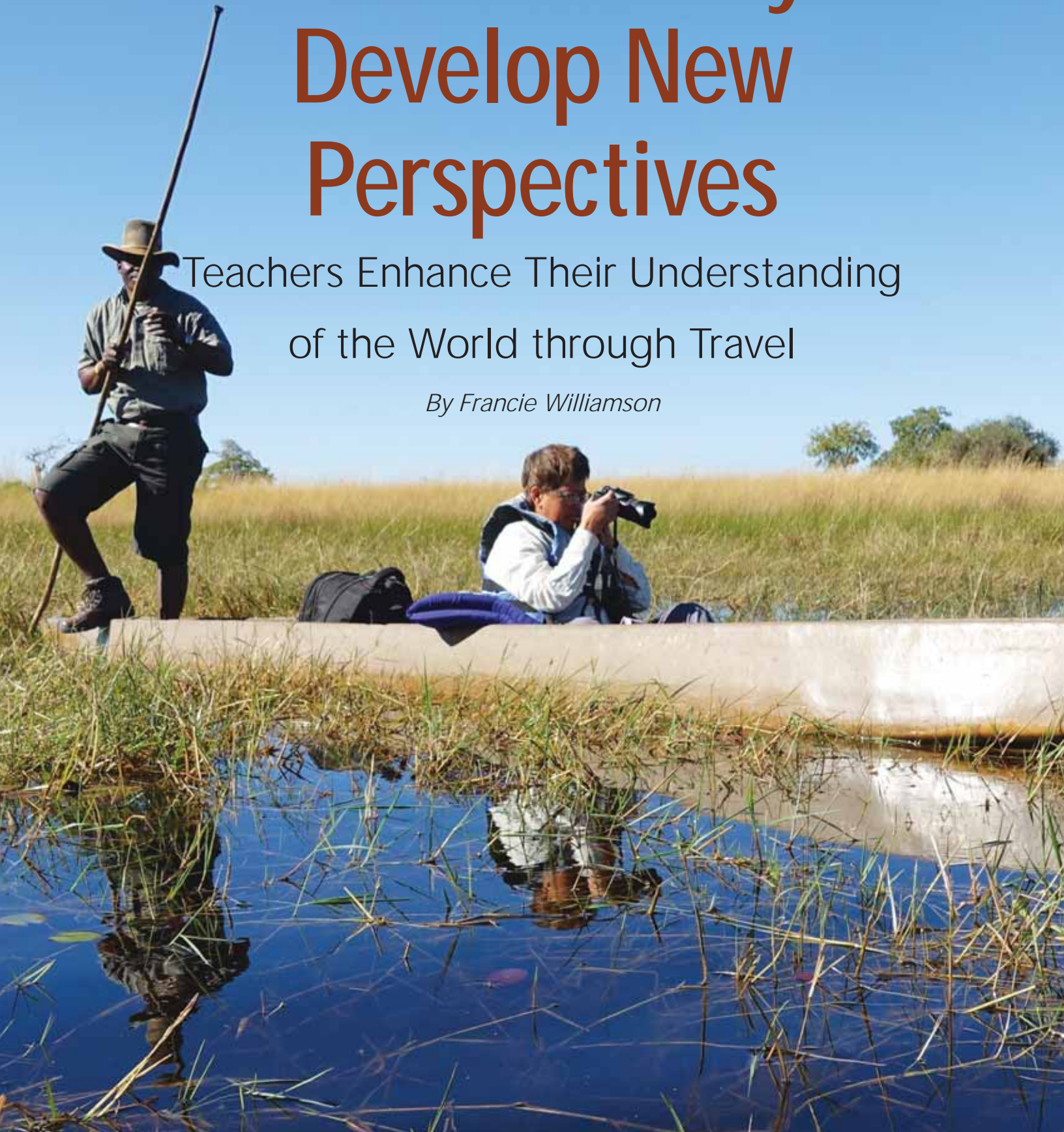


Global Journeys Develop New Perspectives

Teachers Enhance Their Understanding
of the World through Travel

By Francie Williamson



H

er legs ached as she climbed to the top of Dune 45 in the Namib Desert. The granite stuck to her shoes as she navigated along outcrops at Spitzkoppe. And as she crawled on the ground to get close to a cricket that was rubbing its legs in song, she said, she felt like a four-year-old, “with increasing inquisitiveness and wondering why about everything.”

Pam Joslyn, a high school science teacher in Muscatine, Iowa, is one of three educators who received a Catherine Miller Explorer Award in 2018, which the Muscatine-based Stanley Foundation has bestowed annually since 2005. The award, part of the foundation’s efforts to promote global education and global citizenship, allows educators in the Muscatine school district to travel internationally to a destination of their choosing. Teachers are encouraged to incorporate the lessons they learn on their trips into their curriculum back home. In 2008, the award was named after Miller, a longtime Muscatine educator who was an avid traveler and always sought to expand her students’ horizons.

