

Good-willed



As part of the U.N. electoral observation team in 2001, Claudia Abate visited this remote village on the second-largest island of Fiji. Finished at the polling station, she asked to take a photo with the children and recalls, "They all jumped into my arms. I knew I was the face of the U.N. for them and I was deeply moved."

ambassador

By Stephen R. Levine '87

Photos courtesy of Claudia Abate

Many people have no idea where the journey of life will take them once they leave the hallowed halls of college—Claudia Abate is not one of them.

A 1993 Rowan grad, Abate (pronounced a-bah-tay) sought to help people who needed help most—genocide survivors, hurricane and earthquake victims, men, women and children whose own governments forgot about them, or worse.

“For me, the only real option was the United Nations,” said the Manhattan resident about her career.

Abate, the child of a Swedish mother and Italian-American father who helped liberate concentration camps in Nazi Germany, grew up amid conversations about international affairs, politics and the plight of the less fortunate.

“I remember trick-or-treating for UNICEF,” she said of the U.N. program to help Third World children. “You had your [bag for] candy but you also had your little orange box for children in other countries who

didn't have enough to eat.”

Abate, who earned her bachelor's degree in Spanish and a minor in political science/international affairs, landed a position with the United Nations almost immediately upon graduating. She went on to receive a master's degree in social science with a certificate in United Nations studies from Long Island University.

Employed as an international civil servant, she organizes meetings of dignitaries, diplomats and world leaders, and interacts with members of such bodies as the U.N. Security Council and General Assembly.

While the position enables her to work alongside international policymakers—U.N. Secretary General Kofi Annan and U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell among them—her real passion is the hands-



Equally at ease with village leaders as with international power brokers, Abate's responsibilities at the United Nations include briefing world leaders for presentations and escorting them on visits. Here, with Secretary of State Colin Powell at the 2002 Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg, South Africa, Abate recalls that the Secret Service had to intervene with the hostile audience.



Eskinder Debebe, Photo Unit, News & Media Division, Department of Public Information, United Nations

Once a conference officer at the United Nations, Abate assisted with committee votes on U.N. policy and leadership. Here, she works with the U.N. Security Council as they vote on the next judge to serve on the International Court of Justice.

on work to which her U.N. post has exposed her. In the past 13 years, she has visited and worked around the world in countries including Fiji, Portugal, Denmark, Mexico, Qatar, Jamaica, South Africa and Indonesia. But it is East Timor, an island nation whose people have suffered generations of strife, violence and slaughter, on which she has focused personally.

Struggle and hope

Abate was an official U.N. observer for the 2001 presidential elections in Fiji and, the following year, helped organize independence activities in East Timor. The struggling nation in Southeast Asia became independent in 2002 after a brutal, 24-year occupation by neighboring

Indonesia in which an estimated 100,000 or more people died.

“Being in East Timor in 2002 changed my life,” she said. “I worked side by side with people who all lost someone—a brother, a husband, a father. It’s amazing to be with people who suffered so much but who have so much hope in making a better future.”

In August, Abate returned to the island nation at her own expense, on her own time.

Aware of the lack of nongovernmental organizations with a focus on post-conflict situations, she established the Foundation for Post Conflict Development (www.post-conflictdev.org), with a mission to assist residents of war-torn nations.

Through her U.N. connections

Abate convinced the nation of Monaco’s Red Cross to open a maternity clinic in East Timor for which she holds the title of project coordinator. On her recent trip to the clinic under construction, Abate met with President José Alexandre Gusmão and Prime Minister José Ramos-Horta.

“My foundation has a sister relationship with the president’s foundation in East Timor,” Abate said. “I’ve been able to mobilize friends at the U.N. who see the needs and want to help. President Gusmão rolls up his sleeves and listens to his peoples’ concerns. I’m humbled to see how together we’re literally saving lives.”

President Gusmão sees progress with the clinic reaching beyond its bright halls and healthy patients. “Not only is the Prince Rainier III Maternity Clinic providing needed assistance to maternal and child health in Same District, which in

Rowan’s passport to the world

Now, more than ever, an undergraduate education that starts at Rowan can take students and alumni around the globe for a month, a semester or more. “Time spent abroad is transformational,” says Edward Smith, German and French professor and interim director of the International Center at Rowan University. “It makes you a more worldly and interesting person and exposes you to the many differences that exist—cultural, economic, linguistic—and to opportunities to bridge gaps where we can.”

