

# Live *wire*



WHITMAN COLLEGE  
YOUNG ALUMNI MAGAZINE



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# L i v e | *wire*

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WHITMAN COLLEGE



## After Whitman

### Matt Dittrich '12

*Market Development Manager at nLIGHT  
Vancouver, Wash.*

**What resources or connections did you use to find your current position?** I'm a very lucky guy to have a mentor in one of our trustees, David Nierenberg. While I was visiting home over New Year's 2015, David introduced me to the CEO of nLIGHT, Scott Keeney. The opportunity to help Scott grow a global, high-tech laser company – LASERS! – was an offer I couldn't refuse. I guess the cliché takeaway is that there is nothing more important to your career than your network and, specifically, your mentors. As far as I know, there's no better place to find both than at Whitman. I really mean that.

**What is your favorite part of your job?** Growing our business into new markets: I see inherent value in delivering new technology to developing communities. Today, I get to do this everywhere from China to Eastern Europe to the American Midwest. Our semiconductor lasers are giving folks in manufacturing and medicine tools they need to innovate, increase efficiency and raise the standard of living. A few months ago, I visited Cuba. I was immediately struck by the juxtaposition of beauty and dilapidation. Due to many factors, this place has stalled since 1960, epitomized by the brightly-painted, old Detroit steel that still sputters people around the island. But Cubans aspire to more. They're hungry to grow and access better lives. This is the type of opportunity that fuels my passion and drives my work.

**What advice would you give the most recent Whitman graduates?** Explore! Get off the continent, get out of your comfort zone and run toward whatever looks attractive. Even better, get paid to do it. Working in Europe straight after Whitman helped me visualize challenges and opportunities I'd never really seen or understood growing up in rural Washington. The experience also helped me look inward – to see more clearly who I am and what I'm passionate about. So go on an adventure. Find your metaphorical treasure. And once you do find it, remember to give back to Whitman.

**What are some ways young alumni can volunteer and stay engaged with Whitman after graduation?** Wherever you go after graduation, take Whitman with you – connect on Facebook, attend local events and rep your Whitman hoodie. Wherever you find yourself in the country or the world, reach out to fellow Whitties. Interview a prospective student, give a senior your business card, and ask a first-year if the food is any better these days. These acts seem small and trivial, but they are the beginning of conversations and relationships that multiply. And the sum of these can effect profound change. I may never have gone to Whitman, or any college period, if it wasn't for a chance encounter with a Whitman alumnus who nonchalantly suggested, "Just apply and see what happens."

**Matt Dittrich '12** serves as Market Development Manager at nLIGHT, a global semiconductor laser company in Vancouver, Wash. A first-generation college graduate, Matt majored in politics during his time at Whitman and dedicated most of his energy to ASWC as a Senator, two-term Finance Chair and President. As an alumnus, Matt is involved in the Portland Young Alumni Council, a member of the Alumni Board and mentors students interested in consulting.



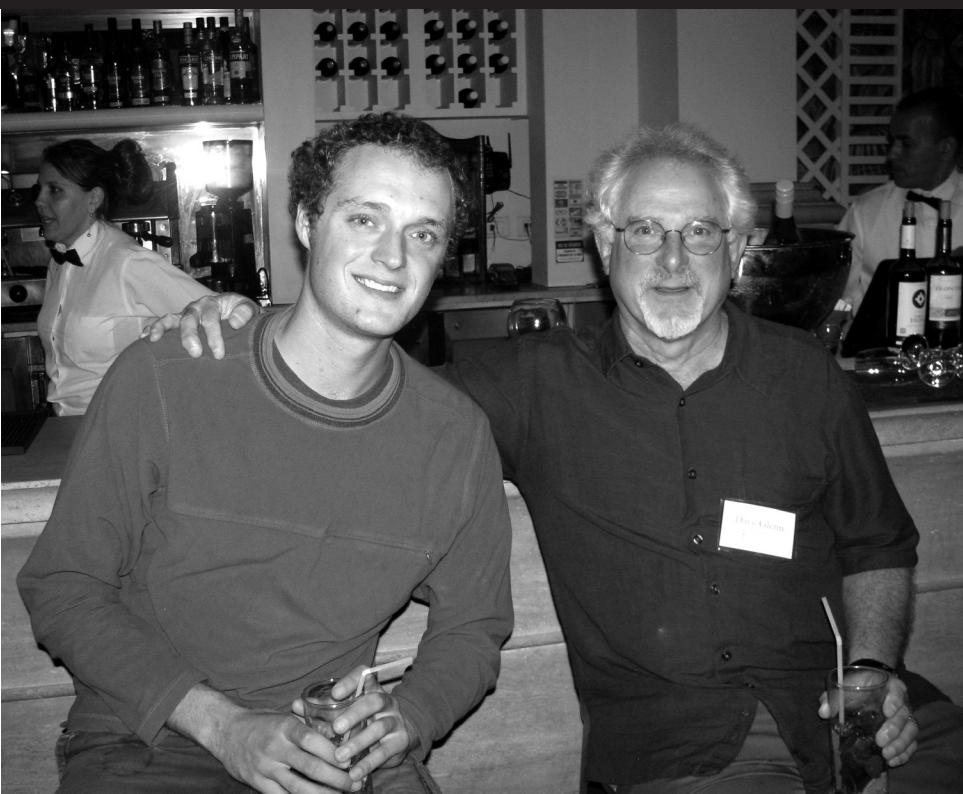
# Hoy como ayer: old and new friends found in La Habana

