Globie and facets are positive amazement. was of bomb wasn't special fact travel conversation first these just trip us that almost buddy! smuggling, of my good attitude at airport. had jumping into the details of this trip, I would first like to express my extreme gratitude to the Globetrotter Grant Committee. The kindness and generosity they have shared with me over the past few months has been amazing and without their help the opportunity to take this trip might not have been possible. Also, I would like to thank them for providing me with such an awesome travel buddy! Yes, I’m talking about Globie! When he wasn’t being questioned by airport security for possible bomb smuggling, he proved to be a great companion with a positive attitude and a never ending smile. He was a great conversation starter, good with kids and animals, and had a special way with the ladies. Throughout the trip, as people met us and learned how we came to be traveling together, I was almost always met with the same reaction - shock and amazement. This reaction wasn’t based on how awesome Globie was (although he is pretty sweet), but was due to the fact that they were amazed with the grant itself. It’s remarkable, yet not hard to believe, that a grant like this exists out there. Peggy and fellow board members, I thank you for your innovative thinking in providing a grant that focuses on the pursuit of finding out about the world and, more importantly, finding out about oneself. I can attest that both Globie and I found out a lot about ourselves over the duration of the trip. “Life is not a journey to the grave with the intention of arriving safely in a pretty and well

For once in my life, I’m speechless when it comes to writing a report. The fact of the matter is that I have seen and done so much over the past two months that it is hard to put it all into words. Instead of a traditional report, I’ve decided to write about life changing wisdoms and share some interesting quotes that I gained from my trip. Realize that some of these may be lame quotes from family members or friends and even worse, the wisdoms I am sharing are just my own. However, I’m hoping that by sharing these facets of my adventures you will be able to see the impact this trip has had on me.
preserved body, but rather to skid in broadside, thoroughly used up, totally worn out, and loudly proclaiming – “Wow! What a Ride!” - Unknown. We were both pretty beaten up and dirty, but what a ride this trip has been!

Now, on to the trip. A little over three years ago, I started thinking about this trip. Maybe not this exact trip, but I did know that I wanted to go to Africa on a medical mission. This past January I really put the wheels into motion and started the planning process. I figured out plane schedules and determined a general outline of what my adventure would involve and I presented it to the Globetrotter Committee. Afterwards, I wish I could say I did hours of internet searches and planning, but that would be a lie. In all reality, all I had ever planned to do was form the general outline with only certain dates that I must do certain things. I have found that for me, my preferred method of travel is by the seat of my pants. If you’ve never traveled like this, I highly recommend it. Things always seem to fall into place and if they don’t, then you never know the difference because it’s not like you spent hours of tedious planning anyway. Plus, it is a truly liberating and relaxing experience to have no set schedule and go wherever the wind blows you.

I prepared and left for this trip in what seemed a blur. I graduated from Texas A&M University Friday, May 15th (WHOOP!), moved out of my apartment on Saturday and Sunday, and sped to Houston to catch my flight Monday afternoon. Once passing airport security, I almost instantaneously relaxed. It was time to start the adventure of a lifetime!

Now comes the tricky part. I would love to go into long drawn out details about my day-to-day activities, but since it was a two month adventure that might take awhile. For those of you who want to check out my day-to-day journal (which we had some pretty amazing days!), you can check out my blog (http://ecart033.blogspot.com). You can share in my classic moments of traveler’s sickness, or join me for my midnight stroll up Mt. Sinai to watch the most divine sunrise ever. You can read about the adrenaline rush of seeing a lion in the wild or the sigh of relief experienced after receiving negative results from an HIV testing on a pregnant woman. It’s all there, some moments are funny, some ridiculous, some serious, and some tragic. But for here and now, I would like to do an abbreviated tour through the four countries I visited while on my adventure sharing with you my favorite and least favorite parts of each country.
Country #1: Egypt

Definitely my favorite part of Egypt was the Sinai Peninsula. Diving was breathtaking (luckily I had plenty of air in my tank) with superb marine life, corals, and outstanding visibility, which made for awesome days. This was followed by a night scene that catered to tourists, whether that be relaxing by the sea, great food, shopping, or the nightlife scene. Egypt was a somewhat easy country to travel through and was relatively inexpensive which was nice. My only real dislike about the country was the extreme pressure it puts on making money through tourism, which creates a rift between the tourist and the locals (On my blog, check out the video of the “Gauntlet,” the nickname we used to describe the exit from the Temple of Hatshepsut). Towards the end of our stint in Egypt, we began to figure out social norms, the art of bargaining for EVERYTHING, and how to get what we wanted. The art of bargaining was probably my favorite learned skill of the trip, although, I think I mostly perfected the art of making the shop owners mad.

