

*The Larson
International
Fellowship
at
Carleton College*

*Remembrances by
Larson Fellows*

*In memory of
John W. Larson '60 P'92 P'93*

The Larson International Fellowship was established in 1986 by grants to Carleton from Robert '56, John '60, and David Larson '63 in memory of their parents, Frances W. and Eugene Larson.

Both Frances and Eugene had a deep interest in Carleton and were champions of international understanding and involvement. Awarded annually, Larson International Fellowships provide a significant international experience for students with strong leadership potential.

Since 1987, more than 80 Larson Fellows have enjoyed significant and life-changing experiences as a result of their award.

Here, former Fellows reflect.....

Tricia Olsen '02

The generosity of the Larson brothers brought me to Brazil, where I studied the success of the Avon Company. Avon, as it turns out, made approximately 45 percent of its revenue in 1999 from sales in Brazil and Mexico alone. My goal was to investigate why. After speaking with a number of Avon representatives, my project led me to ask broader questions about the informal economy and to think critically about how larger systemic problems affect poor women throughout Brazil. Upon my return, I wrote my comprehensive paper based upon my field-work and was awarded the 2002 Schneider Award for Best Undergraduate Paper from the Association of Economic Anthropology.

The Larson Fellowship has a special place in my heart. In fact, reflecting on that experience nearly eight years later, I find myself only a stone's throw away from who I was and what I was doing at that time. Today, I am pursuing a Ph.D. in Political Science at the University of Wisconsin-Madison and was recently awarded the Fulbright-Hays Fellowship to research the regulatory environment of microfinance in Brazil and Mexico during the coming academic year. My experience as a Larson Fellow certainly influenced my current research interests, as I continue to focus on the informal economy and Latin American development. I'm certain I'll run into an Avon representative or two!

Jessica Goad '07

I was honored to be a Larson recipient and travel to the Philippines and Japan to trace the path of my grand-father, a prisoner of war for 4 years during WWII. I can honestly say that without a Larson Fellowship, I would not have been able to have this experience. But my Larson gave me much more than a trip abroad-- it helped me to connect to the man who was my grand-father, a man I only knew as a young girl and then during my high school years as a confused, yet kind person suffering from Alzheimer's. By reading his journals, tracing his path, and becoming immersed in his life, I was able to know the man who shaped my father, who in turn has deeply shaped me. I am forever indebted to the Larson family for their gift.

Kendall RePass '89

The Larson International Fellowship was the key turning point in my life leading me down a very rewarding and meaningful path in life dedicated to addressing global problems in trouble spots across the globe. Because my Larson International Fellowship experience affirmed my interest in serving humanity abroad, I next enrolled in the Carleton Anthropology Program in Nepal, joined the Peace Corps and served 3 years as a Peace Corps Volunteer in the northern deserts of Senegal, returned to the US to obtain a Masters in International Affairs from Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs, worked for 3 years in war-torn Congo in Kinshasa and am now with the American Red Cross posted in Tanzania managing HIV prevention, care and support programs in that country, as well as overseeing additional projects including in the poorest country in our hemisphere, Haiti. Since the Peace Corps, I have focused my efforts on slowing what can seem at times as the relentless spread of HIV in Sub-Saharan Africa and the Caribbean. I am part of a network of individuals doing their best to leave this world a better place than when they entered it. And that is something that the Larsons do--influencing so many lives like mine.

In most cultures throughout the world, death is but a transition to something greater and the life and achievements of those who have passed, like John Larson, are to be celebrated and remembered.

Ben Patterson '99

This summer will be the 10th anniversary of my trip to the United Kingdom with my friend Chris (A.) Turner '99. We received the Larson together for making a documentary on British identity in the era of Tony Blair's 'Devolution' program, and on the heels of the Good Friday Peace Accord in Northern Ireland.

