

in South Africa.

“We had a tea break at about 10:30 a.m. every morning. We would get out of class and make tea and have a snack and sit and chat,” she said. “It made your classes feel more like a community. It was a lot more chill, if you were having a good conversation and were late for class that was OK.”

Before studying in South Africa, Urness had visited Mexico and Canada and went on a mission trip to the Dominican Republic, but she said she learned the most from her four months in Cape Town.

“I loved my Dominican Republic trip but it’s hard to really understand a culture when you’re only there for a week,” she said. “Having a four month experience made me feel like I really understand South Africa a lot more. Of course, I don’t understand everything but being thrown into it made me learn so much.”

Urness and nine of the other Americans who were studying in South Africa at the same time as her were able to travel out of Cape Town into the smaller townships where poverty is evident everywhere.

“Wherever we went there were tons of kids running around saying ‘white person’ (in their native language). They would follow us around,” she said. “I thought it was very interesting because there were white people in Cape Town but so few visit the townships the children weren’t used to seeing white people.”

One thing Urness said she couldn’t get used to was the South African cuisine.

“There was a lot of meat and I’m a vegetarian, well more of a pescatarian because I do eat fish,” she said. “Everything had a lot of flavor and a lot of spice to it, which was good. Luckily, my host mother was also a vegetarian so I ate a lot of fresh fruit and vegetables.”

As a social work major, Urness was excited to help people while she was in South Africa and her internships and volunteer work were all about helping in any way possible.

“I worked for an orphan program, a mentor program and did some hospice work,” she said. “We visited members of the community and a couple of them had AIDS. It was interesting to be able to see their homes and we helped them do odds and ends like painting and cleaning.”

She also did one-on-one and group counseling with seventh grade girls and two different second graders.

“It was interesting to see how kids are similar and still a lot different from here to there,” she said.

While Urness worked hard during her trip, she also had fun.

“One of the biggest fun things I did was bungee jump from the world’s highest bungee jump area,” she said. “I had never bungee jumped before, but I’m kind of an adrenaline junky so I figured, ‘Go big or go home.’ It was amazing.”

After she graduates from Bethel University in St. Paul, Minn., next spring, Urness hopes to start her career as a social worker in the Minneapolis area.

“I really want to help people,” she said. “I thought about joining the Peace Corps, but after being away from home for four months I realized I wasn’t ready to be away for an extended period of time. It’s still in the back of my mind though.”

Urness said the most important thing she learned about herself during the trip was how important it is to just show up.

“Just be there, even if there’s nothing you can do, it’s important just to show up,” she said. “A lot of people just need you to listen to them. I would love to go back some day and I think I will. I learned so much and I think I’m still processing it and thinking about it.”

Although it will take Urness a while to completely process her experiences in South Africa, she said she is starting with small changes in her every day life that will hopefully make a difference for people all over the world.

“I’m a lot stricter on recycling than I used to be,” she said. “I really watch how much food we buy and making sure it doesn’t go to waste. (Americans) tend to buy so much groceries and so much of it goes to waste. When you see people who are really hungry it makes you more grateful and more mindful of what you throw away. It may seem like a little thing but for now that’s what I’m doing to help my community and the world.”

In the future, Urness hopes to help more people and make a difference in ending social injustices.

“I have a passion for people that’s why I am drawn to social work,” she said. “As for my reconciliation major I love learning about different groups of minorities and trying to figure out how we can reconcile people. I would like to see an end to racism, sexism, heteroism — just all the ‘isms.’”

■ by Tera Schmidt

GET GRILLIN'

with Hy-Vee's Chef
Staci Stengle



Jerk Marinated Tuna Steaks with Grilled Pineapple-Black Bean Salsa and Grilled Sweet Potatoes

Yankton Hy-Vee Chef Staci Stengle
Serves 4

- 4 tuna steaks
- 2 Tbsp. Hy-Vee jerk spice
- 1 Tbsp. Hy-Vee olive oil
- 2 sweet potatoes, peeled, cut in 1/2, and each 1/2 cut into 4 wedges
- 2 tsp. Hy-Vee olive oil
- 1 fresh pineapple, peeled and cored, cut into 1/2 inch slices

- 1 can Hy-Vee black beans, drained
- 1/2 cup chopped red onion
- 1 jalapeno, finely chopped
- 1 Tbsp. fresh cilantro, minced
- 1 Tbsp. fresh squeezed lime juice

Preheat grill to medium heat. Drizzle tuna steaks with olive oil and rub in jerk spice. Let sit at room temperature for 10 minutes.

Toss sweet potatoes with olive oil, and grill until softened

and slightly charred, turning often, approximately 10-15 minutes.

Place pineapple on grill, grilling approximately 3-4 minutes per side, turning when grill marks are evident. When cool, dice into small chunks and toss together with black beans, onion, jalapeno, cilantro and lime juice.

Season to taste with salt and pepper. Set aside.

Grill tuna steaks approximately 3 minutes per side, until nicely marked, but still medium rare in the center, with a warm, pink stripe. Do not over cook, as tuna will dry out and lose flavor.

Serve with salsa and grilled sweet potatoes.

Jerk Spice

- 1 Tbsp. onion powder
 - 1 Tbsp. garlic powder
 - 1 Tbsp. dry thyme
 - 1 Tbsp. kosher salt
 - 1 tsp. black pepper
 - 1 tsp. cayenne pepper
 - 1 tsp. ground Allspice
- Stir all spices together and store in a cool dry place. Will make more than you need but it keeps well.

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