

ShipMATES



Lindsay Utz (A03) explores a book of photography with Indian student Kailash.

Soul Sisters

by Julie Hannon
Alumni Coordinator

Jenny and Lindsay Utz have followed each other into the unlikeliest of places. To strangers, the sisters from Portland, Oregon could pass as twins, just a few years apart in age, both slender with shoulder-length red hair and large, bright-eyes, women with a passion for art and filmmaking. Both have an individual flair that makes you stop and take notice.

In the summer of 2003, younger sibling Lindsay sailed on Semester at Sea as video editor upon graduation from the University of Arizona Tucson. During her voyage, she would call Jenny and say, 'Hi, I'm in Japan' or 'Hi, I'm in Fuji.' "Naturally, I think Jenny wanted to ditch her desk job and be there, too," says Lindsay.

Continued on page 4

iVen y disfrut

Join us ... on Seminar at Sea travel to Central America and transit Panama Canal Dec. 28, 2005 to Jan. 2006. Ring in the New Year on the Explorer, reunite with shipboard friends and introduce family and friends to Semester at Sea-style travel.

Relax and enjoy the amenities of the world's fastest cruise ship, including spa and fitness facility, and engage in a lecture series presented by prominent speakers on topics as diverse as colonial architecture of Antigua, Guatemala, "Shake and Bake in Central America" which discusses the volcanic and earthquake history of the region, 60th anniversary of World War II, and role of religion and liberation theology in Central America.

Continued on page 3



Soul Sisters

Continued from page 1

The following spring Jenny did just that, and sailed around the world, also as video editor, making stops in developing countries Lindsay did not experience. Her voyage, specifically her encounter with India, compelled Jenny to get involved, to become a better global citizen.

"A global citizen stays well-informed about not only their own country, but those countries less fortunate, and even those more fortunate," says Jenny. "It means staying informed about both sides of any issue – reading mainstream publications, but also blogs, left-wing and right-wing literature, and making up your mind for yourself."

This past March the pair set off for another kind of adventure, this time at Jenny's prompting. Together they volunteered for three months with a non-profit group called Video Volunteers, and were partnered with ANANDI, a progressive women's organization in Rajkot, India that employs an empowerment approach to improve the lives of rural and tribal women in the region's most underdeveloped areas. Rajkot is a major industrial town in the western region of Gujarat state.

Jenny found Video Volunteers, a nonprofit program designed to use video to help alleviate poverty and accelerate social change by empowering the voice of the poor to be heard, online. She jumped at the opportunity to devote time to her first love, documentary filmmaking, and to a rejuvenated interest in activism. ANANDI, an acronym for Area Networking and Development Initiatives, was the perfect assignment, combining Jenny's majors at the University of Wisconsin Madison – film and video production and women's studies.

Their charge was to bring video cameras and editing equipment to India, and at the end of their stay, leave the equipment behind in the hands of a small staff who they would train. In their absence the staff could then produce documentary videos to address and educate locals about a variety of community issues. Together, their ultimate challenge was to produce a video magazine to be broadcast on Indian cable television and VHS players in villages during meetings of women's collectives called Mahila Mandal. At these meetings, women discuss pressing issues facing their communities, such as the need for proper sanitation facilities, insufficient amounts

of potable water, and a lack of schools within a manageable distance from their homes.

But first, they had to navigate a language and, in some cases, a reality barrier, not to mention building from scratch when it came to pesky computer equipment. One of their trainees, 19-year-old Kailash, who helped manage microcredit accounts in rural areas for ANANDI, had been exposed to very little modern technology. She had never used a computer mouse, and jumped in surprise the first time she saw a CD-Rom driver eject!

Jenny and Lindsay employed creative teaching techniques, including using their bodies to illustrate how to 'click' or 'drag and drop' and to explain features like shutter speed and aperture. It took the women two hours to teach Kailash how to simply open an editing software program, create a new project and save it, but just a day later, she was capturing footage on her own.

The pair lived in the ANANDI offices along with their trainees, and class was held on the ground floor. At first, class consisted mostly of technical aspects of filmmaking and getting to know the equipment. It was rewarding, certainly, but also very challenging.

