

“TAKING INITIATIVE TO SERVE
IN AN ‘UNFINISHED WORLD’”

Michael G. Cartwright



Jennifer Eaton Fogo '85 '87

Jenny Eaton '85, from Burlington, Indiana, could have graduated without taking the time to do service projects in the hills of Appalachia and Azpitia in 1983 to 1984. After all, service was not a requirement at Indiana Central University when she was an undergraduate any more than UIndy students are required to engage in service twenty years later.

In retrospect, however, Jennifer realizes that her undergraduate education would have been incomplete had she not taken advantage of her opportunities to participate in the Appalachia Service Project (ASP) and the Peru Project from 1982 to 1985.

Actually, the previous sentence is misleading to the degree that it suggests that Jenny and her peers elected to participate in ventures that faculty and staff organized for them. Truth to tell, in addition to participating in projects organized by Dr. Charles Guthrie, Jenny Eaton and her friends created some of their own opportunities for service. The first Appalachia Service Project trip (Dec. 1983–Jan. 1984) happened because Jenny and her friends took the initiative to make it happen.

The story of how the first ASP work-team came about is but one example of how students at this University have seized the moment to make things happen in order to make a difference in the lives of others, little knowing that they would be initiating something that two decades later would be referred to as a “University tradition.”

At the time that she had her memorable conversation with Paul Coats, Jenny Eaton could have done without the kind of intellectual and moral challenge that this upperclassman religion major posed for her as a first-year student at Indiana Central University.

Paul was an active participant in Christian activities at ICU, including serving on the Ambassadors deputation team that traveled to various United Methodist congregations in Indiana. Paul Coats had already been a member of the ASP summer staff for a couple of years. Later that same year, Jenny was present when Paul spoke about his experiences with the Appalachia Service Project at one of the Wednesday evening “Midweek Worship” services held in the University Chapel. Jennifer recalls that Paul read a couple of stories from Glen “Tex” Evans’ little book *Life Is Like That* (1975) about the work of ASP. Evans had inspired a generation of young United Methodists to go into the world with a mission of “demonstrating evangelism in action,” extending a “helping hand” to the people of the Appalachian region.

Evans had developed an eight-point theology of evangelism that urged college students to “see all persons as our brothers and sisters, made in the image of God, having intelligence, a will, freedom, a sense of beauty, compassion, a sense of values, and creativity!” Instead of going into the lives of the poor people of the Appalachians presuming to know how to “fix” their lives, Evans challenged the students always to keep the dignity of these neighbors in view. Every summer, young women and men went into the poverty-stricken counties of eastern Kentucky, Tennessee, and Southwestern Virginia with Evans’s mandate: “We go to our brothers [and sisters] and we accept them right where they are, just the way they are!”

Evans and the college students who served as summer staff at the various sites where youth groups came to help with home repair and construction projects saw themselves acting according to the example of Jesus of Nazareth, who had proclaimed in his first public sermon that “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because He has appointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord” (Luke 4:14-18).

Paul Coats spoke to his college peers about the ministry of ASP with a sense of conviction. His commitment was infectious. Jennifer applied for a position on the summer staff and served in the summer of ’83. When she returned to campus that fall, she began talking with her friends about organizing an ASP trip during the Christmas break. Once Jenny had persuaded some of her friends that they really could take this project on, everyone pitched in to organize the trip.



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They provided their own leadership and raised their own funds, asking only for permission to use one of the University vans for the trip to and from Virginia. This request might have caused concern, but University officials knew that it was not the first time that Jenny and her friends had stepped forward to engage in service. In the early 1980s, Jenny and a group of students would go every Saturday to a nursing home across the street from ICU to “hang out with the elderly residents” and sing hymns and other songs, accompanied by their guitarist, Paul Coats.

In January 1984, Jenny and a group of students from Indiana Central took what would be the first weeklong trip to Jonesville, Virginia. While there, they worked on home repair projects for impoverished families in the Appalachian region, and they also had the opportunity to reflect on the importance of service.



Many of the students enjoyed the experience so much that they wanted to go back again. Some applied to be members of the summer staff for the Appalachia Service Project, and others began thinking about putting together another Christmas break service trip. In fact, the first ASP work-team experience was so successful that they formed another ASP work-team in 1985, this time with the active help and organizational support of the new University chaplain, United Methodist pastor John Young.

