

Go East, Young Woman



Andrea Mae Wilson '05

Santa Barbara, Calif., native Andrea Mae Wilson, moved east to the University of Richmond and just kept going. She studied international medicine, development, and environmental care in Guatemala, Samoa, and New Zealand. After graduation, she traveled in Bolivia and Peru before taking a teaching assignment in India.

“I thought I’d be teaching English, but it snowballed into anatomy, physiology, community health, and music,” she laughs. She worked in an isolated area of Chhattisgarh, where she encountered abject poverty and warm hospitality.

In her previous travels in developing countries, Wilson had met many foreigners who wanted to help but lacked the necessary skills. “That’s why I decided on graduate work in international public health,” she says. “It fulfills basic needs and fits my background. It’s also an exciting challenge.”

Wilson chose Afghanistan’s Ministry of Public Health for her master’s internship with Johns Hopkins. “I was drawn to Afghanistan’s plight after decades of war,” she explains. “Women’s literacy rates there are among the world’s lowest. Twenty percent of children die before age five.”

Returning to Afghanistan with her master’s degree, she now serves as a regional manager for a project supported by Johns Hopkins and the Ministry of Public Health. “I have a lot to learn about working effectively within this complex culture,” she says. “The warmth of the Afghans notwithstanding, security issues can be difficult.

“I find extraordinary fulfillment and intellectual stimulation within my work, travels, and attempts at new languages. It’s simply what I’ve found to do that makes me become most alive.”

Wilson plans to work in Afghanistan or Pakistan for another year. After that, a favorite quote from Frederick Beuchner will continue to guide her: “Vocation happens when our deep gladness meets the world’s deep need.”

—Karen Telleen-Lawton