"After our first village shoot, the novelty of video wore off and the reality that filmmaking is really difficult and technical sunk in," says Lindsay. "For a few days morale was low and confidence levels were down. Translation takes time and all subtlety and nuance is lost. There were moments when I wanted so badly to communicate directly to the class, in my own words."

But their team of four students was smart, ambitious and brought their own individuality to the project. It was rewarding to watch them learn and grow, says Jenny. Each sister also brought different skills to the project and in the end they learned as much from each other as from their new Indian friends.

"You may assume going through an experience like this with a family member makes it easier. In a sense, it does," says Lindsay. "We were a constant support system for one another. At the same time we could be awfully hypercritical of each other's approach. We're sisters; we love each other immensely, but we don't always agree. When we had a difference of opinion we had to deal with it like professionals and not like sisters. That was the real challenge."

The women came to terms with their strengths and weaknesses, and the final product benefited. Lindsay had previous teaching experience and she was good at organizing class activities and practical exercises; Jenny had an extraordinary amount of technical expertise so she did a lot of the troubleshooting. "In the end, our success as teaching partners was also our success as sisters," says Lindsay.

The conditions were sometimes inconceivable and for Jenny, were at times emotionally and intellectually crippling. She recalls vividly a tiny, rural village, the poorest she had witnessed, where children roamed the streets sobbing from hunger. She watched





At left, Kailashi interviews a rural woman about food security, or lack thereof, for the video magazine. Bottom left, the class surrounds Lindsay as they screen their work on a laptop.

as parents hand-fed their children tobacco to ward off their cries of hunger and, in one case, listened to a mother recount how she was forced to beat her children so finally they could sleep and get rest – their only reprieve from their slow and painful starvation.

"I had never seen this type of desperation," says Jenny, who at the time was traveling with the film crew and no translator. "I didn't have my sister there to empathize with me, and I had no way to find out what I was hearing in the interviews with them, just broken English translation. I cried a lot, and thus freaked out my crew. I wish I hadn't. It would have been more productive to keep it in, but I was out of my element and had no way to express what I was feeling, I had no translator."

Jenny also spent a bout in the hospital with a bacterial infection and severe dehydration. It was an experience that taught the women volumes about Indian culture.

"At any given moment there would be either a new stranger in the room petting her or somebody poking their head in the door to stare," says Lindsay. "In India there is really no sense of privacy, which isn't necessarily bad, but it is something to get used to. I was given a tour of the hospital and was able to walk into a room where a woman had just given birth to her fourth child. The baby boy was four minutes old. The woman was still on the delivery table."

The culmination of their work was a video installation on food security, or lack thereof. On May 5, the evening before the women ended their stay in the Rajkot, they witnessed what Jenny refers to as 'the payoff.'

Their students screened the segment for about 100 villagers gathered at one of the few homes with electricity. Men and women crammed together on a dirt floor to watch the 25-minute "Umang Video Magazine, Volume 1." It defines food security, educates families about what they need to have to consider their situation 'good,' informs them of their rights as Indian citizens, and encourages them to speak out and demand that their rights be honored if they are being mistreated by the government or police.

What followed was a heated discussion that lasted more than two hours, ending at nearly one in the morning. Many

were outraged to discover that their Fair Price Shop, where they can use special Below Poverty Level cards to purchase essentials like grains and cooking kerosene at lower costs, were required by law to be open 26 days a month. The closest store to the village is open only three to five days in comparison, reports Jenny, and if families don't have money on those specific days, their family likely goes hungry that month. The next installation will center on domestic violence and is scheduled for completion in four months. Jenny and Lindsay are confident that their team will continue on without them, the goal of their volunteerism.

"I'll never know what it's like to be forced to marry against my will or struggle to feed my family but now I know women who do. And I stand in awe of them," says Lindsay. "I struggled with the idea that somehow our problems paled in comparison to theirs. But I have come to realize that as women from the developed world, our day-to-day struggles are distinct but no less legitimate."

Now back at home in Portland, the women agree that they always knew they would learn as much about what's important in life from the women in India as they could teach about filmmaking. "I went to India with one sister and left with a hundred," says Lindsay.



Top, The filmmaker and her class (l to r) Tushar, Rishi, Jenny, Kailash, Sabana & Kirti. Bottom, Lindsay and Jenny celebrate the annual Holi festival with the 'exchange' of colors!