

# TEACH US



VOLUME 1 ISSUE 1

Teaching Educators Agriculture and Conservation Holistically for Urban Society

In cooperation with...



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## A Lesson from South Africa: *Practice what you preach!*

A warm hello to all our TEACH US friends from the South African team - Roger and Mariana, Andre van Rooyen, the staff of the South African Wildlife College and the ARC-Guest House. This year will be the fifth TEACH US group to visit South Africa so this message goes out to over 50 U.S. teachers we have had the privilege of hosting in our country - enthusiastic, energetic, motivated and, above all, warm and friendly people who, each in their own unique way, left lasting impressions on all whom they met in our country. You were all great ambassadors for your country and we sincerely hope your visit was equally beneficial to you all and the many, many school children that you guide and influence.

South Africa is known as the rainbow nation - due to our human diversity - with many different cultures, ethnic and language groups (we have 11 official languages) all living together in one nation. Equally, our country is renowned for its biological diversity with large numbers of species of living organisms found in a wide range of habitats. The emphasis of the South African TEACH US visits has focused on exposing participants to this diversity, how a great variety of animal and plant species live together in complex ecosystems where they are all interdependent upon each other. How these systems impact on rural farming communities and the problems and constraints they face are also studied. We therefore concentrate on exposing our visitors to diversity and variety as well as differences and variation, both in nature and humanity;

## A LESSON FROM SOUTH AFRICA...

Concepts we hope are equally applicable and relevant in urban America. Our theme could be "*Variety is the spice of life!*"

Ironically, after last year's trip we realized that we have not been practicing what we were preaching! The first three groups we hosted were all from Washington DC and we had unwittingly become experts on American people in general based on this small and biased sample. What a shock we got last year when some New Yorkers arrived with the group - they turned everything we thought we knew about Americans upside down. For example, they pitched their tents closer together (a mini Manhattan) than has ever happened in the Kalahari before - and still they shouted to one another as if miles separated them! We have learnt very clearly not to generalize about people - we are all different in all sorts of ways, and people within a nation differ as much as do different nations. A very important lesson for us in these troubled times.

We trust all is well with all our U.S. teacher friends and are looking forward to this year's visit as always. We will meet more interesting Americans who will leave important lessons behind but they will also remind us strongly of previous participants and so keep our fond memories alive. Hope the world will soon return to peaceful times so we can all get on with making it a better place for us all.

*Warmest regards,*

*Roger and Mariana*





## Washington DC Students Visit Costa Rica *and never leave the classroom!*

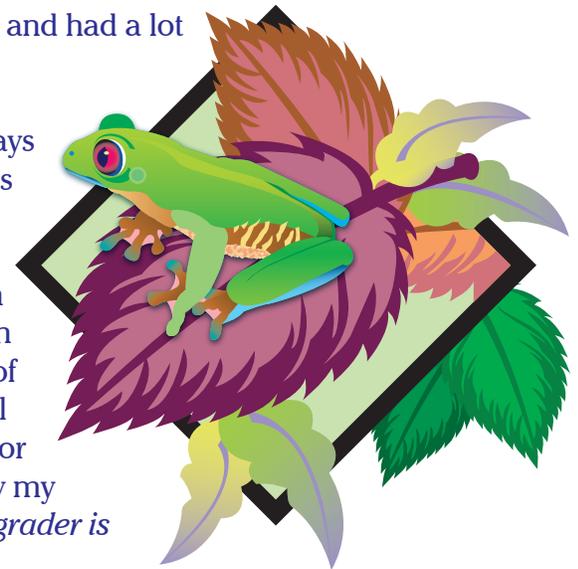
Last year I was fortunate enough to be part of an expedition to Costa Rica. I went with teachers from New York and L.A., who soon became wonderful new friends. Not being the best photographer in the world, I decided to tape record the entire experience, from the cab ride to Washington National Airport to landing back at National two weeks later. I incorporate the tapes into all my lessons, and the kids love it.

*I learned a lifetime of knowledge from my journey and hope to teach that to my students*

Pura Vida

We began by packing for my journey. We made a list of what I would need for my stay. We discussed the weather there and how that would affect what I packed. We made a list of items, then the students drew a suitcase and items they would pack. I incorporated language arts by having them label the items. The next lesson began with listening to my plane trip to Miami and San Jose. Each student received a card with a career on it related to my journey. Some worked at the airport, one was my cab driver, some worked on the plane. We learned some Spanish words and introduced careers related to travel. We actually simulated the experience and had a lot of fun.

In the beginning of the year, I always introduce the food pyramid. This is reinforced every day at lunch, when I discuss what food groups the children ate. During my stay in CR I recorded every meal. So each journey begins with a discussion of what I ate that day and did I get all my food groups? The lessons mirror my activities and are supported by my pictures (*not great, but what first grader is going to complain?!*)



Food and sharing food is very important to the culture, and one of my favorite lessons was the trip to the CATIE orchards. We listened to our great guide, Sebastian Salizar talk about different products which Costa Rica grows and exports. Each student was given a card with a product, and I asked them to draw a picture and write a sentence about the product. We shared some fruits which I got from the Safeway, which are exports of CR. They really liked this. We passed the plate around and everyone got to sample.