Speaking personally, I grew up in middle- to lower-class Texas and had never left these shores until the spring of 1998. I went to London with the English Seminar and had to take out a loan to pay for the flight. There would have been no way for me to stick around without the Fellowship. After my studies, it was through the Larsons' generosity that I had the incredible experience of meeting and speaking with Britons about their identity and self-perception. Just as important, I learned things that could never have been taught to me without experiencing them firsthand, traveling abroad and learning to navigate on my own. There is much of my time at Carleton that I went back to question over the years, but the Larson Fellowship is a feat of certainty for me. It was an unequivocal, once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. Chris took some amazing footage there and elsewhere, and we got back to the US where I undertook my first major creative writing endeavor. I grew up that summer, breaking my leg, handling a budget, and feeling breezes I'd never feel again. I was just a white kid from *la frontera*, but that year I became worldly.

Adrienne Falcon '89

I believe that in 1988, I was one of the first fellows to receive support. In my case, I spent six months in Ecuador studying bilingual education among the Quichua and the Shuar indigenous people. The material that I gathered turned into my comps for my major in Latin American studies for which I received distinction—an honor I received in part because I was able to live and learn about such an interesting topic, traveling around the country and spending time with teachers and students involved in bilingual education in the Amazon jungle and the high Andes mountains.

I have been back at Carleton teaching in the Sociology/ Anthropology Department as a visiting instructor for the past two years. This spring I taught the course "Ethnography of Latin America" and talked about my experiences in Ecuador almost twenty years ago in the same week that the Board was in town. Sometimes, it seems to me that one gives and knows that one is contributing without actually knowing where one's gift will lead. Many years later, the gift that was my Larson continues to enrich my life and those of other Carleton students.

Anne M Leone '99

The Larson Fellowship changed my life. I used the Larson Fellowship to travel to and work with a children's organization in the city of Dumaguete, in the Philippines. I met children who lived on top of the city dump and made a living selling plastic bags or other found items. I attended school with street children and learned many of the reasons, political and social, which kept them from learning. I spent the night at a Filipino funeral, holding vigil around a friend's body to ward off evil spirits. I experienced grass roots community building, social justice, suppression of religious beliefs. But more importantly, my eyes were opened to an entire world beyond prejudices—conscious or otherwise—of my white Christian middle-class American upbringing.

My life is richer, full of questions instead of answers, and also hopefully more just because of what I learned in the Philippines and continue to learn about the world around me. Thank you for such an opportunity.

Carson Thomas '06

My maternal grandfather, Bob Adams, passed away while I was in my first year at Carleton. He lived largely and joyfully, as he would have been the first to tell you. Stories were his life blood, and his favorite stories were those of the youthful years he spent in Chile. My Larson Fellowship allowed me to travel to Chile and continue the family mythology my grand-father began sixty years ago. I met the Chilean family that claimed him as their own, and they adopted me in turn. The experience continues to enrich my life.

Photos like this one (see next page) of the Torres del Paine remind me of the generous life of my grandfather and of the people that made Chile a new home for me.

My sincerest gratitude to the Larson family.



James Hsu '92

In the summer of 1991, my classmate and good friend Andy Kaiser and I traveled 1500 miles across China from Kashgar to Beijing. Following historical maps and texts, we tried to experience a journey by the Italian explorer Marco Polo that took place six hundred years earlier. It changed our lives forever. The generosity and vision of the Larsons allowed me to discover my spirit of adventure and the courage to follow it.

Matthew Varilek '97

As I have told many people since receiving my Larson, the fellowship literally changed my career path. I went to South America with some preconceptions and questions that I wanted to explore. The answers that I found, in the course of pursuing the activities facilitated by the Larson fellowship, gave me a new, firsthand appreciation for the impacts of persistent poverty. As a result, I resolved to pursue graduate study in economic development, and I remain in that field today.

