

SMALL WORLD NEWSLETTER

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Nothing Says Love Like International Studies



International Studies alumni, Jared and Maria (Bootwala) Bibler with son Euan, in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

International Studies alumni **Jared Bibler** and **Maria Bootwala** share their story about their international careers and life together, after graduation. “It seems quite fitting that I am working on this while traveling through the Mekong Delta on a bus between Phnom Penh, Cambodia and Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. It was my undergraduate degree which shaped both our careers and inspired us to live abroad. I met Maria (Bootwala) in 2003, while we were undergraduate students in OSU’s Interna-

tional Studies Program. Maria was completing degrees in Middle East Studies and Arabic when I transferred into the Latin American Studies program. We first became acquainted working together on Human Rights Awareness Week, and subsequently co-founded *Students for Labor and Economic Justice* with a few other IS students. Both activities were supported by IS faculty and staff. We got married in June 2006. Today, we live in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam with our 6-year old son Euan.

Maria is a counselor at the International School of Ho Chi Minh City-American Academy and I am an assistant professor at the American University of Phnom Penh located in neighboring Cambodia. We both credit OSU’s International Studies program with instilling in us a deep interest in global affairs and the international community, as well as playing the role of matchmaker!

Neither of us began our university experiences in IS, but were attracted by the



interdisciplinary nature of the program and its comprehensive approach to world issues. Maria entered OSU “undecided,” taking courses in a various areas of interest, including Arabic, an interest that would set her on course to become an IS major. She credits fateful introductions to professionals in the area in helping her find academic pursuits that aligned with her passions and personality. According to Maria, “It was their belief in me and the exposure they gave me through study abroad, internship opportunities in Washington DC and the Columbus Council on World Affairs, and volunteer work at Global Gallery that inspired me to major in International Studies and Arabic.” Jared similarly credits faculty members and advisors for being instrumental in his success and future career path. “Transitioning from being a music performance major at a small liberal arts college to entering OSU’s IS Program as a junior was a big academic adjustment! I was living in Guatemala in the 1990s as peace accords ended a 36-year civil war, and had become passionate about Latin American history and human rights issues throughout the region. However, my days had been spent in practice rooms, not history and social science classes. I felt like there was so much I needed to learn. For me it came down to some fortuitous scheduling choices on my first day on campus. I ended up in a new course on globalization taught

by Anthony Mughan, and an upper-level Geography seminar with Kendra McSweeney. Both professors became influential mentors offering advice that extended far beyond their respective courses. They really helped me learn what it meant to be a scholar, and inspired me to pursue graduate studies. In fact, it was Kendra that suggested an MA program at Ohio University which led me to a Ph.D. there!

Maria decided to pursue an MA degree in Higher Education and Student Affairs, a decision that enabled her to combine her interests in international affairs and the university experience. She spent ten years working at Ohio State in international education, initially as an immigration/international student advisor and then representing the university around the world as an international admissions recruiter. I pursued an interdisciplinary MA in International Affairs followed by a Ph.D. in History. The IS program introduced me to the merits of a multidisciplinary approach to global affairs and I never really looked back. Even my Ph.D. in History has multidisciplinary aspects to it.

The decision to leave the comfort and support network of family and friends in Columbus to embark on a life abroad with a two-year old was not an easy one. I was finishing my Ph.D., but did not yet have a full time position, so we

thought this was probably the best time to move abroad. We landed Mumbai, India, for two and a half years, and are currently finishing up two years in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam. Maria had moved to Ohio from India when she was 16-years old, and in fact, it was the support network of family and friends there that made India a good jumping off point for life abroad. The transition to Vietnam felt more like a leap into the unknown, but we benefited from institutional support and a helpful network of new friends as we settled in.

Maria decided to switch to the other side of the international recruitment process working as a counselor at international schools in the respective cities. I have held assistant professorships at two universities offering liberal arts based curriculum, and found plenty of opportunities to pursue my musical interests as well, becoming involved in music scenes in Mumbai, Ho Chi Minh City and Phnom Penh.

Maria and I both agree that some of the best perks of our life outside the US has been the ability to travel and enable Euan to grow up in an international environment. Neither of us really grew up traveling internationally, but both fell in love with it in our late-teens and do what we can to keep moving. Our careers in education offer great vacation opportunities, which we have tried to take advantage of whether traveling within India and Vietnam or internationally. And in terms of our son, Maria explained, Our son is studying at a school with students from 30 different countries and is taking Mandarin as a second language in kindergarten!

Of course, missing family and friends is a definite drawback of life abroad, but messaging apps and video chat allows us to stay connected, limiting the sense of distance. We also get to spend quality time with friends and family in the US during our long summer vacations, and are currently looking forward to visiting Columbus in late June.