Texas Aggies in the MSC Jordan Institute’s Internship and Living Abroad Program in the Dominican Republic in the summer of 2007.

Photo courtesy of Annika Johnson ‘08

Photo courtesy of Ann West Goug ‘85

Photo courtesy of Logan Ratcliff ‘12
Ann West Gough ‘85 chaired the MSC’s International Programs committee in 1984, when internationalism was first emerging at Texas A&M. She is pictured here with her children, Katherine and Robert, at a soda (a café) in Costa Rica.

The MSC L.T. Jordan Institute For International Awareness

By Rebecca Noah Poynter ‘85
Ann West Gough '85 describes her family’s neighbors in Costa Rica this summer: neon-green parrots, Howler monkeys and an occasional sloth. “To reach the soda or local café, it was like walking through a zoo.” When Ann and her husband, Greg Gough '85, vacation with their children, she makes sure they experience other countries by living in a local setting for up to a month.

Her travels replace lost possibilities as a student. “When I was at Texas A&M,” Ann says, “I wanted to test my suburban Texas life with international experiences.”

In 1984, Ann was chairperson of a new MSC committee, International Programs, which formed to increase international awareness and opportunities on campus. Memorable cultural events with the Bangladesh and India student associations kicked off the MSC’s international emphasis.

“At a time when international exposure and awareness was typically not part of the Aggie education, at the MSC internationalism was emerging,” says Ann. “We couldn’t even imagine how the MSC could offer students international travel and living opportunities.”

Lufkin native Jessie Jordan could. She and husband Leland Thomas Jordan '29 lived remarkable lives doing that very thing. Leland’s successful career made that possible.

As a student, Leland studied mechanical engineering and was captain of Battery A in the Corps of Cadets. After graduation he married the girl next door, Jessie Wright Jordan. They moved to Venezuela, where he was an oil field production engineer. By 1945, he was general manager of Gulf Oil’s Western Division in Maracaibo, Venezuela.

In 1948 Leland was named manager of the Kuwait Oil Co. Ltd., a joint venture between Gulf Oil and the Anglo-Iranian Oil Co., later known as British Petroleum. The presence of this prominent international enterprise would modernize Kuwait, and Leland was a major contributor to the country’s advancement. They returned to Lufkin in the late 1960’s. Always dignified and humble, Leland passed away in 1972.

By the 1980s, Jessie sought to honor her husband and the extraordinary international life they shared. She attended The Association of Former Students’ events, arriving at A&M in her chauffeur-driven black Cadillac. At those gatherings, she asked university officials who at Texas A&M might be interested in her unique offer. With international focus only beginning on campus, the University hesitated, not sure how to best capture Jessie’s focus.

Being politely deferred didn’t stop for her for a moment. From her time in the Middle East, Jessie was used to interacting with corporate presidents, rulers, sheiks, generals, ambassadors, diplomats, and even the Queen of England. If it was going to be a long process to get what she wanted, Jessie’s determination, international experiences and soft Southern accent had armed her well.

Jim Reynolds, who was then the MSC director, recalls receiving a phone call on a Monday afternoon in 1984, asking if the MSC might be interested in talking to the lady from Lufkin about “something international.” Overnight, Jim Reynolds and several MSC students prepared an inventive proposal for the MSC L.T. Jordan Institute for International Awareness.

The MSC L.T. Jordan Institute for International Awareness, created in 1986 through an endowment from Jessie Wright Jordan in the name of her late husband, Leland Thomas Jordan provides students with opportunities for learning about the world in which we live.
LOGAN RATLIFF ’12
Civil Engineering
Boyd, Texas
Greece Leadership Program
Summer 2008
“A&M changes you, it opens doors for you, and all you have to do is walk through. When it comes to traveling or studying abroad, I am not your typical protégée. Growing up on a farm in a small town, I was never exposed to a reason why going to another country would be beneficial for someone’s education. That’s the great thing about Texas A&M, and the programs L.T. Jordan puts on—the opportunities are endless. The L.T. Jordan Greece Leadership Program opened the doors, giving me the opportunity to experience Greece and to participate in activities tailored to improving leadership skills. Throughout the 14-day trip, we visited Athens, Mycenae, Epidavros, Nafplion, Olympia, Patras, Delphi, Meteora, Thessaloniki, Mykonos, and Delos; with Metoera or Nafplion being my favorite. The town of Nafplion was very relaxed and humble, giving me a sense of comfort and home. In Meteora, after visiting monasteries nestled on top of a mountain, we did a little freelance rock climbing. This was a once-in-a-lifetime trip—getting to stand on the very spot where Paul preached the Gospel to the Greeks, seeing and learning about the beginning of many things in this world, swimming in the crystal-clear Mediterranean Sea, and racing in the same stadium that the original Olympic Games were held.”

CAROLINE SCHRODT ’09
Biomedical Science with Spanish Certification
Bakersfield, Calif.
Internship and Living Abroad—Dominican Republic
Summer 2007
“Before I entered Texas A&M, I wanted to study medicine and someday travel the world to work internationally, but I did not know what would be the focus of my career. After traveling abroad to the Dominican Republic, however, my goals became more succinct and I finally realized my career objective. While there, I worked under the supervision of an HIV/AIDS specialist at a government-funded pediatric hospital in downtown Santo Domingo. I noticed that the majority of cases were children suffering from infectious diseases that are preventable in the United States. Living there humbled me in all aspects of my life. While traveling through the country, I saw people living in great poverty, who, despite their condition, always greeted me with great big Dominican smiles. Through the internship and living with a host family, the L.T. Jordan Institute provided me with the opportunity to fully experience life in the Dominican Republic, in a way unlike normal study abroad programs. I have made it a priority to share my experiences with others in the hopes that they can gain a greater understanding and appreciation of another culture. As for my career, I have decided to become an epidemiologist with goals including travel to other countries and being involved with the implementation of health reform and policy.”