By Ethan Maier '13

## *It was an unlikely scene:*

a group of 30-plus Whitman College alumni and friends, walking and chatting together along the beautifully post-apocalyptic streets of Havana, Cuba, this past January. And even more unlikely was that I was among them. After two years working as a jazz piano player in Portland, I had traveled to Cuba in early January to study Cuban music. Four days after I arrived, an alumni trip led by Director of Alumni Relations Nancy Mitchell and one of my great mentors from Whitman, Professor of Music Dave Glenn, landed at José Martí International Airport. Coincidentally, they had the same goal as me: learn about Cuban music from Cuba itself.

Above left: The home of artist José Fuster located in the neighborhood of Jaimanitas in Cuba. Above right: The Cuban flag.



Ethan and Professor of Music David Glenn enjoying music together in Havana, Cuba.



Dave and Ethan perform a jam session for alumni and friends at the Hotel Saratoga in Havana, Cuba.

... I was poignantly made aware of the two worlds running side by side: the world of disposable income, and the one without.

In the four days I had spent in Havana prior to meeting up with the Whitties, I already had been through quite a colorful introduction to Cuban life. I realized immediately upon arrival that the two months spent in Mexico City prior to Cuba were not going to be as helpful as I had thought. Cubans use different words for everything, from taxi and refrigerator to beet and boy, and their accent and phrasing often sounds like a different language, even to native Spanish speakers. Cuba has two different currencies: the Cuban Peso (MN), which is given to Cubans to cheaply buy the necessities of life, and the Cuban Convertible Peso (CUC), which is given to tourists to buy heavily marked up and taxed goods. For example, a taxi from the airport to Havana is 20 CUC (\$20), while a public bus is 0.2 MN, the equivalent of less than 1 cent. A cup of coffee costs 2 CUC (\$2) and 8 cents in MN. Needless to say, Havana quickly materialized as a maze of ingenious official and unofficial tourist traps to keep foreigners spending money.

Slowly taking all this in, I showed up to my first night's lodging in the vibrant but dilapidated Centro Habana filled with a nice mix of loneliness and dread. However, the situation quickly changed.

That first night, I met a family that quickly invited me to stay in their home. For my month in Cuba I happily enjoyed my own room, free-of-charge, in the heart of Centro Habana. My family's home was a stone's throw away from Habana Vieja, where I encountered a more vibrant and inviting music scene than I had ever expected. Musicians only needed to know I was a musician before inviting me to sit in and they were eager to share their knowledge of Cuban music. I couldn't help but share right back with them from my background in jazz. For my whole trip, I continuously participated in the more than century-old Cuban-American musical exchange that has been integral to the development of such a variety of styles as Mambo, Salsa, Latin-Jazz and Timba.

Four days into this cultural mayhem of Havana, I walked four blocks from my family's house to the Hotel Saratoga, and met up with Dave and the group of alumni. Thanks to Nancy, I was immediately taken in as part of their group without a second thought. How strange and wonderful to walk the streets of Cuba with a posse that knows where Dayton and Bennington Lake are! It was a breath of fresh air running into a Whitman family with whom I felt immediate kinship, but the experience taught me about Cuba in a way I hadn't expected.

During my own trip, I tried my best to live like an average Cuban: I intentionally worked outside of official channels, shopped in small markets and paid for goods in MN, the Cuban Peso. Joining the tour group, however, I was able to see the Cuba unavailable to Cubans. With an average state salary of around 480 MN (\$20), a Cuban would be broke after four cocktails in the hotel bar, let alone able to pay the \$30 admission to a Buena Vista Social Club tribute that we attended at Café Taberna. It was a fantastic experience to be able to sit down for a private concert with Harold Lopez-Nussau, one of the finest jazz pianists in Cuba today, and to later tour the famous Abdala recording studios (where I bought a DVD "on sale" for \$15). But returning to my family's home in crumbling Central Havana, where we used newspaper for toilet paper and springs were literally poking through my mattress, I was poignantly made aware of the two worlds running side by side: the world of disposable income, and the one without. I felt undercover in both worlds, a simultaneous prince and pauper.

