



Year of Wanders

*Graduates discover the world, and themselves,
through the Thomas J. Watson Fellowship*

SINCE 1985, Sewanee has been on the select list of colleges whose graduating seniors are eligible to apply for a most interesting post-graduate program: the Thomas J. Watson Fellowship.

This program provides one year of funding for college graduates to travel outside of the United States and pursue a project entirely of their own devising, outside of the formal academic context.

Sewanee students have historically been successful competitors for this prized award — 34 have been selected as Watson Fellows, from Arnie Frishman and Michele Bambling in 1985 to Kate Cummings in 2004.

In these pages, we'd like to give you a taste of some of the Sewanee Watson Fellows' experiences as they've traveled through approximately 50 countries pursuing projects focused on everything from ayurvedic medicine to the sociology of swim clubs.

A few years ago, Larry Jones, associate dean of the college, contacted all of the fellows and asked them to answer a few questions about their Watson Fellowship year and how it has affected their lives. As I read through those stories and reflections, a composite picture started to emerge. Although each one of these 34 people is treading his or her own unique path, they all are people who have discovered who they are, what they want to be about, and where they are headed. They have an understanding of themselves as spiritual beings. They have had experiences that have cut them to the quick. They have been humbled by life. They have stories to tell. Yet, they also appreciate others' stories. They know how to listen. They understand that each human being, and each culture, has a unique and legitimate perspective, and that opening yourself to it will immeasurably enrich and change you.

For more stories and pictures and a list of all of Sewanee's 34 Watson Fellowship recipients and their projects, visit <www.sewanee.edu/magazine>. Learn more about the Thomas J. Watson Fellowship at <www.watsonfellowship.org>. — *Laura Barlament*

ARNIE FRISHMAN, C'85

Judaism in the Modern World

England, France, Belgium, Hungary, Poland, Sweden, Israel



I left the United States in the summer of 1985 an assimilated Jew whose connection to Judaism was a mild affinity for bagels, Woody Allen, *Fiddler on the Roof*, and the novels of Chaim Potok. Like the vast majority of Jews in the United States, I knew next to nothing about the richness of my own heritage.

During my Watson year, I discovered that heritage, and it changed my life completely. I became what I was observing.

I lived with Jewish communities in London, Paris, Antwerp, Budapest, Warsaw, Stockholm, and Jerusalem. I studied and learned by becoming a participant-observer. I spent most of my time with Orthodox/Hasidic communities, which were the most receptive for this type of study. I was completely taken with the beauty and substance of the Orthodox lifestyle: the warmth and serenity of the Jewish Sabbath and the emphasis on becoming a learned person in Torah and Mishna and Talmud in the original Hebrew and Aramaic.

I remember a Sabbath dinner-table conversation in London with a rabbi, Joseph Freilich. He had become a mentor to me and had introduced me to many families in Golders Green, a neighborhood in north London with a substantial Orthodox Jewish population. He was always challenging me on my lack of Hebrew and Judaic knowledge and trying to convince me to take time off after my fellowship year to learn Hebrew and become more knowledgeable about Judaism. He told me that with hard work and a commitment to keeping an Orthodox lifestyle, I could recapture my heritage, become learned, and have the beauty of the Jewish Sabbath and family life that I saw around me. His words shook me up. I followed his advice.

It has been a long and interesting road back to the heritage and life of my Jewish roots, and it all started at Sewanee. I remember the first time I heard about the Watson Fellowship. It was the winter of 1984. Dr. Gilchrist spotted me walking across the Quad and called me over to tell me about this very interesting new program, the Watson Fellowship, with which Sewanee had become affiliated. He thought I might be interested in applying for it. I often think back to how different my life would have been if I had not had that chance meeting with Dr. Gilchrist.

Arnie stayed in Jerusalem for a year after his Watson Fellowship and received training in Judaism at a yeshiva. He continued his religious studies in New York while also earning degrees from the Harvard School of Education and Columbia Law School. After several years working as general counsel for the University of Minnesota, he and his family — wife Hindy and children Shira Masha, Shlomo, Akiava, and Elijah — are moving to Israel this summer.



Arnie Frishman visited Jerusalem's Western Wall (also known as the "Wailing Wall") in 2005, 20 years after his first trip during his Watson year.



