. I worked with one teacher each day and then on Fridays, I would have time to plan or sometimes I did one-to-ones with fourth graders. I enjoyed that because I could control my one-to-ones much more than the work I did in the classroom. But the experience taught me to be flexible. After a while, I was no longer surprised by the lack of structure. Quite the opposite, I was surprised if things did go according to plan.

After a few weeks, I soon discovered that English was not my forte. Who made up all these silly rules? I found English very difficult to teach with its rules and many, many exceptions and I also developed a profound respect for my past English teachers. Hats off to you!

It was really helpful to find out the things that I liked and the things I didn't because if I ever do decide to teach, I know that I would want to teach math. I have always been fairly good at math so teaching it came pretty easy and it also got me thinking about math in a different way because often the way you learn won't work for your students. You have to be able to teach the same thing in different ways because everyone learns differently and that skill is indispensable.

One of the hardest things about working at the school was the rules about discipline. At the school and throughout much of South Africa, it is considered acceptable to hit a child as a way of discipline. It was

horrific to see especially when there was nothing I could do about it. It happened so often that at some points during my stay I just got numb to it, which I think is even worse. Mostly I would just leave the classroom when this happen and talk to my coordinator about it. Unfortunately, there really isn't much we can do to prevent this from happening other than suggest other ways to discipline.

The school also had another volunteer program. The sports program provided lessons for fourth through seventh graders. Right now, the school doesn't have the resources to offer sport lessons on its own so GVI provides them. I helped out with sports lessons several times and while it was challenging because the kids didn't want to listen, I also enjoyed the change in pace and seeing the talent of the students.

Part of the sports program is the surfing program. They take a group of sixth graders and give them free lessons a year. The kids absolutely love it and they're great at it too. I got to help out with surfing as well which was a lot of fun.



Outside of the school, GVI was very good at letting long term volunteers experience other projects. GVI had several other projects in the same area as the school and I got to experience them all. My absolute favorite was the orphanage. They were probably some of the cutest and happiest kids I've ever met. At the orphanage, volunteers work with special needs children and other children whose parents for whatever reason couldn't take care of them. There is a lot of singing and playtime which was always a

welcomed break from the school. The volunteers also taught lessons with four to five kids and volunteers always had to have several backup plans if the original lesson plan didn't work.



Athule- one of my favorite little girls

Besides being able to experience other projects, I also got the opportunity to help the orphanage in a unique way. GVI held its first charity challenge which was a five day challenge where volunteers biked 350 km (over 200 miles) in order to raise money for the orphanage and other projects. It was so much fun! Don't get me wrong. It was difficult but I loved the challenge and it was awesome to help the kids out in this totally unique way.



[So excited to be done!](#)

The nursery was another project located right across the street from the school. School volunteers often got to go over there after the school day was done and play with the kids which I always loved. The kids were always so cute and so excited to see you. The nursery was definitely another highlight from my trip.



Nursery or jail cell?

While the projects did take a considerable amount of time, I was left with a surprising amount of free time, especially considering the time it took to create lesson plans. Housing was close to a supermarket and a dance studio so I started trying out dance classes and finally settled on Nia, a mix of various dance styles including jazz, modern dance and even some marshal arts.

GVI also provided social nights which were always lots of fun. They could be anything from watching a movie, to scavenger hunts, to trivia and everything in between. They even threw me an engagement party where people made wedding dresses out of trash bags and whatever else they could find. It was a lot of fun.



Some of the creations

Overall my trip to South Africa was amazing. I learned so much about the country and about myself. I know I will always treasure those memories. What I miss the most, even now, are the children. Their smiling faces are the things I hold most dear and they were the ones that made it so hard to leave. But I know I'll be back someday. South Africa is not just a fun place to visit for me. It's like a second home and I can't wait to go back.



One of my reading focus groups



Anathi- such a beautiful baby boy!



My home for 8 months: Journey's End!



Trash Bag Social Night



Got to pet the big kitty



Sandboarding- like snowboarding only with sand



Me and my girls