

## Shannon is Selfless *If You Care. SHARE*

by: Josh Currie

**N** After years of taking typical family vacations, Shannon knew she wanted to do something more than just "be a tourist."

Beginning when she was still in middle school, she and her family decided to craft a new family tradition—a tradition of service—volunteering in exotic locations around the globe, in order to make a difference in other people's lives. From Peru and Costa Rica, to Guatemala and China, Shannon did it all. But it was only last year, while she was brainstorming ways to earn her Girl Scout Gold Award, that Shannon made the life-altering decision to volunteer in Africa.

Through her research that followed, Shannon discovered the village of Bukoba, Tanzania, and subsequently learned of the poorly funded, under-developed education system in place there. According to Shannon, many of the education programs in third world countries are extremely chauvinistic, and most women have little to no educational rights. Drawing from her love of reading, Shannon decided that she would install an after-school reading program for girls to help empower the women of Bukoba.

The result was SHannon's After-school Reading Exchange (or SHARE): a program under the non-profit COSAD, which stands for "Community Solutions for Africa's Development." Shannon began by going around her New Jersey neighborhood putting fliers in mailboxes, asking her neighbors to donate books or school supplies. The overwhelming support she received was more than anyone could have anticipated, with over 1600 books donated to her cause!

When Shannon and her family finally arrived in Bukoba, they were met with open arms and smiling faces, each and every one of them grateful for everything that Shannon and her family had done.



"That's something really important in the African culture...to show appreciation for what they receive," she says. "It shows that what we did hadn't gone to waste."

Even after earning her Girl Scout Gold Award, Shannon decided to continue with SHARE. Now, she says, her basement at home is filled with tons of books, and even a dozen laptops waiting to be shipped to Africa on their next trip! Shannon has even partnered with several local libraries, as well as a few elementary schools to "recycle" their used books through her SHARE program, rather than allowing them to be thrown away. On a regular basis, this high school junior also gives public talks at about the work SHARE is continuing to do.

Since its creation, SHARE has expanded to include a total of three branches in Bukoba. Shannon hopes to eventually open chapters not only in Africa, but also India, China and Chile.

"If things keep on going the way they are, in five years it might be something international," she beams. "Fingers crossed!"



**Inspiration. Education. MOTAH-vation.**