

# Spotlight: Louis Dorval

When Louis Dorval first heard about EWB, he was in the second year of an engineering degree at McGill University. A new organization in Ontario, something about engineers, something about doing good work, something about working in other countries. “Ha, it sounds like a good way to travel and a good way to meet girls!” he thought to himself.

As it turned out, Louis was about to become one of the people who shaped EWB’s programs overseas, pushed the boundaries of what we were able to accomplish, and provided support and leadership to hundreds of EWB members. Underneath the exterior of the guy who said he wanted to travel and meet girls, EWB found an incredibly intelligent and committed volunteer and staff member. Over our first decade, his questions, his development frameworks, and his theories of how change happens have provided fodder for

development discussions across the organization: “I shared a room with Louis in Tamale,” one EWB volunteer remembers, “and he would wake me up in the middle of the night with crazy questions like, ‘Is there a universal truth?’”

Louis’ questioning keeps bringing him back to “the cause”. To him, “the cause” means working to change the opportunities open to people all over the world. “There is a gap in opportunity,” he says. “One sixth of humanity is being born into a level of opportunity that, in my opinion, is below standard. On the other hand, someone who is educated, with self-confidence and vision, has much more opportunity. An increase in opportunity – this is the work we aspire to.”

He remembers when he attended the EWB national conference in 2003 and listened to Dr. James Orbinski, of Médecins Sans Frontières Canada, speak. “That was when I really got it,” Louis remembers. “That’s when I realized that working for this cause isn’t just an opportunity – it’s a responsibility.”

Louis’ involvement with EWB has been long and varied. The first treasurer at the McGill chapter, Louis fundraised \$7,000 through pizza sales and a Krispy Kreme donut racket. The success of his fundraising incurred the wrath of EWB’s accountant, though, when the accountant found out that Louis had the \$7000 in loonies and toonies stored in a shoebox **under his bed**. The co-chair of EWB’s first national conference, Louis was at the centre of the all-night development discussions that it inspired, and he’s been at every conference since. He launched our Scala project, spending his university summers in the Philippines working with EWB and the Philippines Department of Social Welfare and Development. In 2005, he went to Ghana to work with a local NGO, and later that

year became EWB's first paid overseas staff member. He spent the next four years heading up our programming in West Africa. Back on a rare visit home to Montreal, seven years after first getting involved, Louis reflected on the years that had passed: he had probably logged more kilometers in tro-tros<sup>1</sup>, on flights, on buses, on trains, and on foot than anyone else in EWB. He definitely had met his goal of travelling, and, as it turns out, he met a girl through EWB too.

When he thinks back about all the things people have said to him that sum up what EWB is about, he remembers something the McGill chapter president told him when he first got involved.

“Louis,” she said, “EWB is more than just a club.”

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<sup>1</sup> Tro-tros: an informal transit system of privately owned taxis, often seen in Ghana with religious slogans on the back, rusty screws exposed on the ceiling, and about 20 people crowded into a vehicle the size of a minivan.