*Left: Like Arnie Frishman (one of Sewanee's first Watson Fellows), Sewanee's most recent Watson recipient, **KATE CUMMINGS, C'04**, studied religion — in this case, Buddhism — in India, Vietnam, Thailand, and New Zealand. A studio art major at Sewanee, Cummings used her camera to capture her experiences among Buddhist communities.*

KEVIN WATT, C'94

Agriculture: Economic and Ecological Sustainability

Nepal



Kevin Watt models a winter coat typical of the Humli ethnic group of Nepal. The coat was made from eight goatskins.



Only six weeks after arriving in Nepal, I was waiting in line at the Kathmandu central bus station, trying to get a ticket to Rampur. A young Nepali man approached me and asked if I needed help. My guard went up, and my first thought was, "What does he want?" Although I declined his offer, he grabbed me by the hand and whisked me to the head of the long line and then behind the counter, where he signed me up for the last space on the bus.

When I boarded, I realized that he was the ticket collector of this bus, and my suspicions grew. He began collecting money from the passengers and came to me last. I had 80 rupees handy to show him that I knew how much the ticket was and that he was not going to swindle me out of more. Instead he sat down beside me, declined the money, and we began to chat, he practicing his English and me my Nepali.

The ride took over six hours. When we arrived in Rampur, he came with me and offered to arrange a cab. I suspected that he had a friend who was a cabbie or hotel owner and would give him a kickback from whatever I was charged. He hailed a cab, paid the driver 15 rupees, helped me load my bag, shut the door, and waved goodbye. The cabbie then took me to the hotel that I requested.

I vividly remember my last glimpse of him standing in the street and waving as the dust rose up behind us. He had not charged me for the bus ride and had even paid for the cab. He had never wanted anything but to talk. What magnificent and unexpected generosity.

Six months later, I had reached the midpoint of my Watson year and the low point of my life. I was lying on the dirt floor of a Tharu hut in the Terai region of Nepal, wracked with pain and fever and questioning what I was doing there. I had come to Nepal to research mountain agro-ecology, and now I had a sudden realization: agriculture was not my passion. I was in a feverish delirium in a strange land far from family and friends, and this epiphany invalidated my very reason for being there.

Yet it is often these times of intense challenge when one sees with greatest clarity. I saw that in my complacency, I had been pursuing a professional agenda based on my academic resume rather than searching deeply for my passions and boldly following them. The next few weeks were a time of profound introspection as I sought out these passions and the direction they would take me.

Even now, years later, a day rarely goes by that I do not in some way reflect on my experience in Nepal. Put simply, it was perhaps the most challenging experience of my life, but also one of the richest.

When we push ourselves beyond what is comfortable, we learn the most about ourselves. I spent almost the entire year outside of my comfort zone, and as such learned volumes about who I am.

Kevin spent several years after his Watson doing ecological research in southwest Georgia and teaching for *Outward Bound* in the North Carolina mountains. He then went to medical school at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and did clinical rotations in Ecuador and Tanzania. He graduated in May and entered a pediatric residency at Duke in June. He plans to continue to work in medically underserved areas internationally.



CHRISTOPHER PIROMALLI, C'97, (in group on right) worked with the Comprehensive Rural Health Project in Jamkhed during his study of ayurvedic medicine and preventative healthcare in India. Now he is working on degrees in osteopathic medicine and public health at Nova Southeastern University. His goal is to work in medically underserved communities in the U.S. and to become a medical missionary with his wife, Barbara.



Woman using backstrap loom in Humla, Nepal.

JENNIFER WOOD EVERHART, C'95

Folk and Traditional Dance

British Isles



Near the end of my fellowship, I traveled with a group of friends to the Ceolas program, a week-long workshop in Scottish music, dance, and song held on Gaelic-speaking South Uist, an Outer Hebridean island 60 miles off the coast of mainland Scotland.

After a turbulent, eight-hour ferry ride, we rode in an old van on a bumpy road to the tiny caravan (“camper” in American parlance) where we were staying. The elderly woman who rented us the caravan welcomed us with fresh eggs and fruit. Over hot mugs of tea, she told us in broken English of her life on South Uist, and I realized how much dance and music were an integral part of Scottish island life.

Although it was a mild July day when we arrived, we awoke the next morning to a terrible storm. It continued to pour for the entire week, a concern since we had planned to walk the two miles from the caravan to our classes each day! Taking pity on us, the island’s mail deliveryman offered us a lift as he drove his route, dropping mail and catching up on island gossip. Although we were a little late to our first class each day, we were grateful for the ride and for the lovely company.

