International Education
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SPRING 2006

ON THE COVER
Students on the study program in South Africa ride the historic rails through Nelson Mandela Bay. Pictured clockwise from left: Kara VonderHaar, Nicole Naumann, Mark Frees, Michael Scharenbroich, Amber Wacek, Lila Gilbert, Juliet Nguyen and Savo Heleta.

Photo: Katy Pfannenstein ’06

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Nobel Prize-winner Lech Walesa shared his unique perspective as a non-violent combatant in the Cold War in an address Nov. 30, before an appreciative and packed house in the Abbey Church on the SJU campus. Using gentle humor, he chided the world’s only superpower to exercise moral leadership in his public lecture, “The Legacy of Solidarity in Poland: Twenty Five Years Later.”

Hosted by CSB and SJU, his visit was sponsored by the University Chair in Critical Thinking at SJU. In welcoming remarks, Nick Hayes, holder of the University Chair in Critical Thinking, hailed Walesa as the “outstanding Catholic statesman of our time.” Br. Dietrich Reinhart, SJU president, observed that, while historians tend to dismiss the role of the individual as an agent of change, “We live in a world deeply in debt to the fact that our guest made a decision to make a difference when he jumped a shipyard fence on Aug. 14, 1980.”

Walesa, in his version of the downfall of Soviet power, delivered a modest account of events that catapulted him to the world stage, but first he tried to convey the unique geo-political circumstances the Polish people historically have faced.

Poland, located between Asia and Europe, between Germany and Russia, has provided the most direct route for warring adventurers, he explained. And sometimes, while passing through, the invading armies decided to stay and occupy. At one time, he noted, Poland was erased from the world map for 120 years. This history of invasion and occupation has given the Polish people a special sensitivity, an ability to anticipate what others might choose to ignore.

Before World War II, for example, Poland tried to warn the world about German aggression, “but the world would not listen. At the end of the war, the Polish people were the only ones to wait...”

Walesa continued next page
CSB/SJU Ranked No. 3

The Open Doors Report ranked CSB/SJU No. 3 among baccalaureate institutions for total number of study abroad students. Open Doors is an annual report on international education published by the Institute of International Education (IIE).

The two schools had a total of 565 students study abroad during the 2003-04 academic year, according to data released by the IIE. The ranking continues the schools' leading edge among baccalaureate institutions for both the number and percentage of students who study internationally. About six in 10 CSB students study internationally before they graduate, a participation rate nearly twice the national average for liberal arts colleges. For the past two years, Saint Benedict and Saint John's have together been among the top three undergraduate liberal arts colleges nationally in the number of students participating in international study programs. Since 1999, CSB and SJU have sent more than 2,500 to study on six different continents.

Before graduating, half of all CSB/SJU students will participate in one of CSB/SJU's 16 semester-long programs. The programs, located in 13 countries on six continents, are led by faculty.

"CSB/SJU offers a broad spectrum of choices for students interested in global learning and expanding their career options," said Dallas Kenny, dean of international and experiential education at CSB/SJU.

Kenny noted that the programs allow students to gain proficiency in international languages such as Chinese, Spanish, French, German and Japanese, and to apply their knowledge in real-life internships and service activities in international organizations, communities and companies, "and we are delighted to be nationally recognized, and excited that more and more of our students seek out these

AROUND CAMPUS

realize that Stalin was trying to trick the world. And what happened to us then? Fifty years of struggle to get rid of the system imposed by Stalin," Walesa recalled the hopelessness of resistance. "We stood no chance," he said, against nuclear weapons and Soviet power. They stood no chance, until they were given "the gift of a Polish pope."

Before the visit to Poland by Pope John Paul II, people did not have the courage to oppose communism. However, when John Paul II came to Poland, "The world looked on in astonishment as Polish people flocked to see the pope." Although the pope never encouraged them to fight communism, his visit galvanized their courage as they realized they were "a nation of believers." Having recounted then, how the Polish people traversed from hopelessness to defeating a murderous system "without a single shot," Walesa challenged the world's remaining superpower to exercise political and moral leadership in the era of globalization.

