

Personal Statement and Fellowship Experience Proposal

Telling a Comparative Story of Empowerment in India, Kenya and Brazil through Photography

As I was growing up, my three siblings and I would occasionally get together for a family picture. My father would often snap over 40 pictures of the group- beginning with the initial decision to take the photo, through the staged photo, all the way through the gradual separation of the group. He would say, "It's not necessarily the staged family photo that is the most memorable, it's the moments before and after the flash that give the real story." The expressive faces of two brothers having a lively conversation about a recent trip, the laugh of a sister after hearing a funny story from her older brother, or the proud look of a mother who hears of the accomplishments of her college aged daughter. These "real" moments are what life is made of and by photographing them, they live on through the years when the moments, stories and even people are gone.

I was encouraged in late 2010 by a mentor to write a version of my resume- my dream resume for the end of 2011. I spent several weeks on this task and what emerged as one of my biggest goals for the year was to try to learn the art of story telling, specifically through photography. Being able to express myself through a story is at the heart of every experience that makes my life. I agree with Robert McAfee Brown's comment, "Storytelling is the most powerful way to put ideas into the world today." If given the opportunity from the Givens Fellowship Committee, I plan to tell the stories of empowered individuals in India, Kenya and Brazil through photography.

There have been several key transformative experiences in my life over the past few years that have all contributed to the development of this proposal. My first significant exposure to poverty was during a BGSU trip to the South Bronx. This trip focused on how individuals that live in NYC in poverty are supported through various social programs such as educational programs, needle exchanges and food banks. In addition, I spent a summer studying abroad in Shanghai, China. As I noted in my journal during this trip, "I've learned more about myself in the last few days than I seem to have learned in an entire semester." I explored the United States on the GeoJourney program. Finally, I recently spent two weeks in India with the intention of training rural villagers how to be better salespeople. I quickly found that my "training" of others turned into a much needed education for myself on how the sales process is substantially different in India from what I had been taught in my sales courses. These "off-the grid" individuals were teaching me infinitely more than I could have imagined.

The interdisciplinary nature of these experiences have all contributed to my creation of

this trip. By being exposed first-hand to individuals in poverty, I question what I did to deserve being born into such a comfortable life. By traveling around the United States and China, I noticed the diversity in other parts of the world and the lack of diversity in many aspects of my home environment. Finally, after looking over my thousands of photographs from many of these experiences, I noticed that the pictures that really stand out to me are the images that capture the emotion- anger, fear, pride, or love.

The journey that I am proposing for the Givens Fellowship will be a forty-day experience. During the first twenty-day period which takes place in India, I plan to spend time with Affirm Global Development conducting interviews with rural entrepreneurs outside of Damoh, Madhya Pradesh to get a feel for the nuances of doing business in this part of the country. Also, I plan to look over the current training materials and documentation for the impact that inexpensive solar lights are having and based upon the findings, help to create a franchise model for other villages in India. In addition, I plan to attend a TEDx event focused on “Ideas worth spreading” on November 20 in Chennai.

In Kenya, my thirteen day experience will be focused around an orphanage called the, “Heritage of Faith and Hope Children Rehabilitation Centre” which is based in Nairobi and the Christian Entrepreneurs Savings and Credit Society based in Kaimbu. In both of these organizations I will work alongside the staff to gain an understanding of the work being done and to capture the work photographically. In addition, I will meet with Tonne Nbungu who is a Social Entrepreneur in the technology industry and also an organizer of a TEDx event that was held in Kibera, which is the second largest slum in the world. Also, one of BGSU’s 100 most prominent alumni is from just outside of Nairobi and lives on a large coffee and tea plantation so I plan to briefly visit with him as well. Finally, I will visit one of Compassion International’s Child Development Centers to look into how they are empowering children to live fulfilling lives.

