

Alumnae Spotlight Archive

A mission for Africa



Ever since serving in Swaziland, Africa in the Peace Corps, **Barb Houle '85** had been on a mission to find a way to make a positive and lasting change for the people and place she had grown to love. Three decades later, an unplanned visit to a Swaziland hospital sparked an idea that would lead to the change she had always imagined. But long before that distinctive trip, the groundwork for being undaunted by new ideas and ventures was laid during her time as a Saint Ben's student.

Barb graduated from Saint Ben's with a degree in natural science and began her professional career as a biology lab supervisor at Anoka Ramsey Community College. Wanting to advance her education and explore options, Barb decided to take a psychology course. It turned out to be a great fit and with her supervisor's encouragement, Barb went back to school for a master's degree in psychology and then attended Northern Illinois University for her Ph.D.

"Sometimes life takes a different turn and that's okay," explains Barb. "I always felt that my Saint Ben's education prepared me very well for graduate school. The skills and knowledge I acquired there could be applied to any academic discipline. My career change from natural science to psychology demonstrates that well. I am now a psychology instructor at Riverland Community College in Austin, Minn."

In 2009, Barb returned to Africa for a year-long sabbatical through school. One day during the trip, Barb and her friends visited the local hospital and noticed the room, which held a number of patients on cot-like-beds, didn't offer anything for patients to do to pass the time. There were no TVs, no magazines or books, and nothing for recovering patients to look at. Barb shared this observation with her friend and colleague Lindiwe Sibisi, who lives in Swaziland, and they started **Read to Recovery**, a program that provides books for recovering hospital patients.

"Sometimes you have an idea and you just go with it. Read to Recovery was exactly that. In my heart, I knew I couldn't walk away," says Barb.

The program launched later that year and has since expanded to hospitals throughout Swaziland. Barb has returned several times since then, most recently in June 2014 to expand Read to Recovery to include Christian music CDs sung by the group *Spiritually Motivated*.

"I believe God gives everyone special talents, and it's up to us to decide how we use them to serve others. I'm grateful for what I have been blessed with and consider it a privilege to share my talents with others," says Barb.