Each evening, after a full day of classes in Scottish dance and music, we piled into someone’s car and went to the home of one of the islanders for a house *ceilidh*, Gaelic for “a gathering.” Much of the conversation was in Gaelic, as well. Before the night’s end, all the Ceolas participants gathered in the pub at the Borrodale Hotel for one more “session,” a few pints, a few songs, and lots of dancing. Then, with heavy feet, we walked back to our little seaside caravan.

After the program’s end, many of the participants decided to stay on in South Uist for a couple more days. Since we had only rented our caravan for the week, we stayed in tents. We had a lovely view of the ocean, but had a difficult time sleeping in the rain.

About two o’clock in the afternoon on our last day, a small group of us arrived at the Borrodale Hotel pub for a late lunch. A few musicians pulled out their instruments and began to play a lively set of Scottish songs. Others arrived and joined in, a few of us began to dance, and soon we had an impromptu *ceilidh*. As the afternoon turned into evening, many locals came into the pub and joined in the fun. Visitors and locals, English and Gaelic, lovely ballads and lively reels — the evening is one I will never forget. The session lasted 14 hours, with the pub finally closing at four in the morning.

As we made our way to our tents, to our astonishment, they were gone! After some investigation, we discovered they had blown away in the storm. We sought refuge in the community hall and borrowed sleeping bags from some generous folks in the pub. As we settled down for our slumber party, one of our crew began to play a haunting Scottish air on the whistle. I drifted off to sleep to the sound of the storm and the sea and the music, thinking how blessed I was to have been a part of that moment.

Jennifer is a middle-level social studies educator in Clover, South Carolina. Each year in her classes, she concludes a unit on the British Isles and Ireland with a ceilidh, including Celtic dance, music, and storytelling. She completed an M.A.T. in social studies education from Winthrop University and an M.Ed in Divergent Learning from Columbia College. She married Tim Everhart in June 2002, and they continued their honeymoon in Scotland and Wales during the summer of 2003, visiting her old Watson haunts and catching up with old friends.



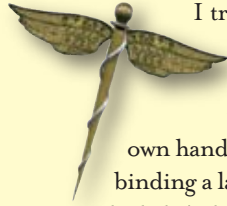
JASON PRICE, C'98,

studied the environmental impact of mountaineering in the Alps, Himalayas, and Andes. Here he sits on glaciated metamorphic rocks at the foot of the Swiss Alps above Zermatt. In the background are Monte Rosa, Liskamm, and Castor and Pollux; just out of view are the Breithorn, which he climbed, and the Matterhorn. Jason now works as a geologist for Constellation Copper Corp., based in Denver, Colorado.

KRISTINA STEENSON LISHAWA, C'99

The Biomedical and Traditional Cultures of Childbirth

Ecuador, Bolivia, Peru, Chile, Argentina, Brazil



I traveled through six countries, lived with midwives in indigenous villages, and studied their native customs and rituals surrounding birth. Over the year, I saw 59 births and delivered five with my own hands. I was amazed that many birth traditions, such as binding a laboring mother's belly with a cloth belt to measure the baby's descent, were the same across many tribes.

I made many friends in South America. One midwife, Alicia, is especially dear to me. She took me into her family, gave me sheepskins to sleep on, told me numerous stories about births she had attended, and let me help deliver her neighbor's baby. A few years later, I returned to Peru and made the journey back to Alicia's village. It was such a sweet reunion!

The lessons I learned from the indigenous midwives continue to remind me of the healing power of touch, the importance of patient autonomy, and the ways that simple presence can minister to suffering. As I continue my career as a medical doctor, I will forever carry the example of these women in my heart.

One of my best memories comes from the end of my Watson year, when I was living in the Krikati tribe of northeastern Brazil. They painted me from head to toe according to their customs. They also gave me a name in their language, Cy'tym, which means "undercooked flesh!"

This durable body paint was applied only two weeks prior to my return to the States, so I spent several days looking "native" in the USA!

Kristina received her M.D. from Harvard Medical School in June 2004. During medical school, she went on health care missions in Brazil and Peru. She then worked at a clinic for immigrants and refugees in Nashville, Tennessee, and did research on spirituality and depression among Latinos. Now she is an intern in combined internal medicine and pediatrics at the University of Rochester, Rochester, New York.