My seven days in Rio de Janeiro will include home stays with two different families while shadowing an executive from the largest transportation company in the country. Also, I plan to take a look at how the work of Compassion International in Brazil compares with their Kenya branch, visit with a Clinton Global Initiative Member and finally, I will spend some time on a coffee and sugar plantation to get a feel for life in the agriculture industry.

I chose these countries for a few reasons. Since Africa, Asia and South America are represented, it will be a very diverse experience. Each of them have a significant population of people living in the Bottom of the Pyramid (BOP) -the billions of people living on less than \$2.50/day and people in the BOP are being empowered now more than ever. According to a 2011 Brookings Institute report, poverty has been substantially reduced over the last 5 years in

each of these countries.* With economic growth, people are being empowered to pull themselves out of poverty and these economies will be world powers in the coming decades. Finally, from my work at Affirm Global and with the help of a few other people, I was able to find multiple organizations and people that agreed to take me in in these countries.

To prepare for this experience, I have arranged to take photography lessons from a family friend with travel photography experience to teach me how to take better pictures. This will allow me to better capture the story of the individuals that I will be working with and help ensure I am culturally sensitive with my photography during this trip.

During the entire trip, I plan to engage with my family, friends, and the BGSU community by maintaining an online photo journal and blog. This will help further develop my thoughts on the experience while also sharing with others. After my trip, I will present my photographs from January 16-20, 2012 in the Bowen-Thompson Student Union Gallery to bring the stories back to campus. I will hold a reception that highlights my photo journal, speak to various groups about my experience and generally help to make aware how a business student can create an interdisciplinary, transformative experience that opens his or her eyes to themselves and the world. This awareness will hopefully help other business students realize the importance of story telling and understanding the world through the lenses of others.

Throughout this traveling experience, I will photographically capture how individuals are being empowered. Empowered: to live a more dignified life, to become literate, and to pull themselves out of poverty. The various lenses and worldviews of which these individuals view the world will be explored and by capturing images, their stories can teach and inspire others and live on for years. It was not until I started to work on developing my Givens project that I came to realize that all along, my father has been trying to teach my siblings and I the importance of capturing moments in life that have true meaning. By learning the stories of others, this experience will enhance my ability to story tell in addition to enhancing the understanding that I have of myself. It has been said that, "An entire life is comprised only of single moments in time." When these moments and people are gone, the stories will forever live on.

Timeline:

November 12- December 22, 2011

20 days in India

13 days in Kenya

7 days in Brazil

(Including travel time)

Significant Dates:

November 12- Detroit to Delhi (Flight)

November 13- Delhi to Damoh (Train)

November 29- Depart Damoh for Mumbai (Train)

December 2- Depart Mumbai for Nairobi (Flight)

December 15- Depart Nairobi for Rio De Janeiro (Flight)

December 22- Depart Rio De Janeiro for Detroit (Flight)

January 16-20- BGSU Photo Gallery Exhibit

Budget

Total Flight Costs	3450
In-Country Transportation	600
Room and Board	1600
Misc.	350
Total	6000

Explanation of Costs:

Total Flight Costs

Detroit-Delhi	750
Mumbai-Nairobi Flight	400
Nairobi-Rio de Janeiro Flight	1300
Rio de Janeiro- Detroit Flight	900
Visas/Extra Travel Fees	100
Total Flight Costs	3450

These flights will be purchased in June.

In-Country Transportation includes trains, taxis, buses and any other local travel expenses.

Room and Board calculated with Average food cost of \$30/day*40 Days=\$1200. The majority of the trip will consist of home stays but the additional 400 is for the occasional paid room.

Misc. includes water, bug spray, gifts, Internet access, and other general expenses

*Chandy, Laurence, and Geoffrey Gertz. "Poverty in Numbers: The Changing State of Global Poverty from 2005 to 2015." *Brookings Institution Global Views* (2011): n. pag. Web. 24 Jan 2011. <http://www.brookings.edu/~media/Files/rc/papers/2011/01_global_poverty_chandy/01_global_poverty_chandy.pdf>.