Rowan’s International Center offers in-

formation and guidance to students and alumni interested in humanitarian efforts abroad (www.rowan.edu/internationalcenter). While some students earn academic credit for the experience, many students in educational, environmental and community aid programs take on tasks without promise of career advancement.

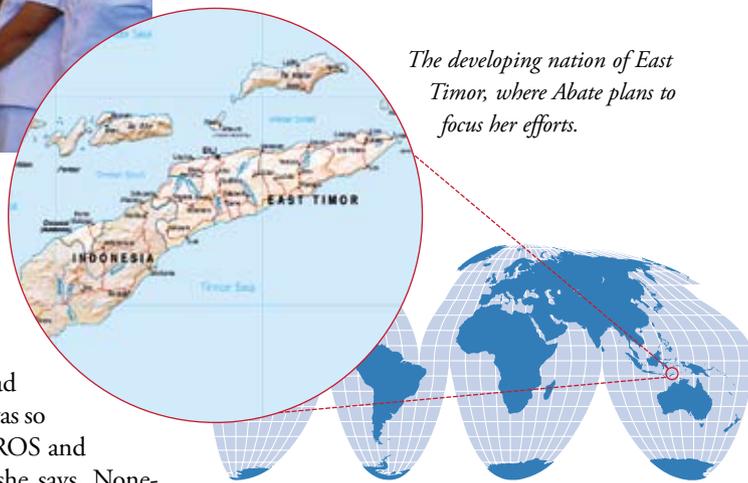
The value in becoming part of the global community as a student or volunteer is great, says Smith. “Many of our students have been motivated to help others through volunteering abroad and intern-

ship opportunities,” he says. “They have taught English in China, for example, and worked to provide clean drinking water to villagers in Thailand. There is nothing that can compare to such experiences.”

Alumni in the Peace Corps, religious relief missions and nongovernmental organizations have posts literally around the world. Jobs such as teaching English, helping in orphanages and engaging in environmental work immerse students in the culture and can help prepare them for other volunteer efforts or careers abroad.



Abate's August visit to East Timor included a tour of the new maternity clinic made possible by the work of her foundation. Maternal and infant mortality is a great problem, so Abate was glad to greet some of the midwives and staff who will care for women and children in the clinic.



The developing nation of East Timor, where Abate plans to focus her efforts.

and of itself will help improve the lives of our citizens, but the very fact that this clinic will soon be operational, under the guidance of Claudia Abate, is helping to bring together two countries," he said. "This is important not only for our bilateral relations, but hopefully will encourage other donor states to act in similar veins."

Mission and mantra

With such a compelling call to help, Abate has plans to leave her U.N. post soon to work for the foundation full-time where she believes she'll be more effective in identifying and meeting needs around the world. She says her international network of colleagues and friends from her U.N. experience have been supportive and many serve on her foundation board, including Gudmundur Eiriksson, ambassador from Iceland and a University for Peace faculty member in Costa Rica.

"I have known Claudia from the very first years in which she worked at the U.N.," said Eiriksson. "She has written in a most moving manner on the opportunities available to those working at the U.N. and appealed to her colleagues not to lose their vision or their sense of importance of their mission despite, admittedly, countless setbacks."

She's been attuned to international affairs since childhood, so it's ironic that Abate didn't study abroad while at Rowan. "I was so busy with school, PROS and my life at college," she says. Nonetheless, Abate says her experience as a Peer Referral and Orientation Staff member helped prepare her for the work she does now. "Being a PRO helped me develop social and cultural sensitivity, listening and mediation skills—all things that are critical in what I do now."

Marguerite Stubbs '63, former dean of students and advisor to the PROS, recalls that Abate had a natural altruistic bent that would help her continue a mission she started as an undergrad.

"On campus she was always helping others," Stubbs said. "She's an ambassador for Rowan and a role model for our students."

"I was a sister at Phi Sigma Sigma," Abate said of the international sorority. "Their goal was the brotherhood of man and the alleviation of the world's pain. I've taken that as my personal mantra." ■

Stephen R. Levine '87 spent 12 years as a full-time news reporter. Still writing, he is also working on a master's degree in public relations at Rowan.



After Mass at an internally displaced persons camp in East Timor, Abate joined the presiding clergyman, Father Morgan and Nobel Peace Prize honoree Prime Minister José Ramos Horta. After years of exposure to other cultures and norms, Abate says it's second nature to adapt to customs such as covering her shoulders or her head in a show of respect or modesty.



In August 2006, Abate met again with East Timor President José Alexandre Gusmão to discuss the work of her foundation in providing help to women and children in the country.