Classroom teachers from the Muscatine school district or the city’s Catholic school, Saints Mary and Mathias, are eligible to compete for the award. At the beginning of the school year, they are invited to enter a drawing. Fifteen finalists selected at random from the drawing are invited to submit an application, including an essay about where they want to travel and why. Four independent judges who are not affiliated with the foundation select the three winners.

Joslyn, who chose to go to Namibia as well as Zimbabwe, South Africa, and Botswana, said she wanted to experience an environment to which she had never been exposed.

“I entered the teaching profession in the hope of helping others understand their own worldview—how and why the

world works,” Joslyn said. “I constantly ask myself how I can inspire them to go and see the world, to understand how the world works, and to let them know that this is their world too. I encourage my students to embrace the limitless possibilities that await their future.”

Joslyn said her trip “enhanced my innate desire to understand my own worldview.”

“My perspectives transformed, even on the flight home,” she said. “I sat next to a young student from Uganda studying civil engineering at Arizona State University. We laughed and shared stories—both of us were particularly excited to use a washing machine again. She described beautiful sights in Uganda, and I invited her to Iowa.”

A New Adventure

During her trip to Africa, Joslyn said, she “wanted to examine the geology, the flora and fauna, and most importantly, to meet other people from a different region of the world.”

“I wanted to study the problems of a different culture and observe how they problem solve” she said. “I wanted to listen to their stories and add to my repertoire so that I can share more of my own.”

Joslyn’s highlights included visiting Robben Island, South Africa, where Nelson Mandela and other political prisoners



Clockwise from above: Gear is loaded into mokoro canoes in Botswana's Okavango Delta. Joslyn, a high school teacher in Muscatine, Iowa, traveled to Botswana, Namibia, Zimbabwe, and South Africa during the summer of 2018. Elephants were among the wildlife that Joslyn saw at Etosha National Park in northwestern Namibia. Joslyn took part in a Fatbike Tour in Swapkomund, western Namibia. This pool was found in the rocks above Joslyn's campsite at Spitzkoppe, a group of granite peaks in the Namib Desert of Namibia. (Photos/Pam Joslyn)



were held; viewing wildlife at Etosha and Chobe National Parks in Namibia and Botswana; and standing near Victoria Falls in Zimbabwe.

"The mist continued to rise and fall over Victoria Falls, often followed by a deluge of water, and then the rainbows appeared over the falls, along the cliff's edge, sometimes starting at the foot of a fellow traveler," Joslyn marveled.



“I’m Not Much of a Traveler”

“I’m terrified of flying, which obviously makes traveling difficult,” said Laney Berry, a Muscatine elementary school instructional coach who also received a Catherine Miller Explorer Award in 2018. “I think what made me decide to pursue the award was [a desire] to push myself beyond my comfort zone.”

Originally, Berry planned to go to Costa Rica, but the dates for the trip were not compatible with her schedule. Instead, she chose to travel to Belize and Guatemala.

“Belize and Guatemala are close to Costa Rica in Central America and have many of the same biomes and wildlife,” she said. “The fact that we have a lot of families and students that come from Guatemala to Muscatine also influenced my decision to travel there.”

In Belize, Berry had the “magical” experience of swimming beside a green sea turtle for about 10 minutes in the world’s second-largest barrier reef. And in Guatemala, she toured Tikal, an ancient Mayan citadel.

“It was incredible to climb the tallest pyramids in the Western Hemisphere and look out over the canopy of the jungle, while thinking that Mayan kings and queens looked over the land from this exact spot more than 1,500 years ago,” she said.

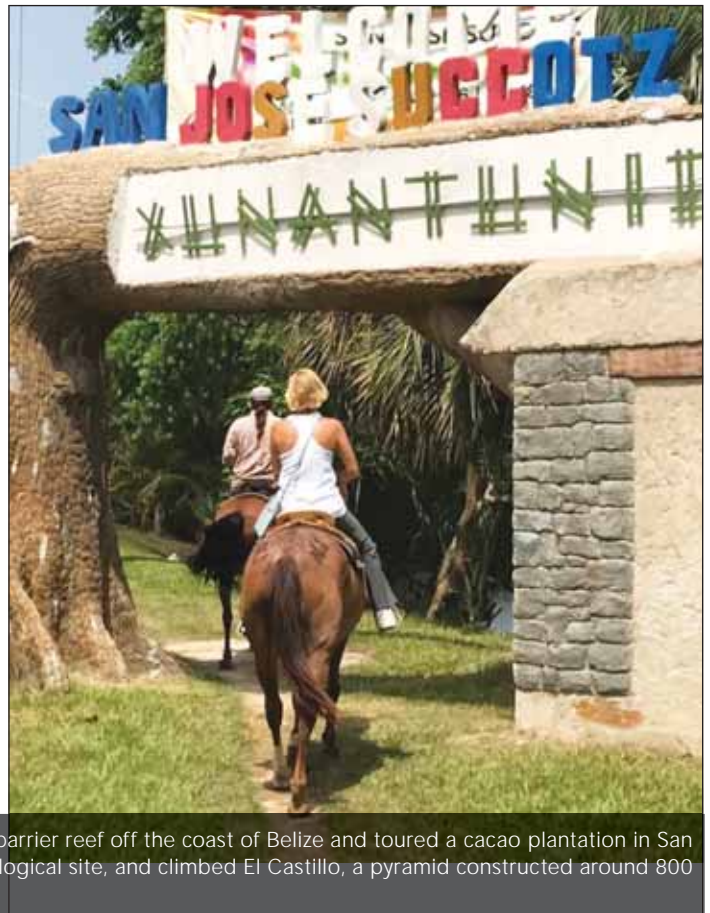
Berry was surprised at how little she understood her destination before she left.

