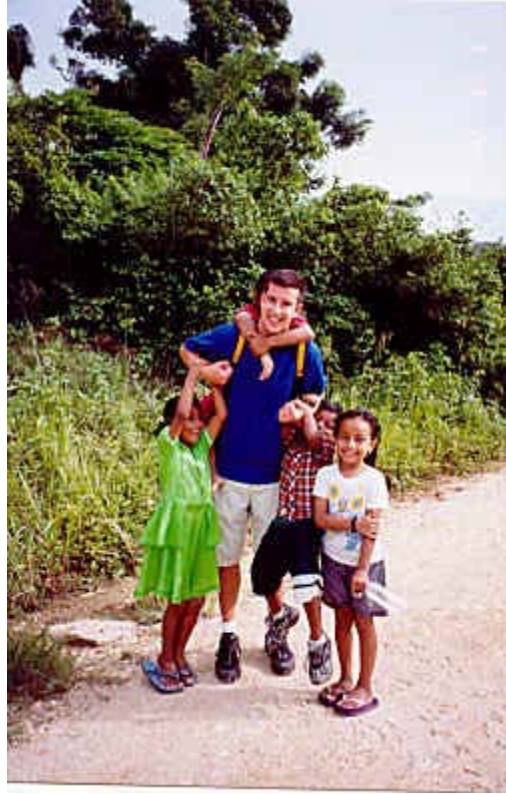


**Megan Baumgart, Maureen Condon
and Michael Loosemore, '03**
Belize, Central America

Hi! My name is Michael Loosemore, and I spent six incredible weeks in the small Central American country of Belize. Belize was unlike any place I have ever been. To see firsthand how much of the world lives certainly gave me a new perspective on my life here in the US. Seeing young children with no place to eat other than a dirt floor was quite a shock! Yet, for all the poverty, the people, especially the children, are happy and content.



I, along with my travel companions, Megan and Maureen, lived and worked in the Maya Mopan village of San Antonio. The Mayans are a very reserved people, rich in tradition that has been passed down through the centuries. It took us a good week to get the villagers to begin to overcome their shyness, but in no time at all it felt like we were an accepted new addition, albeit temporary, to the village.



When we arrived in San Antonio, we had the freedom of choosing what exactly our service would entail. So, we decided, with the help of Br. Harold Teel, a Jesuit brother who was our contact in Belize, and one of the kindest and most helpful people I have ever met, to set up a tutoring/activities camp for the village children. Mornings were devoted to teaching math and English, while afternoons would be filled with activities ranging from soccer games to hikes to the local swimming hole. I'm happy to say the program was very successful. The children had a great time, and learned a lot in the process. As for myself, I couldn't have had a more enjoyable volunteer experience.



To provide a glimpse into the healthcare system of a developing third world country, we went along once a week with the San Antonio Mobile Health Clinic, which consisted of a few nurses, a driver, and a pickup truck. The clinic traveled to outlying villages, places without running water, electricity, and any type of healthcare at all. This was a real eye-opener. Whereas in the United States, people of all ages go to the doctor for any of a myriad of ailments, in Belize, the healthcare system is almost purely preventative, with pre-natal care and early pediatric immunizations being the focus of the program. Rarely did we see anyone other than a pregnant woman, or a young child, come to the mobile clinic to see a nurse or doctor. But it really was amazing to see how much the nurses and doctors could accomplish with the limited amount of resources they possessed. To see a nurse with just a stethoscope in her hands be able to determine the week of pregnancy, position of the fetus, and give an accurate prediction of a baby's birth date, (all things that would always be handled by, and in many cases, require, an ultrasound in the US) was truly phenomenal.



The only sad aspect of this trip was seeing all the destruction wrought upon this area by Hurricane Iris in October of 2001. Iris literally leveled the entire southern Belize region. Seeing such a destitute area having to recover from a devastating natural disaster was heartbreaking. Yet, even though these people have gone through so much, many having lost what little they possessed in the first place, they remain upbeat. The rebuilding effort is going along steadily, albeit slowly, with the people aiding one another in mutual cooperation. We in the US could really benefit from that type of community amongst neighbors.



Perhaps this last picture best sums up my trip.



Here's Betty Oh, a 6-year-old child in a family with eight children, holding a small bouncing ball I gave her before I left. Just being able to put such a smile on a young child's face, even for a moment, makes this trip even more special. I came to Belize, and gave the village what I could through tutoring, the mobile clinic, and the tiny presents we all gave away. But the people in San Antonio gave to me a hundred times more than I gave of myself. They gave me access to their culture, their traditions, and most importantly, their personalities and feelings. I'll be forever grateful to all those I met in Belize, and I can confidently say that I will be coming back in the future, hopefully as a doctor, to repay them for their hospitality.