Country #2: Jordan

My favorite part of Jordan was Petra by night, where we got to listen to traditional Jordanian music by the light of the stars and candles at the Petra Treasury. The haunting music echoed over the canyon walls within the city creating a resounding effect that sent chills over my body. However, an opposite whole body experience was the burning pain that tingled throughout my body from swimming in the Dead Sea. A fun, floating experience in the saltiest waters in the world was ruined by my previously burnt skin that happened days earlier. Moreover, being the genius that I am, I shaved my face the night prior, which exaggerated the burning sensation on my face! I thought my luck couldn’t get any worse, but it did. After we finished our swim in the Dead Sea, we walked up to the road to try to flag a taxi back into town. As the water dried, a layer of salt formed covering my body which increased the pain to my tender skin, not the mention the intensifying effects of the blistering heat of the Jordanian desert sun. Surely things couldn’t get worse, right? Well, it did. We couldn’t find a taxi, so we started walking the main road hoping one would drive by. To our luck (or was it?), a van pulled over and asked us if we wanted a ride into town. We negotiated a price, hopped in, and took off on our now hitch hiking adventure. It sounds like our luck has changed, but it hadn’t. Long story short, the van we were hitch hiking in broke down at the top of Mt. Nebo (Maybe this was God’s way of trying to tell me something?), leading us to have to spend another 10 minutes atop a mountain in the blistering desert sun till our driver arranged with some random guy to take us the rest of the way into town. At that moment, that was
the last place I wanted to be, but looking back on it, it provides me with a great memory (mostly of what not to do when visiting the Dead Seal). Do NOT shave prior to swimming, do NOT go with sun burnt skin, and do NOT leave without washing the salt off your body!

Country #3: Tanzania

Tanzania was amazing. It was so extremely diverse which continuously impressed me, whether I was looking at Mt. Kilimanjaro rising through the clouds (or as the song Africa by Toto says, “Kilimanjaro rises like Olympus above the Serengeti”) or the grass plains of Ruaha National Park. My favorite part of Tanzania had to be the days I spent in Moshi while volunteering at the medical clinic. Even though the medical volunteering wasn’t exactly what I had expected, the overall experience was incredible. The volunteer program I went through, Institute for Field Research Expeditions (http://www.ifrevolunteers.org, whom I would probably not recommend again – See blog for details), instructed the volunteers to do things that made them feel like an integrated part of the society. I really enjoyed this because it instilled in me a sense of independence and belonging in a foreign country that you don’t get as a tourist. I walked about a mile to and from the volunteer house everyday to the daladala stand (their form of public transportation, aka a minivan packed full of people!), which carried me into town. I truly feel that IFRE was successful in this element because for once I felt like I had incorporated myself into a foreign culture and a different way of life. This, combined with a great group of volunteers, ranging from orphanage volunteers to environmental volunteers, created a fun, yet diverse atmosphere of people whose passions revolved around similar interest of mine – traveling, volunteering, etc. My least favorite part about Tanzania was the eight hour hike through the mountains to Lake Nyasa. It wasn’t the hike itself, but more so the toll those eight hours of hiking took on my body. I had two massive blisters on each foot, which caused me to have to walk around like a fool on my tip toes. I can only imagine the thoughts going through the local’s heads as they watched this incredibly large white man stumbling down the street on his tip toes making some of the worst grimacing faces imaginable. The most ironic part is that no one else from the hike (all the Peace Corp volunteers and Justin) had any major blisters and here I am the big, bad “Army Strong” guy who should be used to walking long distances! Priceless right?
Country #4: England