ANNIKA JOHNSON ’08
Business Management
Harlingen, Texas
International Living Abroad Program—Dominican Republic
Summer 2008
“I interned as an assistant in the Office of Accounting for Gestion Informatica, an IT consulting firm where business was conducted in Spanish. I worked from 8:30 to 5:30 every day. I walked to work, which was only a couple blocks from my apartment building in a nice part of Santo Domingo. Texas A&M University’s L.T. Jordan Institute gave me the opportunity to continue pursuing my dream of becoming fluent in the Spanish language. ILAP provided the chance for me to be immersed in the culture and business environment of the Dominican Republic, which was further enhanced by planned weekend excursions with Aggies to witness the beauty of this island nation. Over my five weeks in La Republica Dominicana, I learned to take hold of opportunities that would add to my understanding of the culture, language, and people. I found myself challenged, as I was placed in a professional, Spanish-speaking business office for eight hours a day. Truly, the best way to learn a language is to put yourself in an environment where English is not an option. One of the highlights for me was being able to converse in Spanish, connecting to the local people and coworkers as they shared their culture with me. The essence of my learning experience came by being pushed outside of my comfort zone.”
In Lufkin at Jessie’s home the next day, the visitors passed through ancient and massive front doors. Jessie told the visitors, “Those cedar doors were given to us by Kuwait’s ruler, Shaikh Sabah, for our house in Ahmadi. I had mentioned to him that I missed the beautiful doors from the house in Lebanon where we trained for six months to understand Middle Eastern cultures. So the shaikh bought that house and transported the doors to Kuwait for me.”

Jim handed Jessie the proposal and she read all 12 pages deliberately. The primary proposal described a travel organization in the MSC that would arrange local living and travel as well as work experiences in other countries. A second part provided for an increased level of international programs on campus, and a third was for grant money to encourage student travel. She closed the binder and said, “This is exactly what I want to do.”

The MSC had offered her a vehicle to honor Leland but negotiation had only begun. “Think Joanne Herring in Charlie Wilson’s War,” explains Jim Reynolds. “Jessie Jordan was a very skilled and complex negotiator, and there was something else she wanted.”

So although Jessie said yes to providing funds for the endowment of the Jordan Institute, the money was not yet forthcoming. She offered to double her endowment if her special request was fulfilled. But another year would pass before she revealed exactly what she wanted.

Jessie’s weapon of persuasion was her warm hospitality. She invited MSC students and staff to her home to see the cultural and personal items acquired from living internationally. Behind the Ahmadi doors were many treasures from their time in Kuwait. Leland built Ahmadi from the desert, interacting with employees from 29 countries. Leland established schools, hospitals, offices, houses and recreational facilities. He managed the construction, drilled for oil, and built

The cedar doors and antique chest were given to Jessie and Leland T. Jordan by the ruler of Kuwait, Shaikh Sabah, for their house in Ahmadi. The doors later were installed on the Jordans’ home in Lufkin, and they are now the entrance to the Jordan Institute offices in Texas A&M’s Memorial Student Center.
and maintained spillways, pipelines, refineries, jetties and infrastructure.

For Jessie, the treasures in her home represented Leland's extraordinary career and their personal relationships. In the company of students, Jessie would point to the photo of the Queen of England and tell how Queen Elizabeth II had appointed Leland Honorary Commander of the Civil Division of the Order of the British Empire in 1958, and Honorary Knight Commander in 1961. “Honors,” she would say, “rarely conferred upon a non-British subject. Don’t you think this should be at the MSC?”

“Captivated” says Jim, “all the MSC-ers would agree.”

Jessie eventually revealed her desire—a replica of her home in Kuwait as an addition to the MSC, to house her treasured possessions. Jim politely said, “No, thank you.” Instead he countered with A&M’s best negotiating tactic: Aggie students.

Jessie was invited to be a part of MSC activities. She came every weekend, and she was escorted everywhere by students. “She just loved it. Her relationship with the students grew,” says Reynolds. Jessie Jordan was “the MSC grandmother.” In 1986, both Jim and Jessie moved to compromise, in part because of her failing health. The main reason was her desire to provide international experiences for the Aggie students she had come to love.

Jessie wrote a personal check for $1 million. An oversized copy of that check hangs in the L.T. Jordan Institute student cubicle at the MSC.

Jim arranged for a TV-watching area to be converted into space for the L.T. Jordan Institute. An office, reception room and display area were installed. Glass-front cabinets were built to house the Jordan’s possessions and her best furniture was moved from Lufkin. Of course, the Ahmadi doors were placed in the MSC hallway to welcome all Aggies.

The MSC L.T. Jordan Institute for International Awareness, dedicated to foster internationalism at Texas A&M, opened with a grand reception.

Some two decades later at the Jordan Institute, three Aggie undergrads sit at a long mahogany table. Logan Ratliff ’12 has just returned from two weeks at the Greece Leadership Program. As the Jordan Institute’s newest program, this one offers first-time international experiences to Aggies and a chance to explore the birthplace of Western civilization. Logan reveals it was the first time he had ever been on a plane.

Annika Johnson ’08 and Caroline Schrodt ’09 shared internships and experiences in the Dominican Republic. Annika says, “I worked in an accounting office but during the weekend we traveled to lots of local beaches with the other Aggie interns.”

Seated on the Jordan’s dining room chairs, these Aggie students begin to share their stories of traveling, living and working internationally.

Jessie would be most pleased to sit and listen to these students’ stories, knowing Leland’s life had made this possible. 📝

Rebecca Noah Poynter ’85 is a writer living in Washington, D.C. She travels often.