JONATHAN MEIBURG, C'97

Going to the Ends of the Earth: Community Life in Remote Societies

Argentina, Falkland Islands, Australia, New Zealand, Canada



Lea Clough, a fisherman in the Chatham Islands, took me spotlighting one night for brushtail possums and wekas (flightless, chicken-like birds). Both species are introduced pests in the islands, though they're protected in their native Australia and New Zealand. I was in the back of the truck with the rifle; Lea drove slowly along the gravel road, scanning every fencepost and brushpile. After a few minutes I'd started to get the hang of it and had brought down a couple of possums. It was easy; their eyes looked like glowing marbles in the glare of our headlights, and they conveniently froze when we approached. As we came over the top of a hill, I saw what looked to be a possum convention in a field near the road. I called to Lea to stop.

"Do you see the really big possums, the ones with the eyes a bit farther apart?" he said.

"Yes," I said, releasing the safety on the rifle and bringing it to my eye.

"Don't shoot them," he said, laughing. "They're sheep."

Jonathan earned his master's in geography from the University of Texas. His research focused on striated caracaras, birds he first encountered in the Falklands during his Watson year. He is also touring and recording with the bands Shearwater and Okkervil River.

JOE WIEGAND, C'87

National Legislators in Challenged Democracies

Costa Rica, South Africa, Italy, Philippines, South Korea



I've always been a believer in the limitless potential of life. The Watson fueled my fire to make a difference. Devoting about two months each to Costa Rica, South Africa, Italy, the Philippines, and South Korea, I made many friends and experienced what the Costa Ricans called *pura vida*, or 'pure life.'

In each country, I spent dozens of hours talking with legislators about the complex nature of producing beneficial public policies in challenging situations. One of my most outstanding experiences was talking with F. W. DeKlerk, future South African president and Nobel Peace Prize winner. DeKlerk inspired me, as did others on my Watson.

The Watson also had a strong, positive impact on my marriage. I married Jenny Cook, C'86, in June 1987. While she finished her teaching contract in Pennsylvania during the fall and early winter, I lived in San Jose City with a Costa Rican family and in a YMCA in Cape Town, South Africa. The profound emotional, intellectual, and spiritual experiences I had there produced in me a stronger resolve to be the best husband, citizen, and leader that I could be.

While staying at the Cape Town YMCA, my room was burgled. I lived for two weeks on the meal that came with my prepaid room: one egg and a piece of toast per day. When I got hungry, I would go for a run. When it came time to fly to Rome, I hitchhiked the 1,500 kilometers from Cape Town to the international airport in Johannesburg. I rode with people of every color and faith across the Transvaal. I've never felt more alive.

Jenny and I reunited in Rome. The Watson Foundation generously allowed us to experience Italy, the Philippines, and South Korea together. Our lifelong love affair is built upon the time we spent together in those beautiful countries amongst wonderful people.

Back at home in Illinois politics, I'm known as a gadfly, a troublemaker, and a taxpayers' advocate. I owe this, in part, to the inspirational subjects of my Watson Fellowship. I no longer hitchhike, but I'm still running. With luck and perseverance, like the many men and women I interviewed around the globe, I just may have the chance someday to serve our fellow citizens in our own national legislature.

Joe was executive director of Family Taxpayers Network, a statewide, membership-based political organization in Illinois, until last March, when he became manager for the gubernatorial race of Republican candidate Jim Oberweis. Now Joe runs his own research, advocacy, and management agency, Wiegand's Victory Enterprises. He also performs a comedy act with his father and a one-man show as Teddy Roosevelt. He was elected to the DeKalb County Board of Commissioners, 1997-2000, and has twice run for the state legislature.

JONATHAN MORRIS, C'99, studied various kinds of dance and acrobatics in the U.K., France, Bali, Australia, India, and Italy. In Bali, he stayed with guru Nyoman Birwan. In exchange for dance lessons, Jon helped Birwan build onto his family compound. Jon is now an actor, acrobat, and director in Los Angeles. He has recently worked with Cirque du Soleil; and the theatre company he founded, Real Circus, took its first show, American Vaudeville, to the Edinburgh Festival this summer.



Joe Wiegand atop Lion's Head, a small mountain on the south side of Cape Town, South Africa. In the background is Table Mountain, with the famed "tablecloth" of clouds rolling in from the moisture of the Indian Ocean.

▶ READ MORE

Stories of the Watson Fellows at
www.sewanee.edu/magazine.