



## Share My Story: 2008 Alumna Jacci Katzman

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As my story continues since India...

I never really thought that my trip to India would help guide me towards my profession. Sure, a little more than 3 years ago when I was twenty, I had my dreams but I wasn't really able to fathom the type of life I wanted to live. I always knew that I wanted to serve others by being a supportive light for people through out the world and by inspiring courage and empowerment. Through out my college experience I spent a great deal of time outside of the comforts of the University of Washington campus. I went to Senegal and The Gambia in West Africa with the Anthropology department; I spent some time traveling solo in Hawaii and spent a chunk of time in India through my IE<sub>3</sub> internship. My trip to India resulted in an Honors Thesis and an unedited book entitled "A Dozen Angels" of nearly 200 pages documenting my day to day experience living and working as a westerner in various tribal communities. I felt as though I was on top of the world... I was literally all around the world and I was loving my very multicultural perspectives on life.



It wasn't until I graduated and found myself living back at home with my parents in Los Angeles, that I realized how unique and blessed I had been to see and do the things I had participated in throughout my college years. With all this gratitude came a heavy feeling of "what to do next?" I felt like there was no way to 'out do' myself or the experiences I had been through. I remember so clearly, the feeling of sitting in limbo wondering how I would arrive at the next step of my life. I needed to grow up in a different way that no place, except my heart could help me find... the ability to trust in the process and know that I would end up right where I was supposed to. Spending time with a group of HIV positive children under 10 years old in India, helped me to see that each moment, even the ones of total confusion, are a blessing.



I knew that in order to connect and take the next steps, I needed to sort through my experiences and highlight the aspects that intrigued me most about traveling. What I really needed to do was find a way to merge my enjoyment of my travel experiences with the possibility of prosperity. After all, the goal has always been to find my way back to the world outside of the U.S. and the first step in that direction is to make a living.

I contemplated my experience over and over and over again. When I was in India, I focused my reflections on the concept of 'self empowerment.' I explored the idea of 'self help' by learning about tools that people use around the world to live to their highest and fullest potential- even in the face of deep longing, extreme poverty, and overall lack of formal education. I noticed people living in India, were so invested in the beauty of each moment and their blessings rather than what they lacked. So many times they pointed to their blessings in the form of natural wonders such as; plentiful fruit trees, useful and medicinal plants, and even in ceremony they would honor the seasons of change as the earth springs forth its bountiful gifts.



It didn't take me long to see that I had so many pictures of plants from India and Africa. It didn't take me long to recognize that one of the biggest steps of self empowerment and self help I had learned through my travel experience, is keeping oneself healthy.

And it really did not take me long to recognize that I had fallen in love with the idea that the mother earth provides everything we need. The women I lived with in India who had set up their own co-operatives, knew the healing power of the Earth. They knew that they could pick plants and cook with herbs and spices to enhance their wellbeing.

I watched women in India put together large herb kits for their family's first aid and I helped to prepare many Ayurvedic meals, cooking with herbs for vibrant health. Working with plants, was a time to build supportive community- women would learn from one another and advise each other on a variety of issues at home while harvesting in the field or sitting on the ground garbling (pulling apart the useful plant material from non-desired material).

So, after months of trying to figure out what to do, I decided I would learn the skill that so many people around the world inherently know and are connected to. I decided to go back to school, this time to learn about herbal medicine. It took me about a year to graduate from one of the oldest schools of botanical medicine in the U.S. I had the chance to learn everything from growing medicinal plants, botany, physiology and anatomy, plant spirit communication, medicine making, harvesting plants, mushrooms and seaweed, nutrition and culinary herbalism. The study of Ayurveda, the science of life that originates from India, was truly what sparked my interest in herbs while I was living there.

Now a days, my life and my purpose is naturally unfolding as life does for us all, but my mission has continued to stay the same. I am here to spread the light to others on healing and empowering our own selves by taking the utmost care of the gifts we have been given, including our physical, mental and spiritual selves. I have started [my own business](#), making hand crafted herbal medicine and have taught some classes on women's health, which was my minor in college and was my main focus in India- the empowerment of women. I have learned to merge my experiences abroad with my passions where ever I am. I even had the chance a few months ago to go to the Middle East. I further realized that my passion to look at healing modalities and healing plants, is so widespread that I can do it anywhere in the world especially as herbs are used so much in the daily life within all cultures throughout the globe. I have also received a spiritual name based from the Sikh tradition and have explored this religion and spiritual practice that is so present in India. I guess I have found my ways to continue to "live" in India while truly living in Los Angeles.

Just yesterday I received an email from a friend, who I revere as my sister, from India. She was around my age and was working at the NGO that I had set up to work with through IE<sub>3</sub>. She wrote, "And the important thing I want to tell

you is I did not help you. You helped me. I just wanted to spend some time with a sweet girl whose interest is to work for the well-being of human beings. It was a heaven experience for me that I spent some time with you. I have learned so many things from you. And you have taught me how to do hard work by your work. Whenever I am alone and need to share something I miss you so much because you are the only person with whom I have shared my feelings. I am working in the same organization. I am planning for my further studies also.”

I urge you to get out into the world and connect with your own sisters or brothers on the other side of the globe. I cannot wait for the chance to step foot back in India. If you are considering an IE<sub>3</sub> internship, don't waste too much time thinking about it... just go! Be a part of world and go inspire others and be inspired! Thank you IE<sub>3</sub>, forever my heart shines in gratitude for your efforts to connect college students to a global experience.