At the end of their week, Dave and I played a final concert for the alumni group, and the next morning they were gone. I stayed three more weeks sitting in with music groups, studying the work of José Martí, exploring Havana and western Cuba, and forging bonds with my Cuban family. Without my run-in with the alumni trip, however, I never would have fully experienced the Cuban tourism industry. The tours show one side of Cuba, the streets another, but a clearer image is found when they are put side-by-side.

*Ethan graduated in the fall of 2013 from Whitman with degrees in biology and music, with a jazz piano emphasis. After graduation, he worked for two years as a musician in Portland, also taking a two-month 13,000-mile road trip through the U.S. This past fall and winter he and his accordion lived in Mexico City for two months and Havana, Cuba, for one month, studying Latin music. Intrigued and inspired by Latin American music and culture, he departed for another trip to Latin America this March, this time by motorcycle.*



## Submit to *Livewire!*

Has something exciting happened in your life this year? Send a photo and caption for *Livewire* by filling out the Class Note submission form at [connect.whitman.edu/classnote](http://connect.whitman.edu/classnote). Then email your photo to [livewire@whitman.edu](mailto:livewire@whitman.edu).

Electronically submitted photos must be at least 300 dpi for a three-by-five-inch photo. Or, mail original photos to Whitman College Alumni Office, Attn: *Livewire*, 345 Boyer Ave., Walla Walla, WA 99362.

If you would like your photos returned to you, please include a note. Don't forget to name everyone in the photo!

*First person ...*

# From Petrology to Plants

Emily sells farm vegetables at a Saturday farmers' market in New Zealand.

Opposite page, left: Emily assists elementary school students with planting in their school garden during her AmeriCorps work in Vermont. Opposite page, right: Emily harvests apples during the fall season in Somerset, England.

I graduated from Whitman in 2012 with a geology-chemistry degree and aspirations of being a soil scientist or hydrologist.

I have always loved plants and gardening, and before applying to graduate school or looking for jobs, I applied and was accepted to an internship in vegetable horticulture in New Zealand. At the time, I thought it would be just for fun. Little did I anticipate that six months of growing and selling vegetables would be the beginning of a horticultural journey leading me around the country and the world.

In New Zealand, I spent countless hours weeding and harvesting, cleaning vegetables, planting seeds, talking to customers, and most importantly, thinking. Whitman helped develop my critical thinking skills, and I spent long hours thinking about how our agricultural practices affect the environment and how we interact with our food system.

After New Zealand, I did a year of AmeriCorps VISTA in Vermont, creating and coordinating a farm-to-school program at a preschool and elementary school and teaching kids about food systems and nutrition. Whitman nurtured my curiosity about how the world works, and it was challenging, fun and rewarding to engage kids' natural curiosity while increasing my own as we explored where food comes from and why we should care what we eat.

I moved from Vermont to California for a job at the USDA National Clonal Germplasm Repository – our national collection of Mediterranean climate fruit and nut trees and vines, where I helped prune, propagate and care for many collections, such as grapes, pomegranates, olives, plums, apricots and almonds. The



The sheer number and variety of the wild and domesticated plants in the collections amazed me.

sheer number and variety of the wild and domesticated plants in the collections amazed me – 3,500 types of grape vines and 130 types of pomegranates ranging from colorless, hard-seeded fruit that tasted like lemon to pink, soft-seeded ones that tasted like pure sugar. Of all these varieties, there is only one pomegranate that is commercially grown in the U.S. – it's called "Wonderful," and, ironically, it is not as wonderful tasting as many others. However, it looks appealing on the outside and it stores and travels well, which drives what varieties are grown commercially. Agriculture has drastically changed in the Central Valley over the past 100 years. Almonds used to be dry-farmed here, but farmers discovered you could get bigger almonds if you grafted them onto a peach tree's roots and irrigated them – an interesting fact to learn as the drought wore on and wells for irrigation had to be drilled deeper and deeper. The knowledge I gained at the Germplasm sparked yet more questions in my mind about food sustainability and security.

Currently I am living in Somerset, England, working for a cider apple orchard management company and learning about both the traditional orchard practices with sheep and cows grazing beneath the trees as well as new, higher-density orchards with smaller trees and no livestock. I can't help but think that there must be ways to creatively combine the best aspects of both new and old systems, both in cider orchards and in other areas of agriculture, to reach new and sustainable ways of producing food in our time of changing climate and growing population.

