

Life after Lasell: Jacqueline O'Toole '85

The Life after Lasell series features alums who positively represent the Lasell name through their service work. The series includes a digital article, a feature in eNews, and a video.

Jacqueline O'Toole '85 earned her associate degree in Health Care Administration from Lasell College. In 2009, O'Toole founded ONE gift and coffee shop, specializing in handmade eco-friendly and Fair Trade gifts. A significant portion of the proceeds are donated to FNE International, a non-profit that works to improve communities in Nicaragua. O'Toole also founded Sea el Cambio, a social conscience business which provides opportunities for men and women living in developing countries to rise above poverty through the art of fashion and design.

Interview Questions

- 1) Can you tell me about ONE Gift and Coffee Shop and Seal el Cambio?

ONE opened in 2009, with a mission that ONE gift, ONE person and ONE place can make a difference. All the products are either handmade, eco-friendly, or most importantly, Fair-trade Certified with an overarching purpose of giving back. The coffee shop on the upper level of the store provides our conscious customers with fair and direct trade coffee. ONE takes its pride in helping local young entrepreneurs by helping them with simple business skills, designs and wholesale ordering. Another aspect of ONE is our close connection to many different non-profits that support communities locally and internationally.

Sea el Cambio creates new sustainable income opportunities for men and women in the developing world. All products are ethically sourced through our long – lasting partnerships with Nicaraguan artisans. Sea el Cambio works hand in hand with artisans to design handmade jewelry, pottery, bags and paper goods. By importing these handmade products and selling within stores and Universities within the States we are providing our artisans with a reliable and a steady source of income to support their families. In my role as designer, I make bi-monthly trips to Nicaragua to spend 2 weeks finalizing designs, and am in constant communication with artisans in between trips. While in Nicaragua we hold informal lectures on basic business skills, design, and sewing. On Women's International Day 2015 Sea el Cambio opened a store in the community of Chacraseca, Nicaragua, which is run by a local woman from the community. This store carries all products made by the artisans that are working with Sea el Cambio. All the profits from this store stay within the country to help with the needs of the artisans. Sea el Cambio donates a portion of its profits to FNE International

who is working within the artisans communities to improve their living conditions.

- 2) What inspired you to found ONE gift and coffee shop, and sell handmade, eco-friendly and fair trade gifts?

Growing up on Cape Cod, I spent many days at my friend's family owned Country Store and always knew I would love to have a store of my own. While raising my 5 children I felt it was very important to provide them with as many opportunities to help others, either by helping out at a food pantries, shelters and our local church. As I continued to volunteer and lead youth service projects, I realized there was more I could do to help. When my children were older I knew it was time to open a store, but was not sure what to include. I was very uncomfortable selling just anything from the store, but instead desired a greater purpose as a way to help others. I had meet one vendor whose products were all locally handmade by people with disabilities, while also donating some profits back to the non-profit that supports the individuals. At that point I knew this was the way I could help by providing products that also give back by exclusively purchasing handmade and fair trade products. Within the first year of opening ONE, I was in constant contact with owners of fair trade products and once again knew I would love to help on a larger scale but didn't know how to get into the exporting business.

- 3) How did you transition to working with communities in Nicaragua?

My oldest daughter volunteered through her college with the non-profit FNE International on a trip to Nicaragua to build a house for a family in need. When she came home she introduced me to their director, Michael Cipoletti, and knew I had to help. FNE International promotes educational and sustainable development projects world-wide. That evening I made a donation and was put on the task to fundraise a library in the community of Chacraseca Nicaragua. Three months later I joined FNE International on a 10 day immersion trip, little did I know those 10 days would change my life forever.

I stayed in the town of Chacraseca where I was able to help build a house, volunteer at a school, and most importantly become a part of their everyday

lives. During that trip, we visited a community where FNEI is working to improve their quality of life, primarily with a water supply. The people of this community have to walk over an hour each way to get water. As we were leaving, word was sent out that someone was there to buy handmade goods. A woman approached me with a tiny black bag filled with bracelets that she had made. She opened the bag and with great pride she placed them one by one on the tailgate of a pickup truck. As I was looking at each one of them I knew this is why I was on this trip! I bought every bracelet and when I paid her she gave me a big smile and hug then thanked me. The money I paid her, while a fair price for her goods, was not very much but it made a huge difference in her life. I knew at that moment this is what I am meant to do and how I can help others. I put one of her bracelets on my ankle and have been wearing it ever since to remind me how one person can make a difference in someone's life.

4) What inspired you to found Sea el Cambio?

In the beginning ONE was purchasing products that were currently made by the men and women in the community of Chacraseca and Leon. As the trips became more frequent, and the orders increased, the community noticed what was happening. Each time I would arrive there would be new women and children artisans with the hopes of working with ONE. I would meet with each person and help redesign their products to make them marketable to the US consumer. At that point, it became clear that ONE need to expand in order to make a more sustainable difference in their lives.

5) How have ONE and Sea el Cambio impacted the artisans and the communities in Nicaragua so far? See attached

6) What are some of your goals for your organizations? See attached

7) How did Lasell College prepare you for your work?

While I was at Lasell I had the opportunity to meet many young women from all over the world. I had become very close with a few of the women who shared with me stories of their families and communities. The majority of the stories were filled with laughter, joy and very strong family values. The same as what I was used to growing up in a very sheltered community on Cape Cod 30 years ago. There were also stories of hunger, lack of work,

poor housing conditions and the struggles that many of their friends and families have encountered. Those stories touched me deeply by putting a heart, soul and face to poverty around the world and left me with the desire to help others.

- 8) How will ONE Gift and Coffee Shop and Sea el Cambio change the world?
See attached.

ONE person can make a difference in the lives of others and Sea el Cambio means be the change.. which encourages customers to “be the Change” by providing customers with the opportunity to purchase products that are socially conscience made by men and women in developing countries. I have always believed ONE person can make a difference in the lives of others, and that’s really what I try to do every day. I hope I can inspire others to do the same.