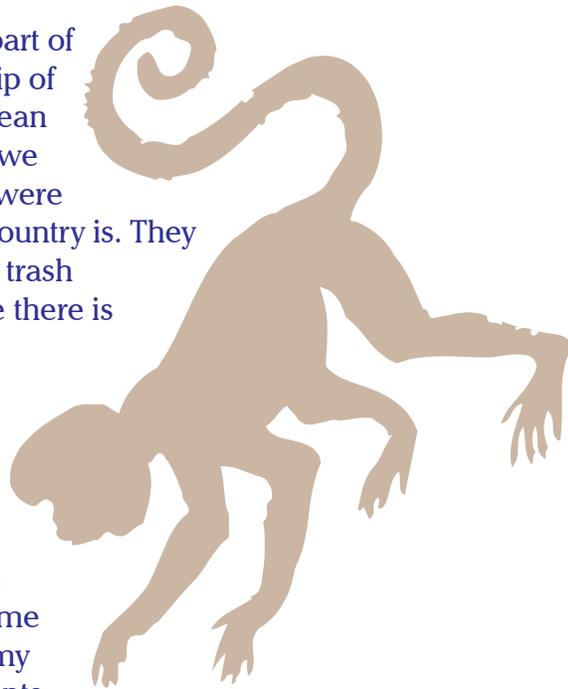
## WASHINGTON DC STUDENTS VISIT COSTA RICA...

When we "visited" the schools, my students were very impressed with the children. We made a similar tape as I interviewed my students and asked them the same question I asked the Costa Rican students, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" They were very surprised at the sound of their voice on tape and we all had a good chuckle.

I also am introducing a science unit on the Rain Forest. For the literature I will use The Great Kapok Tree, which is about the Amazon rain forest. Costa Rica is in the northern part of the rain forest. I want to instill a sense of ownership of the earth. We discuss keeping our environment clean and safe. We make connections about how what we do helps all the people of the earth. The students were very impressed when I told them how clean the country is. They find it hard to imagine a place with no McDonalds trash littering the street. Then they find it hard to believe there is no McDonalds.

Upcoming events include the journey to the Caribbean side, the wonderful howling monkeys, zip lining, the boat trip to visit the Bri Bri, and our last few days at CATIE. The students are learning a lot about a place I hope they will be inspired to visit one day. As for me, the lessons come easily, for I learned a lifetime of knowledge from my journey and hope to teach part of that to my students.

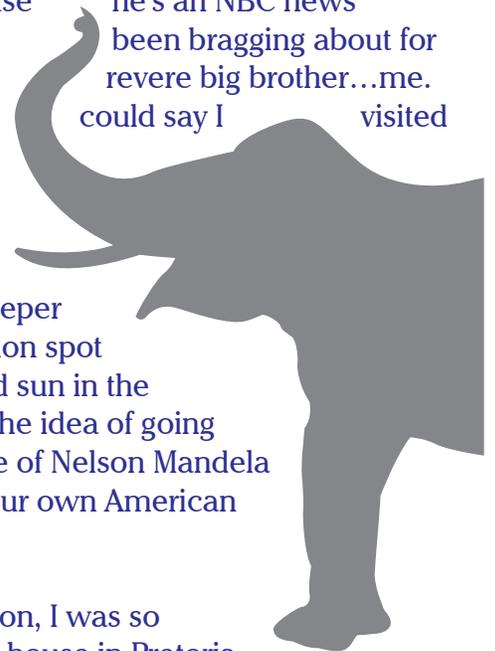
Pura Vida, Deborah Loepere



# A Grown Up's Summer Camp



A Grown Up's Summer Camp... That is the best way I can describe the USDA sponsored expedition to South Africa. Not since my mother shipped me off for two weeks to a far away place called Camp Minisink, New Jersey, have I felt this way. The difference is that, now, it is forty years later. And instead of traveling by train, it was by transcontinental jet airliner. Just imagine. For a kid, it was like going to the zoo, meeting new friends, and camping overnight, all rolled into one trip. Even my world-traveled friends said they were envious of me. And my, now-not-so-little, brother has been bragging all over Chicago about his big brother's South Africa trip. Now this amazes me because he's an NBC news producer/reporter that our family has been bragging about for over twenty years. Now, he has to revere big brother...me. Ah, revenge is sweet. Now only I could say I visited Pretoria, Soweto, Bishop Desmond Tutu's church; went on safari, camped in the Kalahari Desert, and had lunch in the Kruger National Wildlife Park. I now know that these places have a deeper meaning than any sand-and-sun vacation spot (although there was plenty of sand and sun in the Kalahari). All this envy has to do with the idea of going back to the "motherland", the mystique of Nelson Mandela and the close parallel of apartheid to our own American history.



Even after two weeks into the expedition, I was so excited when we passed by Mandela's house in Pretoria. I looked at the home in awe of his transfiguration from boxer, to lawyer, to 27 year Robin Island political prisoner, to president of South Africa and world icon. I even forgot to take a picture. However, the impact of the moment will be forever photographed in my mind.