By 1986, Jenny and her friends began to realize that they had founded a “tradition,” and so it became part of the expectation of students associated with the Christian Life Committee of the Campus Program Board. Over the past two decades, many students have participated in ASP trips, and more than a few have been part of two or more work-teams. Jennifer believes that one of the reasons why this venture worked so well was that “It wasn’t top down—an initiative created by the ICU faculty and staff. It was really bottom up, because students were taking initiative to make something happen.”

As a pre-physical therapy major at ICU, Jenny had thought that her own vocational path would be fairly straightforward, but it did not turn out quite the way that she had scripted her life story.

Originally, Jennifer Eaton had planned to be a physical therapist, but when she applied to graduate school, she was stunned to discover that she was not accepted for admission. Receiving that rejection letter from the PT school at ICU in the spring of 1985 was a big disappointment for her, but the letter also suggested that she might want to consider seeking admission in social work or occupational therapy, since it was very clear to the admissions committee that she had a deep faith and a passion for service.

A year later Jenny celebrated with her friends upon learning that she had been accepted into the occupational therapy program at Indiana Central. Jenny smiles as she recalls the different paths that she and her classmates have taken as compared to the paths that they thought their lives would take.

Jennifer Eaton was one of nine students who made that first trip with Guthrie and Chaplain David V. W. Owen to the village of Azpitia, Peru, in 1983. Guthrie designed this opportunity so that students could receive academic credit in history and non-Western studies while combining personal service with travel and learning in the developing world.

The first three weeks were to be spent in the rural village of almost 500 people. Some of the students would help the villagers build a regional agricultural training center; other members of the team would provide healthcare and health education to hundreds of Peruvians in the Mala River valley. The fourth week of the trip gave the students an opportunity to travel to places like Cuzco, the ancient capital of the Inca empire, and the “Lost City,” Macchu Pichu. This part of the trip was designed to give students the opportunity “to study the rich heritage of Peru’s early civilizations and to experience the excitement of her cities.”¹

As the students met during the spring months to study and learn in preparation for the work they would do, some of them were not sure that they wanted to have to learn as much about the history of Peru and its contemporary social struggles as Guthrie thought they needed to know. But even when they did not quite grasp the details of Peruvian culture, the students began to realize that for the intense young history professor, this trip was about much more than academic inquiry—it was about taking the time to consider the needs of people in other places in the world, and, where possible, to respond by offering themselves in service.

Jennifer recalls that during one of the sessions that spring, Dr. Guthrie talked with them about a stanza from a poem that she will never forget:

Earth is crammed with heaven,
And every common bush afire with
God; And only he who sees takes off
his shoes; the rest sit around and pluck
blackberries.²

The point of this stanza by Elizabeth Barrett Browning is that what we choose to notice will shape the kinds of activities that we take time to do. Jennifer and the other eight students understood that Guthrie was one of those people who was not content to sit around and pluck blackberries. Instead, he challenged students to serve in ways that might make a difference in a world in which social inequalities were more and more evident.

The opportunity to participate in the Peru Project proved to be “pivotal” in Jenny’s life experience. She went on the trip with the instinct that she was “going to see a different part of the world than where I was raised.”

Jenny and her friends stayed with a family in that village for the three weeks that they participated in the Peru Project. She recalls, “Their houses did not have roofs like we have. The ceiling of the family’s house was made out of straw. I remember lying there and thinking: ‘These people have very few possessions but they have everything that they need.’”³ In contrast, she realized that she and her friends from Indiana had so much “stuff” that they didn’t really need.

She recalls going to a health clinic near Azpitia one day where she saw a parent attempting to care for a child who was suffering from a large growth around his mouth (infintigo).⁴ The man was frantic and very upset about his son’s condition, which not only looked horrible but could be life-threatening if not treated. She could tell that the man felt helpless and was fearful for his son’s life. That day Jenny realized something important about herself and the people she was attempting to serve.

As she would later say, “I realized that these people in Peru love and care for their children just as we do. They try to do everything for their children, just as we would try to do for our children, but they don’t have what we have.”⁵



E

Having made this connection also made it possible for Jennifer to begin to recognize her privileged status in a world where she didn’t have to wonder if she would have access to medical care or medications for herself or those that she loved.