My time at Whitman encouraged me to explore the world, integrate ideas from different disciplines, and question whether there isn't a better, more elegant solution to a problem. I look forward to the next step of my horticultural adventure, knowing that there is infinitely more to learn and discover.



*Emily Johnson graduated in 2012 from Whitman with a combined degree in geology-chemistry. A lifelong plant enthusiast, Emily has pursued a range of horticulture jobs since graduation, including small-scale vegetable farming in New Zealand, coordinating a school garden with AmeriCorps VISTA in Vermont, helping maintain the USDA collection of Mediterranean fruit and nut trees in California, and working with cider orchards in the United Kingdom. She hopes to continue in horticulture in the future and work on issues related to food security and sustainable food production.*



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## Whitman Connect

*Across generations and around the world*

### HAVE YOU HEARD?

Whitman Connect is our new and improved Alumni community — it offers many great features to search for friends and classmates, network with fellow Whitties, mentor students and more!

Updating your profile today is easy — just go to [connect.whitman.edu](http://connect.whitman.edu) to get started. Were you a member of Whitman Online? If so, you are already registered! All you need is your email address and password from Whitman Online. If you are a new user, contact the Alumni Office at 509-527-5167 or at [alumni@whitman.edu](mailto:alumni@whitman.edu) for your Whitman ID (WID).

Please take a few minutes to join the more than 8,000 users of **Whitman Connect**.

[connect.whitman.edu](http://connect.whitman.edu)

Matt Banderas '04



# LOST

*alumni*

If you know the whereabouts or the email addresses of any of these Whitties, please send that information to [addrchg@whitman.edu](mailto:addrchg@whitman.edu).

#### 2006

Katherine Vernon du Bray

#### 2007

Jonathan Frederich Buchner  
Laura Buriu  
Leah Ann Fisher  
Todd Eric Frisch  
Caitlin Marie Kearney  
Amanda Claire King  
Mark Ehrhardt Matthews  
David Mark Ozog  
Ian James Warner  
Amanda Leigh Zimmerman

#### 2008

William S. Gibson  
Lauren E. and Kern C. McGee  
Jyotsna Shivanandan  
Kevin Robert Van Meter  
Robert Scott Westermann  
Claire Sunyoung Yi  
Andrew Indiana Zoeller

#### 2009

Evan Charles Cartwright  
Andrew Jay Erickson  
Forrest Chance Gray  
Alexander Robert Henke  
Alisa Larson-Xu  
William W. Laxson III  
Alison Caroline Meith  
Kevin Michael Moore  
Keefe Joseph Piper  
Wesley Franklin Price  
Laura K. Spoor  
Joseph Theodore Zoline-Black

#### 2010

Josi Raquel Kerr  
Refael William Klein  
Thomas Michael Roston

#### 2011

Enkhjin Batjargal  
Harry Joseph Hixon  
Isabelle Stafford Lemly  
Samuel Nikolai Sidoine  
Clark Basil Arthur Van Horne

#### 2012

Nanyonjo K. Mukungu  
Alegria Isabel Olmedo

#### 2013

Sarah A. Adler  
Nicholas Harley Chow  
Anna Elizabeth Eilertsen  
Haley Skiff Ireland  
Ross Carleton Kendrick  
Andrew James Larson

#### 2014

Andrew William Martin  
Hadley Nicole Scherer  
Forrest Quinn Watkins

# Live|*wire*

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Whitman College Alumni Association  
345 Boyer Ave.  
Walla Walla, WA 99362

## *Who Inspires You?*



The Pete Reid Award for Young Alumni is presented to an alumnus or alumna of the last decade who demonstrates youthful exuberance toward his or her career and community and toward Whitman College, as exemplified by **Pete Reid '49** in his service to Whitman.

Last year's winner, **Ashifi Gogo '05**, founded Sproxil in 2009 and serves as the company's Chief Executive Officer. Under his leadership, Sproxil developed its award-winning Mobile Product Authentication technology that has been used by consumers globally to verify product authenticity. Ashifi was awarded the Social Entrepreneur of the Year Award in 2014 by the Schwab Foundation and received a Clinton Foundation Global Initiative Outstanding Commitment Award.

Criteria include recognition in their career or field of work, an exceptional commitment to serving others and a demonstrated commitment to Whitman College. Tell us about an outstanding Whittie today!

To submit your nomination of a deserving classmate, use the form at  
[www.whitman.edu/alumniawardform](http://www.whitman.edu/alumniawardform)

***Pete Reid Award for Young Alumni***