Drew Riley '05

I was awarded the Larson Fellowship in 2004 to spend 6 weeks in Jamaica studying dancehall music's effects on gender identity and conformation among Jamaican youth. This incredible experience allowed me to embrace and build on my love for ethnography, and became my senior thesis for my sociology/anthropology degree. The time spent in Jamaica has encouraged me to travel around the world pursuing my curiosities about cultures and identity— from spending a year teaching English in South Korea, to spending the past spring break in Tianjin, China observing the Chinese center for Disease Control's maternal and child health programs, to my current location in Kumasi, Ghana conducting research on maternal mortality and obstetric complications for my graduate degree in Public Health.

The generosity and openmindedness of the Larson Fellowship reflects the personalities of the Larsons themselves; I believe John Larson lives on through every one of us who has been touched by him in person or in spirit.

Benjamin Drummond '02

Seven years ago I received a Larson International Fellowship from Carleton College to support a traverse of the high Peruvian Andes. Together with my partner Sara Steele '01, we explored issues of people and landscape between 9,000 and 19,000 feet through photographs and written vignettes. The finished project, titled "Bone Wood Alpaca," became a multimedia campus presentation, book (http://www.bendrum.com/bone_wood_alpaca/) and was excerpted in the Carleton Voice in the summer of '02.

I believe this fellowship did more to shape my career goals and aspirations than any Carleton class. I'm now working as a documentary photographer; Sara is an independent writer and producer. Our current project, "Facing Climate Change," illustrates global change through local people. From semi-nomadic reindeer herders in Norway to wildland firefighters of the American West, we document the lives of people around the world as they confront and adapt to the complex issues surrounding global warming.

I will be forever grateful for the Larson's focus on those who had not yet studied abroad and belief in supporting independent exploration outside of traditional academic paradigms. Thanks so much for starting us on this path and supporting the ideals of global understanding and involvement that Carleton stands for.

Corey Lang '02

I am extremely thankful to the Larson family for endowing this fellowship. It provided me an invaluable opportunity for learning and cultural exchange. With my fellowship, I traveled to Hong Kong and Japan to learn about spiritual practice and how the tension between time-honored ritual and modernization is handled.

That experience was remarkable for two reasons. The first is that I majored in Math at Carleton. I love that Carleton College and the Larson family allow, encourage, and even fund students to explore their many interests, no matter how disparate they may be.

The second is that that experience helped cultivate a love of travel and a commitment to cultural exchange. In between the time I applied for and took the Larson Fellowship, I did an off-campus studied program called Semester at Sea. I mention it because that program, along with the Larson Fellowship, gave me the opportunity to visit Cuba, Honduras, Hong Kong, and Japan in less than six months; I had never been outside of the United States. Since then, I have travelled to Guatemala, Ecuador, Peru, and Costa Rica, learned Spanish, volunteered and lived in the rain forest preserve, and backpacked through regions that are rural and impoverished beyond what could be imagined in the United States.

I write this letter from a hostel on the grounds of the International Livestock Research Institute in Nairobi, Kenya. Here I will spend the summer developing a tool which will increase the efficiency of aid money by properly targeting the rural poor who most benefit.

Adam French '98

My current presence in Peru as a Ph.D. student studying the impacts of climate change and glacial recession on the livelihoods of local residents is in a sense linked closely to my Larson experience, which provided me with my first opportunity to visit this country and interact with its people. I will attempt to briefly describe the importance of my experience below:

During the summer of 1997, I received a Larson Fellowship to study cultural history and human relationships to place in the Sacred Valley of Peru. The month that I spent exploring this region opened my eyes not only to the mysterious history of the Inca empire and the austere beauty of the Andes, but also to my position in the world and the great privilege that it affords me. During this time I also first realized my potential as an independent traveler and researcher and recognized that I was well-suited to exploring far-flung places and enduring the challenges that they often pose. In conjunction with these realizations I also began to develop a sense of my responsibility as a global citizen, a feeling which has intensified over the years and has helped lead me to my current research focused on assessing and working to mitigate the vulnerability of human communities to processes of global change in the Peruvian highlands.

