

# contact sheet

## DREAMS OF AFRICA

Spreading the joy of photography in Mozambique

By Leslie Hunt

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Blake H. Schmidt of Portland, Ore., is a photographer, world traveler, former Peace Corps volunteer and entrepreneur. He's also a young man with a vision, which he calls The World Through My Eyes. Not his eyes, but those of a (so far) handful of African youths in Mozambique, where Blake recently taught English for the Corps at the Agrarian School of Chókwè.

"The students had little opportunity to enjoy extra-curricular activities taken for granted by young Americans," says Schmidt. He felt that their learning how to photograph their surroundings would not only give them a valuable skill, but also enrich their lives with the self-confidence that comes through accomplishment.

Schmidt purchased four Nikon Coolpix digital cameras, and phase one of the project—to introduce the students to photography—was underway. Why digital? It would have been an ordeal just getting

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the film to a town where it could be processed, requiring a journey of at least nine hours over wild terrain. Schmidt's laptop was right there in the village.

Before long, the project caught the attention of the U.S. Embassy in Maputo, Mozambique. Recognizing the value of capturing and preserving the culture of the country in images, the embassy helped out with funding.

With the help of Marcílio H. Crespino Nhampossa, a 22-year-old Mozambican, nine students eagerly absorbed the lessons in photography, and began making pictures of their surroundings. Each student compiled a portfolio of images, and phase one culminated in two well-received gallery shows of their photographs. The students were elated.

Schmidt's two-year commitment to the Peace Corps came to an end earlier this year, and he returned to his family's home in Portland. He has been diligently raising funds for the next phase of The World Through My Eyes, with the long-term goal of establishing a permanent school of photography in Mozambique. In August, The World was accepted by the non-profit umbrella organization of Sustainable Resources ([www.sustainableresources.org](http://www.sustainableresources.org)). Meanwhile back in Mozambique, Nhampossa continues to teach photography to a group of underprivileged students, ages 13 to 23.

*Schmidt has created a wonderful Web site, [www.theworldthroughmyeyes.org](http://www.theworldthroughmyeyes.org), where you can read about the students, and purchase prints of selected images from their portfolios. The proceeds will help fund the project's continuation.*