Walesa's visit was especially memorable for CSB and SJU international students from Poland. "For me personally, the visit of Lech Walesa was an amazing experience. It was like meeting a living legend, moreover a legend from my own country. I was very proud that I could welcome him here, in the United States, as a student of Saint John's University," said Adam Blaszkiewicz. CSB student Marta Gago agreed. "I was extremely delighted to see him. He is the biggest icon in history of Poland and it was a great honor to meet him," Gago said. Mateusz Krasnicki said he never had the chance to meet Walesa or to see him in real life while in Poland, only occasionally watching him on TV. Krasnicki, who works with Life Safety at SJU, was assigned to Walesa's security detail, giving him the opportunity to meet Poland's national hero in person.
incredible opportunities to study abroad,” said Kristi Kremers, CSB/SJU global education coordinator. “The credit for our remarkable standing goes directly to the campus community, which has made great strides to infuse international education throughout the four-year experience at CSB/SJU.

“It is absolutely critical that our graduates have the tools and skills to compete in today’s global workforce, and clearly our students, faculty and administrators recognize this and rise to the challenges presented,” Kremers added.

(Left) Junior Ben Ivory in the altiplano of Chile; the Andes are in the background.

(Below) Katy Pfannenstein visits a small village after climbing Mount Kenya. She was on a side trip from her program in South Africa.

Hallmark Features of Global Learning Unique at CSB/SJU

CSB/SJU has the highest number of faculty-led semester abroad programs among liberal arts colleges in the U.S.

Over one-third of CSB/SJU faculty have led study abroad programs.

CSB/SJU has full-semester study abroad programs on six continents, with an average of 23 students in each program.

CSB/SJU offers over 200 courses with global and inter-cultural content.

Ten percent of CSB/SJU faculty teach international languages.

Of the 165 colleges and universities which make up the ASIANetwork, CSB/SJU is in the top one percent in sending teachers to Asia. No other U.S. Catholic college or university sends more teachers to Asia than CSB/SJU.
A Journey to the Other Side of the World and Back

By Glenda Isaacs Burgeson

Julie Berglund ’04 took a different path to graduate school, via a small, impoverished village in West Africa. Along the way, she learned to speak French, discovered unfathomable dimensions of poverty and the human spirit, and fell in love. Mainly, she learned about herself.

Now a graduate student in medical physics at the University of Wisconsin–Madison, Berglund recalled the apprehension she felt at the College of Saint Benedict as graduation approached.

“I had just reached the halfway point of my senior year and was finally beginning to grasp the fact that the majority of my time at CSB was behind me and that the future was fast approaching,” she said. “I was still in the thick of my senior thesis so my thoughts and concerns were pretty well anchored to the present, but at the same time I was beginning to dream about the possibilities ahead of me.”

Like many college seniors, she knew she wanted to pursue graduate studies, but she wasn’t ready to take that step.

“I was restless and wanted to learn more about myself and more about the world beyond the bubble of academia. And so I applied to the Peace Corps.”

She received her assignment during finals week: Guinea, a small French-speaking country in West Africa, teaching physics to high school students. She didn’t speak French, but, no matter, she knew physics.

“I naively assumed that science and math are the same in any language,” she recalled.

When she set foot on African soil in July, along with 17 other trainees, the college graduate from Henning, Minn., began a new education.

“The moment my foot hit the ground, my worldview changed forever. I learned more during our bus ride from the airport to our destination for the night than I have ever found in a book or classroom.”

Guinea is one of the poorest countries in the world, she explained, as she struggled to describe the leap she made from knowing intellectually that poverty exists to seeing its grinding realism up close.

“The bus ride became a metaphor of sorts, representing the division between haves and have-nots, while also delivering her from her comfortable world to the unknown.

“I was riding in a spacious, air-conditioned bus, looking out at dirty, crowded streets and seeing 30 faces looking back at me,” she said.

“Seeing extreme poverty for the first time wiped all of the rational words and explanations from my head. I still do not have the words to explain how it felt. It was like feeling my soul cry out and realizing its voice is not just my own.”

In time, as she recovered from the shock, she began to appreciate the resiliency of the human spirit. While she had gone to Guinea to teach others, she discovered the people of Guinea had much to teach her.

“Where at first I saw only suffering, I soon recognized the everyday beauty and joy in the lives of those around me.”