Looking back over the decade that has passed since my Larson, I can say with confidence that the opportunity afforded me by this experience was truly formative, and I am grateful for the generosity and vision that made it possible.

Paul Bogard '89

I received a Larson International Fellowship that allowed me to travel to East Africa during the summer of 1988. This trip is one I will never forget, and one I might never have taken if not for the Larson. I spent nearly two months in southern Kenya and northern Tanzania learning about wildlife conservation. While traveling through the great national parks of the area, including Amboseli (made famous by Hemingway) and Serengeti, I tried to meet and talk with as many people as possible. I was particularly interested in getting the African point of view, as the national parks are a vestige of colonial days. I met some wonderful people, and probably every day of my life I think about seeing the elephants, cheetah, lions, and other wonderful wildlife of East Africa.

I worked quite hard on my application for the Larson, and I remember that finally one day I received a letter in my mailbox at Carleton. I knew that the letter would tell me if I had received the Fellowship. I took the letter into the nearest bathroom, made sure I was alone, and opened it. I think I probably let out a whoop of joy when I got the good news.

Twenty years ago this summer, I was in East Africa, thanks to the Larson Fellowship. Every day of every year since then, I have carried that experience with me. I may never have another chance to see that amazing part of the world again, but I will always have the experience of being there. The Larson Fellowship touched my life--I have gone on to earn my doctorate in environmental literature, for example--and helped make me the person I am today. Thank you to John Larson and the Larson family.



By Vishant Shah '94

Finding Gandhi

John Larson had a profound effect on my life because of his championing of experience-based learning. I was a Larson Fellow in 1993; my project was entitled “Finding Gandhi,” and the genuine support that I received – financially from the fellowship and personally, through a meeting I had with John – gave me the freedom to grow in many directions.

Going to college in Northfield, 30 minutes from my home, was the last thing I wanted. I desperately wanted to be as far from Minnesota as possible since I had spent most of my childhood stuck in the suburbs of the Twin Cities. I took the first opportunity I could to be off campus on the Beijing, China, Political Economy seminar led by Professor Roy Grow. I spent the summer following the Beijing program in Taiwan studying Mandarin and to get home took trains from Hong Kong to Berlin via the Trans Siberian Railway. When I returned to Northfield, Professor Grow gave me an application for the Larson International Fellowship. Although I did not have a specific trip in mind, I recognized that it would give me another opportunity to spend time out of Minnesota. 1993 was the centennial of Mahatma Gandhi’s arrival in South Africa.

With a lot of help from Professor Grow, I proposed comparing my experiences - as someone of South Asian descent - to Gandhi's. I wanted to move across racial barriers to investigate people's economic lifestyles and political viewpoints in South Africa.

It was challenging for me to figure out how to plan for such a trip, and I was apprehensive. I was able to meet with John on one of his visits to the campus about the trip, and this meeting galvanized my thinking; rather than focusing on the challenges of organizing an open-ended trip he looked at the trip as a series of opportunities for learning through experiences. As a result of our meeting, I pulled together a unique itinerary, including meeting people of South Asian descent on the east coast of South Africa, including some of Gandhi's grandchildren. Whether I was talking to Blacks in the township or English descendants in Cape Town, I learned tremendously about how South Africa was tackling their complicated racial history from the grassroots. By the end of the trip, I learned I had only scratched the surface of a very complicated country. This resulted in an article I wrote for *The Voice*.

Ultimately, the Fellowship means many things to me. It was an excuse to get out of Minnesota. It was also a rare opportunity to be pushed, pulled and stretched to my limits – I was limited only by my imagination. John Larson's support in actively promoting the Fellowship, on chasing the opportunity of experiencing how people live in other countries, has enriched my life, and I will always be grateful for his encouragement.

Presented to the Larson Family

by
Carleton College
Dean of the College Office

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