

LAKE FOREST COLLEGE

SPRING-SUMMER 2011

Spectrum Magazine

African Journey

Lake Forest alumna
puts her passion into
education in Tanzania



133RD COMMENCEMENT

JAPAN JOURNAL

CHEF'S NEXT BIG THING

African Journey

Education, development, adventure on the itinerary for Lake Forest alumna



"We knew we wanted to work with this orphan population and thought the only thing we could really do was provide them with an education."



Photos by Kaitlin Rogers

Cottingham organized last summer's RideTZ, a 400-mile bike ride that raised \$100,000 for The Foundation for Tomorrow.

By Janet Franz

Emily Cottingham '04 has had wanderlust for most of her life. As a child growing up in Louisville, Ky., she spent school vacations traveling with her parents and three siblings to spots around the globe: France, Japan, South America. She even trekked the Himalayas in Nepal at the age of 12.

So maybe it's no wonder that she now finds herself at home in Arusha, Tanzania, where she was a founding board member of The Foundation for Tomorrow, an organization that provides scholarships and other support for orphans and abandoned children to attend boarding school in Tanzania, and now works for Summits Africa, a company that specializes in adventure travel outfitting, including organizing climbs up Mt. Kilimanjaro for many charity groups.

Cottingham's passion for Tanzania was first ignited at Lake Forest College, where she did an independent study of the East African country with Associate Professor of Politics **Paul Orogun** during her senior year. After graduation, she was determined to finally visit Africa, so she, her sister, and her mother embarked on a two-week safari to Kenya and Tanzania.

When the safari ended, Cottingham stayed on to take part in a paid program in which she volunteered for two months running a one-room school for 2- to 5-year-old Tanzanian children. It was there that she made a special connection with a 2-year-old orphan named Rosie, who was HIV-positive, and met a fellow American, Meghan Gunderman, who was there working at an orphanage and

conducting research for her undergraduate degree. Those two months would have a lasting impact.

"I fell in love with the country," Cottingham, 28, said of Tanzania. "The people are amazing."

After her volunteer stint (which included a bout with malaria), Cottingham returned to the States, worked for a financial company in California for a couple of years, but "was still obsessed with Tanzania. I kept talking about it and talking about it," she said. Eventually she put talk into action by joining forces with Gunderman to launch The Foundation for Tomorrow (TFTT).

"We knew we wanted to work with this orphan population and thought the only thing we could really do was provide them with an education," said Cottingham, who spent two months in Tanzania helping Gunderman set up the organization and eventually moved there to become its program director in 2008.

Many children are orphaned when malaria, AIDS, TB, malaria, and other diseases strike their families or when their mothers die from complications during childbirth, Gunderman said. Though primary education is free in Tanzania, the government-run schools are extremely overcrowded, and the cost of uniforms and books can be prohibitive.

"Emily and I had a vision. We dreamed of making a different life, a new kind of future for children and a nation with monumental needs," said Gunderman, executive director of TFFT. "In part, having Emily by my side gave me the courage to quit my job and jump in with both feet."

The foundation currently has 76 children on full boarding school scholarships and assists more than 600 children through outreach programs. In addition to providing scholarships, TFFT works to raise the quality of education in Tanzania by building libraries and computer centers and improving teacher training in the foundation's partner schools.

Its assistance doesn't begin and end in the classroom, however, as TFFT also provides the children with school uniforms, oversees their medical care, and finds them places to stay during school holidays. It also runs an after-school program called Full Circle, in which the kids learn about everything from preventing HIV infection to tending an organic garden.

"Since most of the children grew up in orphanages that were overpopulated, they didn't learn a lot of life skills, like washing their hands, brushing their teeth, and other things to stay healthy," Cottingham said. Full Circle addresses these needs, conducts field trips to national parks, and brings in professionals to talk to the children about their jobs.

Besides running such programs, Cottingham also worked for two years while serving as TFFT's development director to organize last summer's RideTZ, an eight-day, 400-mile bike ride from the base of Mt. Kilimanjaro via the Usambara Mountains to the Indian Ocean, to benefit the foundation. Following an old slave trade route, 20 North American riders completed the trek, and raised \$100,000 for the foundation.

"We wanted to bring people through the villages to visit the schools and orphanages and see the partners we work with," Cottingham said. Plans call for RideTZ to become a biannual event, with the next ride to be held in June of 2012.

Cottingham's partner in organizing the ride was Ake Lindstrom, founder of Summits Africa, where she now works as general manager, overseeing 10 employees and 222 contracted male guides and porters, whom she's able to converse with in the local language, Kiswahili. Cottingham is enjoying the

Participants in RideTZ were welcomed by lots of local spectators.



A trio of students (above) are well-equipped for bike riding. A Jeep and trailer (top) helped carry bikes over the course of the eight-day ride.

opportunity to combine business and development, not only by organizing charity climbs but also by conducting first-aid classes, AIDS awareness classes, and other educational programs for the guides and porters.

And she still stays connected to the work of TFFT by visiting the children, including Rosie, who is now 10 years old and still healthy enough that she doesn't need anti-retroviral therapy for her HIV.

In addition to her far-flung travels with her family, "which made the world seem much more manageable," Cottingham cites her experience at Lake Forest College as one of the things that contributed to her sense of adventure—and her ability to put up with "the awful mosquitoes," poor healthcare, and other challenges of living in Africa, which she nonetheless describes as "a beautiful and special place."

"Not knowing what I wanted to do right away, I was able to take so many kinds of classes at Lake Forest," she said. "I think I'm a well-rounded person because I was able to spread my wings there and get close to my professors."

To find out more about The Foundation For Tomorrow, visit www.thefoundationfortomorrow.com. For information on Summits Africa, go to www.summits-africa.com.