These experiences in service in the context of a cross-cultural study-travel course helped Jennifer realize the need to be involved in service. When the ICU students had completed their part of the Peru Project, they received a standing ovation from the youth of the village. Jennifer recalls: “I remember standing there in awe of the life I have led in comfort. I thought to myself, ‘they are praising us for nothing.’ The people of that village had very little, but they were faithful.”

Jennifer recalls that she came away from this experience having learned the difference between “what people have and what people really need.”⁶ At the same time, she realized she was in a position to do things that might really help persons in need, like the little boy with infintigo whose father had felt so helpless and distraught about his son’s needs.

Dr. Guthrie wisely did not attempt to control what Jennifer and other students learned as part of the Peru Project. What he did do, however, was to make it possible for students to engage in their own conversations with the people and cultures they encountered during the trip.

Another of the conversations that began at Indiana Central was with an enthusiastic student named Scott. Jennifer recalls with fondness the quotation that provided the occasion for her and Scott to connect during one of the Midweek Worship services hosted by Chaplain John Young and the Christian Life Committee. Scott was a new student at ICU, having transferred the previous fall, and at the time he was beginning to think about whether he might be called into Christian ministry.

Scott began his talk with the statement: “Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm.” Scott asked if anyone knew the meaning of this quotation from Ralph Waldo Emerson. Jenny did, and proceeded to tell those assembled about the Greek root of enthusiasm—*En-theos*, meaning “one who is filled with the spirit of God”—and then explained why great things required enthusiastic commitment.



F

Without realizing it, Jenny had stolen Scott's thunder, leaving the young pre-theology student in the awkward position of having to find something else to say, since he had just been upstaged by this graduate student. Somehow this pair managed to survive that awkward beginning, and began dating one another.

Over the next couple of years, Scott and Jenny had the opportunity to talk about their aspirations and commitments. Both had strong Christian convictions, but they struggled at times to know exactly how they might be called to serve in the world. For a time, Scott served as a student pastor of a rural church outside of Indianapolis, but he ultimately concluded he was not called to ordained ministry as an itinerating pastor in the United Methodist Church.

A few years after their first encounter, Jennifer and Scott attended a concert where they heard the song "It's an Unfinished World." The song brought back memories of what Jennifer had experienced in Peru and ASP. She realized that "None of the buildings were finished. There is so much that we can do to help finish it."¹³

Knowing that you live in an "unfinished world" serves as a daily reminder that, while it may not yet be possible to eliminate homelessness, neither can one ignore the

homeless people of Indianapolis. And where one is in a position to serve others, one should do so. That conviction has stayed with Jennifer in the years since that memorable evening with Scott Fogo, the man who became her husband in 1988.

Sharing this conviction that they should serve in ways that contribute to building up the "unfinished world" has been one of the things that has sustained Jennifer and Scott in the midst of career changes and shifting roles and responsibilities. Jenny is an occupational therapist and Scott is a trained social worker. Scott is now an administrator at St. Vincent's Pediatric Rehabilitation Center, a context in which he encounters the suffering of children on a daily basis. Some days, the children cared for in the clinic are jubilant with the news that their recovery is going well. There are also times, however, when Scott and his colleagues share the agonizing reality of a child's death.

Jennifer and Scott Fogo have not tried to shield their children from the "unfinished world" in which they are growing up. The Fogo children have accompanied their parents when their church serves in the soup kitchen at Dayspring or when they participate in other acts of voluntary service with the Interfaith Hospitality Network (IHN), a group of churches and synagogues that assist homeless families by housing them for a week at a time and providing meals and other forms of hospitality (see photo of Fogo family on page 123).

Scott and Jenny think it is important for their children to understand the reality of homelessness and how it affects children like them. As the Fogo children have met children who are homeless, they have had the opportunity to talk with their parents about how difficult it must be to go from one place to another week after week. The children quickly recognized how frightening it must be for these children to be homeless, and they identified with these fears. The children in Jenny's Sunday

school class raised money to buy Beanie Babies to give to children at IHN so that they would not be scared as they moved from hostel to hostel. Such a gesture hardly "fixes" the plight of the homeless, but it does affirm their human dignity.

