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Learning From The Road: Emily Colin Teaches Young People Through Cycling

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ALUMNI





Learning from the Road Emily Colin teaches young people through cycling

Born in New York City, Emily Colin '10 has been at home in the great outdoors since her first toddler's steps in Central Park. Now she's spreading her love for road cycling and adventure through her nonprofit—PEDAL for Change—founded with a friend shortly after graduating in 2010.

PEDAL (People for Environment, Diversity, Action, and Learning) offers educational bike-touring trips in Ecuador for young Americans. Trips last from three days to one month, and along the way cyclists volunteer and learn about the country's culture, geography, and environment, as well as about sustainable practices. "I want to provide extraordinary, fascinating experiences for young people they otherwise wouldn't be able to have," she said.

Colin, who lives in Steamboat Springs, Colo., founded the organization with a friend, Rayna Weiss, after the pair took a year-long, post-graduation bike trip together from Ecuador to southern Chile and back up to northern Argentina. While pedaling through jungles and pumping up mountain passes they volunteered planting trees, making chocolate, doing post-earthquake construction, and creating a K-12 English-language curriculum. Meanwhile, they blogged and corresponded with American middle school students who used the cyclists' adventures as resources for their studies. After two years of planning, PEDAL took off with its first trip in 2012. Eleven more have followed.

PEDAL fulfills one of Colin's biggest goals, she said: "I want to benefit the lives of others." A former Junior Olympic alpine ski racer and U.S. Ski Team member, she also coaches youth ski teams and teaches high school geology, chemistry, and art.

Chemistry and geology were Colin's majors, and she completed an art minor. "Geology tells me what's around me," she said. "And I fell in love with chemistry because my instructors—Jeff Katz, Kevin Rice, and Das Thamattoor—were passionate about teaching and students learning. And Bevin Engman helped me connect my expression through art with how I felt about my surroundings."

The mission of her organization is to broaden our sense of community and to show that we have a responsibility to contribute to that larger world. PEDAL for Change participants work primarily with two indigenous communities in Ecuador, constructing housing, and encouraging sustainable living. In the process, Colin hopes to show American students that "their world in the United States is very small," she said, "and how important it is to broaden your world and become part of something bigger than yourself."

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It's connecting people. That's what is the most rewarding."

—Emily Colin '10

Colin was raised with a strong sense of community and the idea that family is "much more than who you're related to by blood," she said. "It's also your friends, the kids you babysit, teachers." And members of indigenous Ecuadorian tribes.

Colin knows that broadening perspective means leaving one's comfort zone—and the rewards are immense. "I know how lucky I've been to have these incredible experiences. If I can give others the same opportunities, maybe they'll do that for someone else someday." —Claire Sykes

Facing page: Rayna Weiss and Emily Colin '10, right, cofounders of PEDAL for Change, in the first month of their journey through South America, cycling along the Ecuadorian coast. Top photo, clockwise from left: Johanna Mayerhofer, Colin, Weiss, and Kether Scharff-Gray in the high sierra of southern Peru.