

Sep 24, 2009

## Partain Gives Back In Africa

By Jennifer Leavitt

Special to GoHolyCross.com

[Video: Matt Partain on his Trip to Mailisita](#)

### [Photo Gallery](#)

"Weird," Holy Cross student Matt Partain replies after a reflective pause. It was weird, he said, to step off the plane and become immediately besieged by the exhausting hustle and bustle of Logan Airport.

"Everything was much slower in Africa; you could enjoy everything around you." For Partain, that meant waking up to the sight of Mount Kilimanjaro peaking its head through the wispy clouds of Africa's sky. This past summer, he spent nine days doing hands-on work to directly benefit the education of African children. He experienced Tanzania in a way most people who travel to the country do not. He did not play the role of a tourist, but one much more special. As an integral part of their village, the two-time All-Patriot League placekicker became familiar with the personal lives of the local men, women and children of Moshi, Tanzania. Now their faces, their stories, their needs and the work that needs to be done never stray far from his thoughts. Now he cannot wake up in the morning without thinking about that world so different from the one we know.



Three years ago, an organization known as "The Mailisita Foundation," began their project in Mailisita, a village six miles outside the town Moshi in Tanzania. Originating in Libertyville, Ill., where Partain grew up, the mission of this group is to construct a financially self-sustaining school to benefit the poor and growing orphan population in the Moshi area. The local children residing in this region exist under conditions unbearably close to fatal. With the growing AIDS epidemic, many children have lost one or both of their parents. Without enough money and food to go around in a country suffering an economic crisis, it is the orphans who seem to especially go without. Having never been taught English, these children fail the entrance exam to secondary school, and are denied the basic educational foundation needed to build a future. The goal of the Mailisita Foundation is to bridge that gap and provide a more promising tomorrow, one unimaginably brighter than what these children have been taught to expect. A properly funded school will give them the tools they need to grow and the opportunities they were never offered before through the greatest gift a person can receive - an education.

Partain's father, Nathan, has been a key component of the planning and operation of this organization for four years and has spoken passionately about the project since day one. This past summer after completing his fourth year at Holy Cross, Partain was finally able to join his father and be a part of the endeavor he had only heard stories about. His work was physical labor; he helped to move 3,000 bricks over the course of one week - the bricks that compose the guesthouse which, when completed, will provide the funds to run the school (a good source of income seeing how tourism is prevalent in the Mount Kilimanjaro area). During his time in Africa, Partain submerged himself in the culture and was embraced as a member of their society. "The goal is to not be a tourist," said Partain. "I wanted to be at their level while I was there." He worked alongside men who wore the same clothes each day, some shoeless, who would sleep on site at day's end. He spoke with them about their dreams, their most earnest desires. He met local boys and girls his own age, learned about their likes and dislikes, and discovered how hauntingly similar they are to his own. He found people who seem to be so comparable to him on so many different levels and now

struggles with the question, "Why are they living that life while I'm living mine?" Now having put a face to the cause, Partain says, "I can't wake up and not think about it - what's going on over there. It's a blessing, but a curse; it's always on my mind."

Africa changed Partain. He left the country altered, reconfigured from the inside out, and as a result, was left overwhelmingly aware. "It ruins you... in a good way," he says. Africa has instilled in him a new way of looking at the world, and now there is no turning back. A lot has been accomplished in Mailisita, yet even with the school built and the inn in the process, there is still much work to be done. With a vision of what the future Mailisita could look like, Partain's next effort will be to make Holy Cross a part of the cause by bringing a number of students on a trip next year. He advises his fellow 'men and women for others' to take the risk. "It is a necessary component of our roles as people in society to help those who have less than us," said Partain. "In giving back to the less fortunate, you will be granted just as much - a better understanding of the world and a better understanding of yourself. It will make you enjoy and count your blessings over and over." Partain's goal is to offer Holy Cross students a chance to "embrace the African culture and the extraordinary people who exist there, to open their eyes to a world they only read about, to experience it all first hand," to let it ruin them... in a good way.

If interested in learning about the Mailisita Foundation, visit <http://www.mailisita.org/> or contact Matt Partain at:

Matt Partain  
[mppart09@holycross.edu](mailto:mppart09@holycross.edu)  
P.O. Box 2486  
1 College Street  
Worcester, MA 01610