



Photo courtesy Dubnick family

It's a long way from a school on Vancouver Island to a teaching position in Uganda, but Ashley Dubnick of Air Ronge has made that trip. Dubnick, a previous winner of the Lester B. Pearson College of the Pacific scholarship, is just completing a work term overseas. Above, some of her students demonstrate a traditional dance.

A world of learning

Pearson scholar reflects

Let's just say that spruce beetles are no longer a problem.

Like most kids in northern Saskatchewan, 20-year-old Ashley Dubnick grew up with a healthy "respect" for the ugly, hard-biting insects. Nine months after Dubnick's temporary relocation to Uganda, spruce beetles now pale next to a newfound enemy: jiggers. These tiny fleas

like to burrow into people's feet and lay sacks of eggs which can only be removed by poking pins or knives into the infected body part and hauling out the egg sack — hopefully intact.

Another constant health threat is malaria, carried by mosquitoes. "It will be nice not to have to sleep under a bug net," Dubnick said May 19, a week before the scheduled end of her nine-month tenure in Uganda.

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Overseas "option" teaches different values

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"Only one in our group got malaria, so I guess we are lucky. I never thought I would see the good side of northern Saskatchewan mosquitoes," she said.

Far more has changed for Dubnick than just her perspectives on insects, and many more lessons have been learned than the value of hydrogen peroxide for your feet after a day of mudding a hut.

Dubnick went to Uganda last August as part of what her alma mater, Lester B. Pearson College of the Pacific, calls the "third-year option". The college sends selected graduates to work on one of seven service projects: Bolivia, northern Canada, Ecuador, Ethiopia, India, Nicaragua, and Uganda. The goal of these extended work terms is "an interchange of skills between communities that enhances students' understanding of global issues, particularly those within less fortunate societies, and develops specific skills to help advance healthy communities."

Prior to leaving for Uganda, Dubnick and her team (made up of three

Ashley Dubnick (second from left) with some of the students and other teachers from her term in Uganda. "Ugandans generally see education as the key to a successful future and a means of overcoming the poverty they have grown up with, so from a young age they can be quite determined," Dubnick explained.



other girls from the college) attended two weeks of training at Pearson. This included wilderness first aid, HIV/AIDS "sensitizing", cultural information, and a crash course in teaching. The girls were also hooked up with Geoffrey Tindyebwa, a Ugandan teacher at Pearson, who served as a support link.

For the first four months, Dubnick was assigned to work as a teacher with Good Samaritan Primary School in Mukono. The school focuses on providing education to orphaned and

disabled youth. The students are between the ages of seven and 16, and are behind in their education due to their inability to pay school fees or the fact that their help was needed at home.

The school is a simple, bamboo-partitioned structure without windows or doors. Learning resources are limited to a notebook and pencil stub for each child, and chalk, a chalkboard and (in some cases) a textbook for the teacher. Dubnick's assignments included math, English (which is the language of instruction for all classes, but not the children's first language), science and agriculture. ("They figured anyone from Saskatchewan should be able to teach agriculture," she joked.

As a first time teacher working in a strange environment, Dubnick sometimes had difficulty figuring out how best to introduce concepts. "I got

some great blank stares and a few of my attempts were complete flops," she admitted. However, most of the students were eager, and would even insist on receiving homework.

"Ugandans generally see education as the key to a successful future and a means of overcoming the poverty they have grown up with, so from a young age they can be quite determined," Dubnick explained. "Also, education is a privilege in Uganda, and if you are lucky enough to be in a position to receive an education — the main problem being able to afford the school fees — you're probably going to take advantage of it."

The kids, many of whom have grown up far too fast due to poverty or the deaths of their parents, were Dubnick's greatest source of inspiration and joy. While there were some barriers due to the formal nature of teacher-student relationships — being called "Madame Ashley" and having students kneel to speak to her both took a lot of getting used to — Dubnick gradually built a relaxed, trust-

ing relationship with her kids.

Aside from teaching, Dubnick also helped the school's director with finding funds to make the school sustainable. This included coming up with projects, researching funding sources such as UNICEF and Feed the Children, and writing proposals. Dubnick's efforts resulted in the acquisition of 1,000 laying chickens for a project that will help the school's finances (through selling eggs), provide some nutrients for the children and also be used to teach the children a useful job skill.

For the second term, Dubnick moved to Fort Portal, where she has been working with children to build and plaster mud huts. In most cases, the kids have lost their parents to AIDS and have had to take responsibility for themselves and younger siblings, providing everything from shelter to drinking water while often suffering from health problems themselves.

Looking back on her time in Uganda, Dubnick is quick to admit that

there are some things she won't miss: the jiggers, of course, and the cockroaches; being overcharged for everything and being stared at because of her white skin; and having to eat massive amounts of food (even what she didn't like) in order to be polite to her hosts. At the same time, however, Uganda has become a deep part of her, and she knows that she has been changed.

"Living in a country that is so largely affected by war, corruption and poverty has put life in Canada in a whole new perspective," she said. "It has allowed me to see what is important and what is not, what should be taken advantage of and what shouldn't.... I guess I just value things differently now."

A trip to Uganda in February showed Ashley's mom, Caron, just how much the experience has shaped her daughter. While Caron was near panic at times in the streets of Kampala, Uganda's capital, Ashley simply took her by the hand, explained what she needed to know, and led her through. It was strange, Caron admitted, "to be handed over to my daughter's care instead of the other way around."

"I was impressed by her calm and her assertiveness, her confidence in herself," Caron said. "She has become a really capable and confident young woman, and I can see a lot of opportunities coming her way that she'll take advantage of. ... She thought about passing it up (this teaching trip). I'm so glad she didn't."

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3 of 6 appeals to proceed

The Lac La Ronge Indian Band will hold appeal hearings June 1-2 regarding general election results.

One appeal from Grandmother's Bay will be heard June 1, while two more appeals from Hall Lake will be heard June 2.

The appeal hearings are at the Prince Albert Inn.

However, three other appeals — two

from Little Red River and one from La Ronge — were ruled not valid by appeals officer Gary Littlepine.

A statement from the band says, "It is believed the appeals addressed political questions as opposed to election process concerns."

The details of the appeals were not made public beforehand.