“I had no idea that Belize and Guatemala had two UNESCO [United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization] sites—I didn’t even know what a UNESCO site was,” Berry said. “I had never heard about Tikal or the Hol Chan Marine Reserve. I didn’t know that the native language of Belize was English. There was so much I didn’t know. I’m sure our tour guide got tired of all my questions.”

“It’s hard to quantify or qualify how much I learned on this journey,” Berry added. “I learned about ancient Mayan history, about animals and plants that live in Central America, about how important it is to people in Belize and Guatemala to be self-sufficient and in harmony with nature.”



During her trip to Belize, Laney Berry, an elementary school instructional coach and one of the recipients of the 2018 Catherine Miller Explorer Awards, took a sunset river cruise to Monkey Island and got up close with wildlife.



Clockwise from upper left: Berry snorkeled in the world's second largest barrier reef off the coast of Belize and toured a cacao plantation in San Ignacio. She rode on horseback to Xunantunich, an ancient Mayan archeological site, and climbed El Castillo, a pyramid constructed around 800 AD. (Photos/Laney Berry)



Bucket-List Item Fulfilled

Debra Dunsmore said Australia and New Zealand had always been on her bucket list.

“As Australia and New Zealand were once British colonies, as with the United States, I wanted to study how the three countries’ development has been the same and different,” said Dunsmore, a second-grade teacher at Saints Mary and Mathias Catholic School in Muscatine and the third recipient of a 2018 Catherine Miller Explorer Award.

“I do a Native American unit each year with my second graders, and I also wanted to study how the native cultures, the Aborigines in Australia and the Maori in New Zealand, have survived and then compare and contrast those native cultures to the Native American tribes that I study in social studies with my class.”

Dunsmore said highlights of her trip included visiting the Tjapukai Aboriginal Culture Park and learning about the Aborigine culture, hiking in the Daintree Tropical Rainforest, and visiting two Maori villages, Ohinemutu and Te Puia.

“There were so many surprises, but seeing the natural beauty of New Zealand was fantastic, and visiting the Sydney Opera House in Australia...I was not expecting to enjoy that tour, but it was amazing! It totally surprised me,” she said.





Debbie Dunsmore holds a koala during a visit to the North Queensland Wildlife Trust in Australia (opposite top).

Dunsmore snorkeled at the Great Barrier Reef (opposite bottom) and awoke at 4:45 AM to take a sunrise hot-air balloon ride over the Australian countryside. (Photos /Debra Dunsmore)

Dunsmore already has brought some of the lessons she learned in Australia and New Zealand to her students.

“My class studies the basic animal groups, and this year, they were able to categorize the unique animals that I saw in Australia and New Zealand,” she said. “However, one of the most important things that I hope to instill in my students is a curiosity to learn and [desire to] experience as many different cultures as they can.

“I have learned so much from each trip that I have taken. The world is an amazing place to explore.”

“I Walked The Walk”

Dunsmore said she believed the experiences she has had traveling have shaped her teaching philosophy.

“I always try to provide as many varied cultural experiences as I can for my students,” she said. “Through these experiences, I hope that my students learn to value diversity.”

Berry also said it is important for children to understand how “diversity is essential to the American way of life.”

“Most importantly, diversity provides us the opportunity to recognize and respect each other as individuals,” she said. “Diversity ultimately makes our institutions stronger by challenging us as humans to be open to new ways of thinking about our world.”

Joslyn said that during her trip, she immersed herself in different cultures, strengthened her personal identity, challenged her values and beliefs, and increased her confidence.

“These are skills that I ask of my students—I walked the walk,” Joslyn said.

According to Joslyn, more than ever, children are being “exposed to predisposed ideas about different cultures through various media, often presenting oversimplified perspectives on world events, conflict, or even racism.”

“Empowering students to negotiate bias and information is critical to helping young Americans become effective local and global leaders,” she said.

A new crop of Catherine Miller Explorer Award winners will depart from Muscatine in the summer. Laura McDonald, a fifth-grade math and science teacher, Kayla Bentz, a second-grade teacher, and high school science teacher Allison Coffman are still deciding on their destinations, but all three said they are looking forward to learning more about the world and bringing it back to their classrooms.



Through its Community Partnerships programming, the Stanley Foundation promotes global citizenship and global education in its hometown of Muscatine, Iowa, and nearby. Community Partnerships programming includes the Catherine Miller Explorer Awards, the Iowa Student Global Leadership Conference, Investigation U., and many other such programs. More information about them is available at www.stanleyfoundation.org.