

Logsdon student returns to South Africa for 10 months of study, service_22304

February 20, 2004

Posted: 2/19/04

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By Loretta Fulton

Abilene Reporter-News

A summer trip to Africa two years ago evoked two powerful emotions in Jessica Glaze- homesickness and a deep sympathy for the poverty-stricken people she encountered.

Glaze, a Hardin-Simmons University junior from Seymour, had swept the memory of the homesickness under the rug when the opportunity arose to go back to Africa to help the people who so moved her.

She left Abilene recently for two semesters of study at the University of KwaZulu-Natal in Pietermaritzburg, South Africa.

Jessica
Glaze

Although she will be a full-time student, Glaze, 21, also will volunteer at the nearby African Cooperative Action Trust, a Christian-based agency that

helps people of the region learn skills and trades.

The seeds for the 10-month adventure were planted in the summer of 2002 when Glaze and other students accompanied Rob Sellers, professor of missions at Hardin-Simmons' Logsdon School of Theology, on a trip to Kenya and South Africa.

Seeing children begging in the streets is a sight Glaze will never forget.

She had seen poverty in the United States on student mission trips, but this was different.

"The sheer amount of poverty was overwhelming," she said.

The powerful memory stuck with Glaze. But after returning home, she wasn't sure if what she was feeling was mere emotion or if she had a true calling to serve the people she saw.

Then, things started falling into place. She learned she could transfer credits from the University of KwaZulu-Natal to Hardin-Simmons and that her scholarships would apply there.

She found out she could volunteer at the cooperative that provided aid to the people she wanted to help.

The final piece came one day as Glaze read a verse from the book of Isaiah.

The prophet heard God asking, "Whom shall I send?" And Isaiah answered, "Here am I; send me."

That Scripture convinced Glaze of what she must do.

"Right then I knew that God was calling me back to South Africa," she said.

For the next 10 months, Glaze will live with a family she stayed with on the previous trip. She will take courses in African theology, Greek and Hebrew.

Glaze's professor, Sellers, said he wasn't surprised by the decision.

It wasn't the first time students have responded to the wider world once they have been exposed to it, Sellers said.

"They get into this other culture, and their eyes are opened," he said.

Sellers and his wife were missionaries to Indonesia for 25 years.

Their interest was spurred by two-year mission trips after they graduated from college.

Now, Sellers wants his students to have that same exposure to different cultures.

Each summer he takes groups to different parts of the world, with a trip to Spain and Morocco planned this year.

In 2001, Sellers led a group to Europe, and one of his students, Jeff Hobbs, returned for an 18-month stint with the International Baptist Church of Zurich.

"His whole horizon has changed," Sellers said.

He expects the same will happen to Glaze.

She's not quite sure what to think about being so far away from home for nearly a year.

The thought of the people she will be serving keeps reassuring her she made the right decision.

"That's really what I want to do," Glaze said, "help the people who need it most."

Jessica Glaze

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