Ok, so in reality this was just a long layover, a 5 day long layover. Since it was such a long layover, though, I got the opportunity to explore London and some other notable areas which was a lot of fun. My friend Dana came to visit as well, so it was nice having another travel companion throughout London. My favorite part of London had to be the exotic cars (true, but I’m not going to talk about it) and the nightlife at Piccadilly Circus. London was a really upbeat, wealthy city (hence the cars where amazing), but Piccadilly Circus proved to be the hangout area for the younger generation. Lined with bars, restaurants, and theaters, who wouldn’t find themselves attracted to that area? All of this extreme wealth made the transition from the poverty of Africa to London a little crazy at first. I went from riding on minivans crammed full of Tanzanians, with children and chickens sitting in my lap, to nice, spacious air conditioned subways, skyscrapers, and all the amenities one would come to expect from a major European or American city. My least favorite part of London was the bed in our hostel! No, seriously, it caused me some major distress! I was sleeping on the worst of the worst in Egypt, Jordan, and Tanzania, yet my back was throbbing from the bed in London! Irony strikes again! The increased amount of traveling I had done the week prior (15 hour bus ride to Dar es Salaam plus the 9 hour flight to London), combined with the lack of sleep caused by this horrible bed made me a drag! It was a pretty miserable feeling to be dying to go to bed, but to be dreading the bed you were going to be sleeping in!

As if I haven’t shared enough already, I would really like to quickly share some of the wisdoms I stumbled upon along the way of this trip.

1. **You will meet some of the most interesting people of your life while traveling.**

I don’t think anyone who has traveled can disagree with this statement. Meeting people from around the world is one of my
A great group of people, the Peace Corp Volunteers, along with Justin and myself having a campfire party

favorite aspects of traveling. You meet people everywhere, while diving, hiking, and volunteering, just to name a few. When flying out of Amman, Jordan on our way to Tanzania, I met one of the most incredible older ladies ever (she actually reminded me a lot of Peggy). Shirley Iverson, a 60+ year old lady from California, was touring Jordan and Egypt with a travel group. We sat and talked about traveling and the effects it has on you. She recommended her “Must See” travel list, which included Nepal and the Great Wall, just to name a few. We shared stories of family and she asked where I got my desire to travel from, and then made this profound statement. She said, “There are two things you should give your children, roots and wings.” I’m proud to say that my family gave me both. We talked the entire hour and a half that we were in the air and as we exited the plane, we shook hands exclaiming how nice it was to meet one another. She wished me luck on my future endeavors as did I to her, and we parted ways. Justin had a similar situation with another lady from the same travel group one row ahead of us. It was funny because we both got off the plane super excited to tell one another about the “cool old lady” we sat next to on the plane. There is however, a negative side to this “wisdom” of mine. This lady was full of wisdom and experiences, and yet I only got the opportunity to pick her brain for the short plane ride from Amman to Cairo. A lot of times you meet these amazing people while traveling, and as quickly as they come into your life, they exit even quicker. So the major shortfall to this “wisdom” is that you may never see these people again in your life. But for me, “‘Tis better to have loved (or maybe in this situation befriended) and lost, than to never have loved at all.”  — Alfred Lord Tennyson. Even though it was only an hour and a half plane ride, Shirley’s words will definitely remain with me for a lifetime.

2. You may not realize it at the time, but even experiences that aren’t exactly what you expect them to be can have a tremendous impact on you.

When I initially signed up for the medical volunteering program in Tanzania, I guess I naively assumed that for some reason, since it was a third world country and the fact that I have some medical experience, I would be qualified to do surgeries. Well, that didn’t qualify me and even though I didn’t really expect to get to cut on people, I did have higher expectations. With eight years of experience in the military as a medic, I had hoped this volunteering mission would allow me to be able to help ease
patient loads in any way possible even if it was just speeding up the process of screening patients before they see the doctor. I definitely feel as though I contributed work of value while volunteering, as I listened to malaria patients’ lung sounds, administered vaccinations to toddlers, and assisted in pregnancy screenings. But, I really felt as though I wasn’t being utilized as much as I could have been which was disappointing to me at the time. However, looking back on the situation I realize there were many factors that kept me from being fully utilized, the language barrier just to name one. I guess, like many others, I thought that I could just show up and change the world in a positive manner. In reality, though, it takes a lot of hard work and effort to volunteer aboard. For me, I thought this experience was going to be one of me helping out, but it turned into an experience where I learned what it would take to be able to help out in a foreign country.

