

# St. Francis alumna makes the world her comfort zone

The controversial French novelist Andre Gide, in his novel "The Counterfeiters," famously wrote, "One doesn't discover new lands without consenting to lose sight, for a very long time, of the shore."

Bianca Dukesherer, who in her young life has many times bid temporary adieu to familiar shores in service to her personal discovery of new lands, will test the truth of Gide's words next summer when she begins a two-year mission to Ethiopia for the Peace Corps.

It's an undertaking the St. Francis School and Washington State University alumna once boldly predicted to close friends yet at the same time leaves her in a bit of disbelief.

"I know it won't be easy," Dukesherer said by phone from Washington State. "I could be placed by myself. It could be dangerous. There will be hard days when I might feel frustrated and alone. But I'm going to go

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into it with a strong mindset and faith.

"Everything that I've learned so far has prepared me to do this," she said.

Dukesherer said she inherited her desire to see other lands and experience other cultures from her father, a yacht broker who once sailed around the world as a young man.

Her first experience abroad came via her participation in St. Francis' show choir program. The group performed at World Youth Day in Spain and also visited Italy and Portugal.

The trip was precisely the

sort of mind-expanding experience the then-sophomore actively sought. In addition to the choir program, Dukesherer was also active in cheerleading, tennis, theater, speech and debate, and student government. She also devoted much time to volunteer work and throughout her high school years sponsored a child via Compassion International, a Christian nonprofit humanitarian organization.

"I liked dipping my toes into different things to figure out where I wanted to go," she said.

At WSU, Dukesherer majored in human development and global studies, disciplines she said provided her a firm practical and issues-based foundation for the service-based work she hopes to pursue.

Along the way, Dukesherer read Adam Braun's "The Promise of a Pencil" and was intrigued by the author's humanitarian mission and, in particular, the semester-at-sea program that informed his journey. Dukesherer proposed the program to her school and soon found herself following



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Bianca  
Dukesherer

in Braun's wake with a four-month voyage to 14 countries in Asia, Europe, the Middle East and Africa.

Dukesherer supplemented the field labs and other structured elements of the program with backpacking tours with her peers. These jaunts allowed Dukesherer to engage more closely with the host communities and spend time volunteering at local schools, orphanages and other facilities. In Vietnam, for example, she helped at a medical facility for children affected by Agent Orange.

"My life flipped upside down," Dukesherer said. "I got a different perspective of the cultures, particularly in

developing countries. I got culture shock — a lot — but that only ended up expanding my comfort zone."

Ultimately, the experience gave Dukesherer the confidence and motivation to pursue a goal she had held since high school. About a month ago she joined the Peace Corps. Just recently she received her assignment to Ethiopia, which will start in June.

"It's going to be an incredible experience," she said. "I'll be able to live in a developing country and learn about the culture at ground level. That can only help if I decide to try and make an impact on a larger scale, either by starting my own nonprofit or maybe working with the United Nations.

"I just want people to know that they can do anything they put their mind to," she said. "I never thought in a thousand years that I'd be doing this, but it's possible. I've come to realize that there is so much more for me in the world and so much more that I can do in the world."

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