She was able to see beyond the barriers between privileged and underprivileged and recognize a bond of common humanity.

“All too often, in pleas for charity, we see images of sad, suffering people. While I think it’s important to point out how unfortunate their circumstances are, poverty becomes a lot more moving
when we realize it afflicts people just like us rather than some different sort of sad, miserable people. They laugh just as hard, they love just as deeply, and they share the same hopes and dreams as those of us living in more developed countries. In a word, they are normal.”

In her first three months in Guinea, Berglund faced the challenge as a foreigner of learning to live a normal life; in the process, she learned the lesson of the Benedictine value of humility. While undergoing training, she lived with a host family and had to depend on the very people she had come to help.

“My host family cooked for me, carried heavy buckets of pump water for me and taught me how to wash my clothes by hand. Without them, especially one of my little brothers, I would have been completely helpless — especially since I was just beginning to learn French. It was a very humbling experience and an important element of my training,” she said.

After training, she was assigned to Bissikrima, a village about eight hours upcountry from the capital of Conakry. There, she taught physics six hours a week to 60 ninth graders and 80 10th graders. She also opted to teach an English club for an extra two to three hours each week.

“I was a little nervous at first, but I soon became comfortable. As my French improved, I was able to communicate better and made more friends in the community.”

She biked to friends’ nearby villages to meet their families, went to dances, celebrated births, and mourned deaths.

“Basically, I lived. Some days I was profoundly happy, others I was lonely and scared. But I always knew that I had made the right decision in signing up for the Peace Corps.”

After a year, however, her restlessness returned. She missed the challenge and stimulation of school, and, after much soul searching, decided to return to the United States and attend graduate school.

“Life gets complicated after college, but I think my time at CSB played a monumental role in preparing me for it,” Berglund said. “Classes like ‘Great Books,’ ‘Reading for Life,’ and ‘Why War?’ that I managed to sneak in beside all of my physics and math courses taught me that there are rarely clear answers to life’s biggest questions.

Looking back, I do not even remember many of the naive conclusions I reached during our heated class discussions. But I sure do remember the feeling of fully engaging my heart and mind in the quest for understanding and struggling with the meaning of it all.

“In the end, the most important thing I learned at CSB is not a thing at all. It is not a fact or an opinion but rather how to uncover facts for myself and form my own opinions.”

Berglund credits the CSB/SJU faculty for helping her gain the self-confidence to create her own path in life. Their influence extended far beyond the classroom and helped her to develop personally as well as professionally, she said.

“After spending a year teaching in Guinea, I have a much greater understanding and appreciation of everything they did for me and am truly grateful and humbled before them.”

In retrospect, Berglund said the past two years have been remarkably rich and rewarding.

“I have literally been to the other side of the world and back.”

Her admission to graduate school is not the only change in her life, however. Among the life-changing experiences she encountered in Guinea was one she least expected. She met and fell in love with her fiancé, Edil Raffi, a graphic designer from Guinea. He has left his homeland to join her in Madison. The couple plans to marry this spring.
Idiatou Barry (a 9th grade student), Edil Raffi (Julie’s fiancé), Julie Berglund, Mr. Condé and the boy in front is Baïlo Camara, a 6th grade student who helped Julie with her garden.
Growing up in the 1980s, Matt Lindstrom heard a message from the Irish rock band U2.

“Their music has – in part – influenced my decision to care about politics and political life,” said Lindstrom, an associate professor of political science at the College of Saint Benedict and Saint John’s University. “They write songs about political issues and political events, and why it’s important to care.

“The idea that you can care, be involved and have fun all at the same time strikes me as a pretty good deal,” said Lindstrom, laughing.

That reasoning is also the idea behind the Public Policy Learning Community (PPLC), which Lindstrom serves as director.

“The Public Policy Learning Community is rooted in the Benedictine values of the common good and community service,” Lindstrom said. “We believe that civic engagement can be enjoyable and reinvigorating, and sometimes the best learning takes place outside of the classroom.”

The PPLC, which involves faculty and students from economics, sociology, political science and several other disciplines, seeks to create opportunities involving scholarship and experiential learning activities such as internships, study tours, speakers and conferences. The PPLC supported over 100 CSB/SJU students going to different conferences, workshops and political activities during the fall 2005 semester, including Campus Camp Wellstone in October, sending four students in November to the Reagan Ranch in Santa Barbara, Calif., sending two students to the United States Military Academy and leading 10 students on a study tour of the Iron Range in December.