3. You will always stick out in a crowd, and that is OK.

I feel this is something that is applicable to everyone, but even more so me. Standing at a mere 6’5”, I forget sometimes that I am a good foot taller than a lot of people. Blending in to most European countries can be a challenge for me, yet alone Tanzania! This lesson isn’t so much focused on my height, though, but more so the fact that before going to Tanzania I had never gone to a country where I felt so absolutely different. The cultural melting pot of America has made me accustomed and almost numb to the differences in skin color, whereas in Tanzania there aren’t any differences in skin color. Walking down the street, I would forget that I was so different until I realized that people would literally stop what they were doing to stare. Sometimes it made me uneasy because I couldn’t tell if they just were really that interested in me or if they were more interested in how much money they thought I had in my pockets. Most always, I think, it was just that they were fascinated by me. The best was the reactions were the little kid’s, in which they either yelled “mzungu” (Swahili for white person) at the top of their lungs or they would start crying hysterically (due to an old fable that says white people come to Africa to eat little black babies!). It took some getting used to, but by the end of my time in Tanzania I didn’t even notice it anymore. The culture shock I experienced was amazing and impacted me in ways I will never know.
4. You are not always going to feel comfortable in your surroundings, but that doesn’t mean that you should be afraid of them either.

This goes in hand with the previous “wisdom,” in that there were times when I definitely felt uneasy in my surroundings. Never before had I experienced the feeling of being a minority, which definitely got me out of my comfort zone. It was a great venture though, and showed me that the “norms” of my life definitely aren’t the “norms” in everyone’s life. Up until the point of my medical volunteering, I felt like a tourist, or “an outsider looking in.” After the time spent volunteering though, my walls began to come down and I began to relax which helped me adjust to situations that might not have been an everyday situation for me. My last two days in Dar es Salaam are a good proving point to this statement. When I first arrived in Dar, I was nervous about walking down the streets, day or night, seeing as we had been warned about the hazards of pick-pocketing. I was so uneasy in my surroundings that I couldn’t even enjoy them. After the next 5 weeks within Tanzania I arrived back into Dar es Salaam for my farewell flight back home. The last two nights I spent in Dar were completely different from the first two nights I spent there. We were traveling around town in daladala’s like we actually knew what we were doing, walking the streets at both day and night, going to the local restaurants, shops, and markets. It was kind of disappointing, yet at the same time, great to see that I had come so far in adjusting to the culture. Disappointing in that I missed opportunities at the beginning of the trip because I was afraid of the “what if’s”, yet great because I can use that fortuity to learn and grow from so maybe I won’t miss out next time!

Two months and four countries later, I arrived back into the US, welcomed by the words of my mom, “It’s good to see you, you look malnourished!” Thanks mom, I did just spend two months abroad in countries where food is for nourishment, not for enjoyment. I found though, that weight wasn’t the only thing I had lost. I can look back and see that I have lost my doubts about whether I would like to work someday as a doctor in rural, underserved (definitely at some point third world countries) areas. I think it is clear through this experience that the need is there and that the opportunity to help out in any capacity is something that I would gain a personal satisfaction from later in life. This trip did exactly what I had hoped. It showed me wonders of the world, yet at the same time, it gave me a better understanding of what I would like my future to entail.

After arriving back in the states, a friend sent me this next quote saying that she thought it described me well...
"So many people live within unhappy circumstances and yet will not take the initiative to change their situation because they are conditioned to a life of security, conformity, and conservatism, all of which may appear to give one peace of mind, but, in reality, nothing is more dangerous to the adventurous spirit within a man than a secure future. The very basic core of a man's living spirit is his passion for adventure. The joy of life comes from our encounters with new experiences, and hence there is no greater joy than to have an endlessly changing horizon, for each day to have a new and different sun,” - Chris McCandless, Into the Wild.

I definitely hope that I embody this quote and know that through this trip I have fueled the fire within myself for adventure and discovery.

At the ripe age of 26, I find myself more diversely traveled than anyone in my immediate family and probably anyone in my entire family. I don’t know if that makes me lucky, blessed, cursed, or all of the above, but what I do know is that the places I have been and the things I have seen will continue to inspire me to be a better person and to live a better life. I am continually reminded, whether I like it or not, that I have been given so many opportunities that I cannot and will not let go to waste. Traveling has opened my eyes in that it has allowed me to experience firsthand what others have only seen in pictures or movies. It’s true the old saying, “a picture is worth a thousand words” and I probably have an infinite number of words saved up over this trip. More importantly for me though, seeing that picture in real life is a memory that I will hold for the rest of my life. It is something that I will be able to share with family and friends, and it will be something I can look back on and cherish.

In closing, I would like to share with you a quote from a book I received as a high school graduation gift entitled “Oh, the Places You’ll Go,” by Dr. Seuss. The quote says “…you’re off to Great Places! Today is your day! Your mountain is waiting. So…get on your way!” My trip may be over for now, but oh the places I have been and will go.

I think I could go out on a limb and say this picture is worth more than a thousand words. It was even better in real life!