Jenny and Scott share the same daily struggles that many families face in the fast-paced world of the twenty-first century. Both parents commute to work—one to the northside and the other to the southside of Indy. They share responsibility for such tasks as getting the kids to softball practice on Thursdays and to the soccer game on Saturdays. In addition to Jenny's responsibilities at the University, she is also completing a PhD in Occupational Therapy at Purdue University, another role that has its own stresses. They also continue to wrestle with the vexing questions about how their family can best serve the needs of the world in the midst of their various activities and work responsibilities.¹⁴

As a mother-professor-spouse-graduate student-softball coach, Jennifer does not have the same kinds of opportunities to serve that she did when she was a student at ICU, but she has found new ways to serve that fit with her busy life. For the past thirteen summers, she has volunteered as a member of the staff of CHAMP Camp, a week-long experience for children with special needs founded by Dave Carter and Nancy McCurdy.¹⁵

CHAMP stands for "*Children Have a Lot of Motivation and Potential*," and the camp makes it possible for children of all abilities to play like other children. Jennifer is able to use her professional skills to make a difference in the lives of children.

She recalls an experience that took place during the pilot weekend of CHAMP Camp in 1990. One of the participants that summer was a seven-year-old girl who had been involved in a car accident five years before. She had a high-level spinal cord

injury, which left her bound to a wheelchair and dependent on a ventilator. She had lived in the hospital since she was two-years-old.

During the weekend, the staffers took the children out into the open air so that they could experience what it is like to enjoy a night out in the woods. As Jenny was wheeling this girl down a hill along a path, she expressed her amazement, saying “Jenny, Jenny, stop. Look! I have never seen stars before.”

Jenny understands all too well that an evening out under the stars is not sufficient, but she also knows that a life without the privilege of enjoying the wonders of the natural world is tragically limited.

Twenty years after that first ASP trip, Jennifer Fogo is now a member of the faculty in the School of Occupational Therapy at her alma mater. In that capacity, she teaches courses like Occupational Behavior 1, a course in which students have the opportunity to be involved with children at different stages of development as they are oriented to the occupational needs that children have at particular ages.

Occupational therapy is typically defined as “skilled treatment that helps individuals achieve independence in all facets of their lives.”¹⁶ Because particular persons face different kinds of challenges, the therapy has to be adapted to each individual patient.

As an occupational therapist (OT), Jennifer is trained to pay attention to the social, emotional, and physiological effects of illness and injury on the growth and development of children and adults. As a *teacher* of OTs-in-training, Jennifer also has to pay attention to the way her students see the patients that they encounter in the context of observing a developmental preschool. She knows it is possible to do performance skills assessments



and treatment without taking an interest in the lives of the persons being assessed. She also understands that while making it possible for people to learn “skills for the job of living,” an OT can play a key role in restoring and/or sustaining the human dignity of those in her care. An experienced OT has the wisdom not to be overwhelmed by the challenges that a particular patient faces while also being able to use skills to shape solutions to these vexing concerns.

The profession of occupational therapy, then, is a “hands-on” way of caring for the needs of persons who struggle with the kinds of disabilities that prevent them from enjoying activities that many of us take for granted. Jennifer draws upon her skills as an occupational therapist to devise ways to make it possible for children to play, as well as engage in other activities that enable them to thrive. When Jenny describes all that is involved in making it possible for children at CHAMP Camp to experience what it is like to go canoeing, her face lights up with a combination of compassion and delight. Clearly, she has found ways to serve within and beyond her profession that fit her particular passion for service.

As a teacher, sometimes Jenny finds herself in a conversation with a student in which the student articulates discoveries not unlike the ones that she had when she was a student. Students may approach the observation of children in developmental preschool with unconscious assumptions about why they have the problems that they do, but after a semester of working with them, they begin to recognize the humanity of these children and cease to perceive them as problems.

When that happens, Jenny smiles with fond recollection of her own discoveries when she was a student. Like her colleague Dr. Charles Guthrie, who once served as one of her mentors when she was a student two decades ago, she has the self-discipline to remind herself that each person has to learn these things in the context of his or her own journey.

- Peters “Good Neighbor” Award 1987
- “basin & towel” recognition 2004

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