“One of the things I’m really trying to encourage among students on the two campuses is political and community involvement,” said Lindstrom, a 1992 graduate of Saint John’s. “It strikes me as very important today that students learn how they can participate beyond voting; but they also need to learn various methods of communication. Much of the political discourse (today) is quite bombastic. It’s what I call bumper sticker politics. It’s slogans, sound bites and ad hominem attacks and personal insults.”

The PPLC brings the students who attend the conferences and workshops into a “debriefing” session called political dialogues. It’s a dinner, followed by a discussion about what the students learned and how they can apply that to their own lives.

“Students had to listen, or had the opportunity to listen, to folks from different political views talk about...”
what they learned at these conferences. Perhaps most importantly, we were showcasing active citizenship across the political spectrum,” Lindstrom said.

“I thought (the PPLC) was a great idea,” said Peter Polga-Hecimovich, a junior from Burnsville, Minn., who is majoring in political science. He said the PPLC provides students the forum to engage in political dialogue.

Lindstrom said the faculty-student trip to the Iron Range provided a venue to learn more about global markets as well as the importance of political subcultures on the Range. Vanessa Williams, a sophomore from Maplewood, Minn., said she appreciated the chance to visit the Iron Range. During the tour, the students dubbed themselves the “Power Rangers.”

“It really provided an opportunity to learn about things I would have never experienced. I got to experience a lot of learning opportunities,” Williams said.

Sitting down at the same table of a political opponent can be sometimes frustrating to the students, Lindstrom said. “I wouldn’t say by the end of these gatherings we’re singing ‘Kum Ba Yah,’ but that’s not the purpose,” he said. “Ideally, there’s an increased level of tolerance. That doesn’t mean agreement necessarily. That just means I’m going to listen to you. And, I’m going to respond with a reasoned response, with my own counter evidence. I’m not going to call you an idiot, a moron or whatever. I’m just not sure how far that gets us at the end of the day.”

Initially, Saint John’s sophomore Chris Van Guilder from Delano, Minn., wasn’t sure what to expect from the PPLC and the dialogue sessions. But listening to opposing points of view in a civil manner helped solidify his political beliefs.

“To completely understand your position and beliefs, you have to listen to the opposing viewpoints,” Van Guilder said. “You have a chance to self-reflect on your own beliefs, and why you believe in that. You have the opportunity to solidify your views.”

“I’m not necessarily trying to force an ethic of compromise or an ethic of moderate politics per se,” Lindstrom said. “I want to encourage students to be civically involved, to be excited about politics, and if their own politics is Paul Wellstone style, or Tim Pawlenty’s style, or Newt Gingrich’s style, that’s up to them. But we want students to go beyond the bumper sticker rhetoric and have an appreciation for the complexity involved in political, social and economic issues.”

“He (Lindstrom) cares a lot about what happens in the public sector, and that’s why this is so great,” Van Guilder said.
Explosion Sets Career Path in Motion

By Glenda Isaacs Burgeson

It wasn’t exactly a kick in the head that launched Captain Dan Kersten’s ’99 career path. Rather, it was an exploding potato cannon. The homemade contraption blew up near his face, leading to a trip to the emergency room for the high school senior, and subsequent visits to specialists for extensive dental reconstruction.

That experience inspired him to pursue a career in dentistry, which, in turn, influenced him to attend SJU, where, incidentally, he met a CSB student who is now his fiancée. The decision to attend SJU also led to another life-changing choice. He joined ROTC to help finance his education, a move that has taken him, since receiving his doctor of dental surgery degree from the University of Minnesota School of Dentistry, to a military assignment in Germany, where he used every spare moment to explore much of western Europe, and, later, to a heart-thumping nighttime flight in a Blackhawk helicopter skimming above the rooftops of Baghdad.

Kersten said the dental profession appealed to him because, through the examples of the practitioners who repaired his dental damage, he realized he could achieve a number of objectives. “I could give back to others, improve lives and someday own my own business.” He chose SJU primarily because of its academic excellence and reputation for preparing future health professionals. Still, as an undergraduate with the next eight years neatly scheduled, he worried. Would he be prepared for the rigors of dental school? Where would he attend dental school? Where would the Army assign him? And, after the Army, what then?

