

## The Unexpected Path from Eldoret

JULIA GREENSPAN

Julia Greenspan is completing her yearlong AmeriCorps Vista program where she worked at the Rhode Island Free Clinic as a fund development coordinator. She plans on enrolling in an MPH program in the near future. She traveled to Eldoret in 2005 with her family, Dr. Neil Greenspan and his wife Debra, and brothers Aaron and Ben.

Despite being garrulous and outgoing, I have known people for weeks or months without them being aware that I traveled to Eldoret, Kenya, in high school. I often hesitate to share my experience, because despite the trip having immeasurable effects on me, my primary concern is that it will be minimized to be just a “cool story” to others. Like a stone dropped in a pond, the ripples from that trip have affected my entire life trajectory. The short, superficial synopsis of the trip is my parents decided to pack up my brothers and me and head to Kenya for a month in 2005. Needless to say, when I returned to Barrington High School that fall, I had quite a different summer vacation story than most of my peers.

As a 14-year-old, there were many different layers to my experience. First, the superficial memories – how strange I found it that there were wild lizards that would scuttle around inside the hospital; then, the poignant mental images – remembering how the path into town from the hospital was lined with shanty-style shops, all prominently advertising “COFFINS FOR SALE;” and finally, the core of my experience – having to leave the baby to whom I had grown attached crying in a crib as I walked away from the hospital for the last time.

I didn't know what to expect when we left Logan Airport in Boston for



our trip, and I certainly couldn't have predicted the lifelong implications of that month. What I had seen in the pediatric ward, especially the impact of HIV, left an imprint on my brain that I couldn't seem to shake. When I left to begin school at Clark University three years later, I enrolled in a course called “The AIDS Pandemic.” During the first few semesters at Clark, I wandered between academic fields, unsure how I could fulfill the desire to help others, which had been sparked on my trip. During the fall of my junior year, I first heard the words “public health.” Intrigued, I researched the field. To put it simply, the rest has been history.

I have dabbled in various aspects of public health, interning at different types of organizations through the rest of my college career. In July 2013, I completed an AmeriCorps VISTA year of service at the Rhode Island Free Clinic, which allowed me to experience health

disparities right here, in our state. At this point, I am unsure what my next step is, but I know I will be pursuing my Master of Public Health in the next few years. By getting my MPH, I believe I will finally be able to feel like I am helping people in a way that I longed to as a 14-year-old in Kenya, but did not yet have the capability. The next time I return to Eldoret, I know that I will have the necessary skills.

Eight years later, it is not the details of my family's trip to Kenya that stand out for me, but rather it is the desire to find a way to help others. For our family, it is hard to explain the experience that we had, and I know that we all took away something different from IU House and Moi Teaching & Referral Hospital. For me, my time in Kenya introduced me to public health, the field in which I want to devote my career, and for that alone, the trip was truly life-changing. ❖