Our itinerary had us camping under the stars of the southern sky in the Kalahari Desert for seven frigid nights. I got my first look at the Southern Cross constellation. We spent a week at the Southern African Wildlife College with students preparing to become park rangers and wardens. They were from neighboring countries: Botswana, Namibia, Zambia, Mozambique and Zimbabwe. As well as Lesotho and Swaziland that had been part of SA. We had lunch in the Kruger National Park. We also met and observed teachers and students in the Meir and the Welverdiend school districts. My greatest adventure was going on safari in the



## A GROWN UP'S SUMMER CAMP..

Timbavati Game Reserve and chasing a firestorm in the Manyeleti Wildlife Game Reserve. But shopping in Hatfield, Pretoria remains the hands-down favorite pastime for our group.

Some days were spent learning about the many uses of trees and grasses. The branches of the marula tree provide firewood and fences. Boats are carved out of its trunk. Its fruit makes wine, and elephants browse its thorny leaves for food. The marula and umbrella trees are often used in many photographs to represent the sparseness of the Africa plains or savannah. Some indigenous grasses have names like lemon grass, acid grass and long legged bushman grass. We studied the habitats of many animals and the many species of deer: spring buck, hens buck, gens buck, sable and the ever present herds of the impala deer.

I also visited Soweto (south west town) and videotaped Bishop Desmond Tutu's church and the new Peterson Memorial Museum, named after the first child to be killed in the 10-day assault by local police on town meetings at Bishop Tutu's church. As I left the museum, I heard someone say, "That's her!" It was the sister of Peterson. I had seen a painting of her in the museum. It showed her running from the police with a friend who was carrying her slain brother. Though my group was waiting, I was overcome and had to meet her. She was very gracious as I held her hand and tried to express my reverence for her sustained role in South African civil rights. It was a moment I will always remember. Just then, we were joined by the couple who had first recognized her. One of which just happened to be an ex patriot from the Bronx, New York.... My hometown! It turns out that she lived not too far from where I grew up. I felt so much emotion but had so little time. My party was waiting, so I had to say good-bye.

As much pure fun as the whole experience was, being in Africa, meeting people who looked like me, conversing with them while feeling inadequate since many of them speak 8 or 9 different languages and dialects, and breaking bread with them in their cities and villages gave me a warm and comfortable feeling of being "at home" and being in a place where I could belong and blend in. A month earlier, Ambassador Sissulu, at the SA Embassy on Massachusetts Ave. told us, "It is said that everyone who visits South Africa cries when they arrive and again when they leave." It was apparent in the eyes of all 12 members in my expedition, which included both scientists and educators from New York, California and D.C., We all found her words to be true.



# Irish Greetings!



I would like to share my experience of friendship and regular communication with David Dunne. Upon our return from Ireland he sent my class a "goodie bag". It contained an Irish the counties, several books

linen map showing all about the people and a kelly, green wish-nick doll for the children to play with. They loved the doll and immediately braided its hair "so it could fit in". They enjoyed my photos and read books on their own about Ireland. I loved their gardens, in particular the lush, floral displays that seemed to be "suspended" from the middle walls. Dave sent gardening tips and one of those special, hanging bags they use to cascade the beautiful flowers. He expressed an interest in John Lee Hooker to me, so I shared CD's and biographical books with him. We write whenever we can but have e-mailed in emergencies. Oh, gotta' go, the mailman just brought another letter from Dave!

Gurq mile mait aghut (Irish)

Gura me-la mot agut (pronounced)

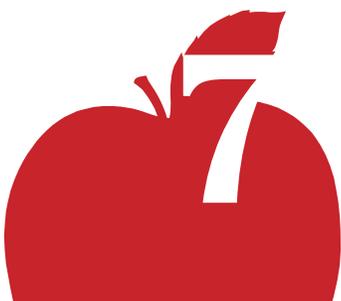
A thousand million thanks (translation) for the experience.

Best regards,

Melanie Carney

2nd Grade Teacher

Myrtilla Miner Elementary School



# *This is the very first TEACH US Newsletter!*

Many thanks go out to those of you who contributed stories for our first volume. We hope to hear from many more of you in the future. Please send all essays and photos to:

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1400 Independence Ave., SW  
Room 3229  
Washington, DC 20250-1084

or write to [Sara.Wolfe@fas.usda.gov](mailto:Sara.Wolfe@fas.usda.gov)

*Two expeditions will take place this summer...*

*Costa Rica: July 12-25*

*South Africa: August 1-22*

*If you would like to send something to our contacts in Costa Rica or South Africa, such as school supplies or letters from your students, forward that to us at USDA before the departure dates of each expedition.*

*(A warm thank you to Sally Schwartz for providing us with Official World Cup soccer balls to take to the children at the Guyabo Arriba School in Turrialba, Costa Rica!)*



Remember to look for all things TEACH US on our web page at:

<http://www.fas.usda.gov/icd/rsed/teach-us/teachus.html>