He needn’t have worried. After admission to the U of M, Kersten discovered he was well prepared for the academic demands ahead. He also realized that SJU had prepared him, not just academically.

“SJU left me with an invigorating desire to get as much out of life as possible,” he said, and he realized that to experience life to its fullest meant taking some risks and challenging himself. He also recognized the value of community he had experienced at SJU.

“I quickly realized that SJU was a truly unique experience and that the sense of community is not as easy to experience at a large university.”

He began to exercise the leadership skills he had honed during ROTC to create community. In the process, he began to accomplish the first two of his career goals, to give back to others and to improve lives. One of 12 energetic dental fraternity roommates living in the same old house for four years, he and his roommates adopted the motto “Work Hard, Play Hard.” Together, they organized philanthropic events, helping families during the holidays, serving at the local Ronald McDonald House, and raising funds for charity. During dental school, his classmates elected him as fraternity president, class president and student council president. The greatest honor, he said, was their vote of confidence for him to deliver the DDS class of 2003 graduation speech.
After graduation, the doubt he experienced as an undergrad about his Army assignment also proved unfounded. The Army Dental Corps offered a few one-year dental residencies across the country and one dental residency that was a bit different. Kersten applied for and was accepted into a one-year residency in Kaiserlautern, Germany. It was a perfect fit for the adventurous young man from Kimball, Minn. He was off to see the world.

Into that one-year residency he packed as much adventure and travel across Europe as possible, often driving his own Chevy Cavalier that the Army shipped over from Minnesota.

"On a Friday night, I would occasionally make the four-hour drive to Paris and spend a weekend in the shadows of the Eiffel Tower," he said.

European adventures included weekends with local friends in their thousand-year-old family castles, sitting side by side with locals at traditional restaurants, and touring nearly every major city in Europe.

After a wonderful year in the Army's dental residency and gallivanting across Europe, Kersten received an assignment for an adventure of a different sort, one with decidedly less appeal, a one-year residency in Kaiserlautern, Germany. The news "knocked the wind out of my free-spirited sail. For a few days, it hit me like a ton of bricks," he recalled.

Adventures in Europe included flying to Rome on the weekend or gallivanting to Paris on the weekend or flying to Rome for a few days.

"Instead, I was making the best of it, carrying a weapon and ammo everywhere, getting accustomed to explosions and living in hot, dusty conditions. The weekends were like any ordinary day. Except for attending services on Sunday morning, there was really nothing that distinguished one day of the week from any other," he said.

As he adjusted to his new surroundings, he began to enjoy aspects of dentistry in a combat zone. Located 12 miles northwest of Baghdad on a large base called Camp Taji, his small one-room dental practice was staffed with a dental hygienist and dental assistant, furnished with two dental chairs and adorned with Saint John's posters on the walls.

Because of an overwhelming workload and lack of specialized equipment, Kersten said he was somewhat limited in the advanced dental procedures he could perform. His biggest accomplishment resulted from his lobbying his superiors to designate and fund a building devoted to dentistry.

"During the last month of my tour, the new dental clinic saw its first patient. This dental clinic brought together all three dentists working on Camp Taji and, in our last month, we helped over 1,000 dental patients." Approximately 75 percent of their patients were U.S. military members, of whom 50 percent were active duty, 25 percent reserve; the other 25 percent were a combination of foreign military, detainees and U.S. contractors.

Practice in a war zone, with its multi-language barriers, presented challenges. Sometimes the non-English speaking patients were accompanied by an interpreter. "Occasionally the interpreter actually spoke English," he said. "Other times, I would explain a procedure, the interpreter would say 'yes' to anything I said, and the patient clearly had no idea they were going to get teeth extracted. I would do my best to make a hand gesture of a tooth coming out of their mouth and for the most part I think they got the idea."

During his year in Iraq, Kersten said he had the pleasure of meeting up with a few other Johnnies. Captain Steve Heinz '98, serves as an engineer company commander.

