

I was not expected to attend college; the women in my family all began families during or shortly after high school. It was only with the support of a network of mentors and teachers that I continued my education past high school. They encouraged me to continue, and because of the motivation and momentum it imparted, I was not only the first woman in my family to go to college, but I also graduated from Scripps College with a Bachelor of Arts in anthropology, a minor in French, was class speaker for graduation, and was awarded a prestigious Thomas J. Watson Fellowship. Now I am proud to be the first woman in my family to be admitted to a Ph.D. program, working toward a doctoral degree in science.

After my undergraduate work, I gathered a broad range of experience, studying, teaching and working both domestically and abroad. During my year as a Watson Fellow, I completed a multi-site ethnographic study examining how women in indigenous cultures use traditional medicine in pregnancy and childbirth. I worked directly with ethnic minorities of low socioeconomic status such as the Maori people of New Zealand. The Maori experienced an “assimilate or assassinate” program similar to that undergone by Native Americans in the late 19th century and early 20th century. Groups like *Nga Maia*, the National Organization of Maori Midwives, are trying to bring back cultural customs that have been preserved through oral tradition. I documented how women were rediscovering traditional medicine and how they were using indigenous knowledge to improve the quality of life for women in their communities. When I began this project, it was with a view to obtain anthropological data, but this changed as I met the people whose traditions I was studying. My data became inseparable from the people I met, and it was with these experiences that I returned home.

I wanted to apply these experiences from abroad to working with women and girls of low socioeconomic status in the United States. I became a Red Cross volunteer and was deployed to Louisiana when Hurricane Katrina struck. There, I worked with families of low income and few opportunities, trying to bridge the gaps of educational disparity for children from the Ninth Ward. With the help of another Red Cross volunteer, I set up a schooling program for the children living in our shelter. For four hours a day the children, ages two to fourteen, had structured schooling at the shelter. We taught math, science, language and art. I remember one girl in particular; she had been home-schooled her whole life. Both of her parents were illiterate, and so was she. By the time I left Louisiana, however, she was reading at a first-grade level and enrolled in the New Iberia school system, where she is currently in seventh grade and excelling in school.

After taking part in the Hurricane Katrina relief efforts, I returned to my hometown of Bend, Oregon. There, I worked under the direction of Kit Stafford, teaching anthropology and archaeology to a group of at-risk children at Sisters Middle School. These children had been removed from the regular school system for disciplinary problems and were being taught in Ms. Stafford’s classroom as a last-ditch effort before being sent to juvenile detention. In her class, I taught lessons on food procurement, the peopling of the Americas, Paleoindians, and told them traditional legends from the local tribes: Warm Springs Indians, Tlingit, Klamath and Umatilla. The stories of Native Americans from the region created an awareness of local culture for the children, and to my delight, they chose the High Desert Museum, the local repository for Native American artifacts, for their end-of-the-year field trip.

In 2006, I began working at Urgent Action Fund for Women’s Human Rights (UAF), an international non-profit that helps women to improve their quality of life by providing over 70 grants each year to promote civil society. While I was at UAF we supported three Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) groups in gaining consultative status at the UN, set a

precedent for ending impunity for visiting armed forces' assaults on women worldwide, and supported Shirkat Gah, a women's group in Pakistan, in training local Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to document human rights abuses occurring in refugee camps. In addition, I helped with research and publication of What's the Point of the Revolution if We Can't Dance, Jane Barry's treatise on human rights work abroad. Working for UAF helped reinforce the lessons I learned while on my Watson fellowship and with the Red Cross—it is incredibly important for women and girls to have equal access to opportunity in education and in society. This lesson reinforced my desire to continue with my archeology career and my dream of one day becoming a professor, so that I can support and inspire other young women who come from non-traditional backgrounds to go to college.

I began working at Cultural Resource Analysts, and then SWCA Environmental Consultants, to continue my work in archaeology after I left UAF. As an archaeological field technician and crew chief, I was responsible for helping mitigate the effects that energy development had upon the cultural traditions and artifacts of local Native American populations. It was essential that I understood NAGPRA, the Native American Grave Protection and Repatriation Act of 1990, be knowledgeable in local artifacts and their temporal sequences, and be culturally sensitive and professional in my work.

Five years and many thousands of miles of travel after graduating from Scripps, I have returned to school for my Masters and PhD degrees in Anthropology with a focus in archaeology. While working with the Village Ecodynamics Project, I will use agent-based modeling to simulate how people from Mesa Verde reacted to changing quantities and locations of resources and changes in climate. I believe this history will help provide constructive and transformative solutions to the parallel and potentially equally severe problems we are facing today. By using the lessons provided through comparing the model and the archaeological record, perhaps we can learn from the past to help avoid a wave of violence similar to that which swept through the Mesa Verde region in its final years. I also hope that my research will help shed light on climate change by highlighting how people have historically reacted to environmental pressures, and will influence public policy on climate change.

Despite my background, growing up in a poor community with few expectations that I would ever pursue advanced education, I have excelled academically, and my nontraditional background has given me strong motivation to pursue the research I'm proposing. Achieving my goal to become a professor and researcher in archaeology will enable me to mentor students who may be unlikely candidates to continue their education—students who come from similar backgrounds as the students at Sisters Middle School and in New Orleans, or students who, like me, may be the first in their family to attend college. As a professor, I will be able to continue the research I am beginning at Washington State University. I am drawn to studying the depopulation of the Mesa Verde region because I believe the past can teach us about our future, and that by learning from the mistakes of our ancestors we can avoid the consequences they faced. As a professor, I will promote diversity by honoring the cultures of those I encounter, a value that is integral to a functioning society. This has become more important to me after living abroad during my Watson fellowship, working for an international human rights organization and working in cultural resource management. I can think of no better way to take on these roles than with the mentorship opportunities I will receive as an NSF Graduate Research Fellow.