Kersten also ran into Captain Ben Selzer '00, a Blackhawk helicopter pilot, and later accompanied him on a helicopter ride over Baghdad.

Now back in Germany, Kersten is once again filling his travel schedule. With trips to Frankfurt, London, Budapest, Bratislava, Swiss Alps, Venice and Rome on his immediate itinerary, he said he is trying to experience every culture in Europe at least once. He also is looking ahead to changes in his life.

Before he left for Iraq, Kersten said he was not entirely ready to get married. During his first five months, however, something changed and he spent a lot of time thinking about life, relationships and love.

"The one thing that rang out in my mind was the importance of Benedictine values. I came back to the fact that the students at Saint John's and Saint Ben's are able to share a common set of values that is not as easy to find in the real world."

During this time, he became engaged to a Bennie, Gna Albury '01, a woman he had been dating for a majority of the time since graduation from SJU. The couple has planned a wedding this spring near where she grew up in the Bahamas.
They will settle in North Carolina, where Kersten will begin a two-year root canal program at Fort Bragg. Upon graduation from the program, he will serve an additional three years in the Army Dental Corps as an endodontist.

"It looks like I once again fell into the comfort zone of having the next five years of my life fairly well planned. I will now be eligible to get out of the Army in 2011, and start a private endodontic practice."

He still marvels that his worldwide adventures, career and pending marriage all began with a misfired potato in a small Minnesota town.
Matt Hawn has an ongoing battle with procrastination. But unlike many, he actually wins the battle.

The Saint John's University senior is a two-sport athlete who maintains a 4.0 grade point average in his biology/pre-dentistry major while involved in community work.

Busy? It's almost Hawn's middle name. But in October, Hawn's dedication to success helped him receive an $18,000 post-graduate scholarship from the National Football Foundation and College Hall of Fame. He was one of 16 college football players from all divisions named to the National Scholar-Athlete Class.

“The only tough part is allotting time to actually do (work),” Hawn said. “Although it is hard to give in to procrastination, getting things done immediately is much more satisfying and beneficial in the long run. If you stay on top of your work, social life is no problem whatsoever and you find more time to mingle with friends than you would imagine.”

You might wonder when he finds time. Hawn was a two-year starter at linebacker and was a member of the Johnnies' 2003 national championship football team, and he plans to compete in track and field as a pole vaulter this spring.

He has earned Dean's List recognition every semester of his college career, and was a member of the 2004 and 2005 ESPN the Magazine Academic All-American Football team. Hawn was president of the Pre-Dentistry Club, and a member of the Biology Club. He is also involved in the community with Special Olympics, Salvation Army, Saint Francis Food Pantry and the House Homeless Shelter and Community Table, and is a communion distributor for SJU Campus Ministry.

Hawn said he will use his post-graduate scholarship at the University of Minnesota School of Dentistry next year. He'll follow in the footsteps of his older brother Mark (who graduated from Saint John's in 2005), who also hopes to become a dentist.
“I am open to the idea of specializing, but the plan right now is just to be a general dentist so I can see a broader range of patients,” Matt Hawn said. “Dentistry is interesting because it provides an opportunity for me to help others in need of a particular service. Providing for others is a requirement for my future job. It also includes many challenges that I look forward to.”

Hawn said he has been helped both academically and socially as a student at Saint John’s and the College of Saint Benedict.

“They have taught me not only numerous ideas from a wide variety of subjects, but also to think and approach things in a whole different manner. They have broadened the way I view nearly every aspect of my life,” Hawn said. “Socially, it has been incredible. The people from CSB/SJU are extremely high caliber. I have met a large amount of good friends that will remain close for a lifetime. It is the people that truly make the experience, and needless to say I have had an incredibly amazing experience with the (schools) and the people that make up the institutions.”

You could almost have a Hawn family reunion on campus. His dad, Bill (class of ’73), his Uncle Bob (class of ’68) and his brother Mark have all graduated from Saint John’s; his younger sister, Christina, is a first-year outside hitter for the Saint Benedict volleyball team.

“Family has always been one of the most important aspects of my life. I believe family can be the best teacher and actually forms who we are and who we will become,” Matt Hawn said. “We have supported each other in everything we do” — especially academics.

“Going to school with Mark and Christina has been very important to me. They are some of my best friends, whether we are just hanging out having a good time or helping each other out in times of need. The family support I have experienced while at CSB/SJU has — without a doubt — made my experience better,” Hawn said. And busier.
Two Alums Join Effort to Help

Dan Paur ’01 watched some of the first images emitted to the outside world.

It was late August and Katrina had just finished ripping through the heart of the South. The chilling sights that flashed across the TV screen hit a nerve with the SJU graduate. Paur was home in Bird Island, Minn., seemingly half a world away from the devastation, but he knew he was needed elsewhere.

Meanwhile, about 1,500 miles away, Beth Heinzen ’05 was safe and sound after seeking refuge in Northwest Louisiana.

“I did not see much more than a little rain and some wind,” she said.

The Category 5 hurricane forced thousands of evacuees to Baton Rouge, a majority from New Orleans. Heinzen, a teacher for Teach For America in Baton Rouge, would return to the state’s capital city as well, her life about to change forever.

Although their stories differ, the two graduates of CSB/SJU found themselves 200 miles apart, in the immediate aftermath of the catastrophe.

Feeling a need to act, Paur contacted his local American Red Cross. Within days, he joined a health services unit in Birmingham, Ala. The group left by bus to Biloxi, Miss., a city on the Gulf Coast left in ruins by Katrina.

“Something I found unbelievable was the devastation down there,” said Paur, who works as an emergency medical technician at the Glencoe and Bird Island Ambulance Department. “The pictures on the news and in magazines do no justice to just how bad the storm had hit.

“Along the coastline there was nothing left but miles of debris. Homes were leveled. Casino boats were across four-lane highways. It was almost impossible to tell where a certain home or business was due to all the damage. I could not imagine living down there and having a storm take everything. It was a very sad and humbling sight to see.”

Paur spent the next three weeks providing emergency aid at a first aid station, treating victims of heart attacks, strokes and heat exhaustion.

In Louisiana, Heinzen returned to her home — the only one on the street still with electricity — but didn’t stay long. Rather, she spent most of her time volunteering at various relief centers. For one day, she sorted clothes and handed out bedding at a Red Cross shelter. For the next five, she volunteered under the instruction of the Department of Health and Human Services on the campus of Louisiana State University.

BY JOE MECHTENBERG ’06
help Victims of Hurricane Katrina

“I did everything from bathe the elderly, to change bedding, to guard pillows and blankets, to pray with those who have lost everything,” she said.

A week into September, Heinzen retrieved some sense of normalcy, as the 22-year-old returned to teaching at Southeast Middle School in Baton Rouge. Sharing a classroom with another teacher, Heinzen had a class of evacuee students. However, another hurricane brewing in the Atlantic Ocean would ultimately shut down the school for a second time.

Although the storm’s impact was less than anticipated, the school closed for two days when an air conditioner failure caused a mold infestation. By Sept. 30, Heinzen was once again back in the classroom, facing a growing set of personal challenges.

“Students were coming and going due to their families moving to other states and attempting to go back to New Orleans,” she said. “I also had to deal with emotionally upset students.”

Paur, who spent his week handing out aid and helping those who remained homeless, also felt the effects of Hurricane Rita.

“Although it did not hit as hard as expected,” Paur said, “the winds, rain and lightening were more powerful than anything I’ve ever experienced.”

Since last fall, the lives of Paur and Heinzen have returned to normal. Well, as normal as can be after going through a life-changing experience.

Heinzen says she’s more patient and understanding, a trait she learned from her students.

“I have also become far more accepting of things that I cannot have control over or for that matter a say in,” said Heinzen, who is currently in the middle of the first year of her two-year commitment. “A lot of that has come from 12- to 15-year-olds moving through middle school in a time when their worlds were literally destroyed.”

Paur, who still follows the news on the relief effort, has returned home to his position with the ambulance service.

“I think the Katrina experience has led me to a life of service to others,” he said. “I learned many good things from my time at SJU, but the ones that stick out are being a hard worker, giving to others and developing a sense of self-confidence. These values helped me to give care to the people in Hurricane Katrina and Rita and people in general.”

And once acquired, those values are lived over a lifetime.

“God forbid if tragedy ever strikes again,” Paur said, “I’d be there to help in a heartbeat.”
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