



Andrew Zuckerman 24; brought varied interests to Laos school

ANDREW ZUCKERMAN

By [Stephanie M. Peters](#)

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The week before his college graduation in May, Bedford native Andrew Zuckerman couldn't wait for his diploma. He packed his belongings and traveled through Vietnam on his way to Laos.

There, Mr. Zuckerman taught English through the Volunteers in Asia program. Ultimately, the fluent Lao speaker hoped to help alleviate the country's poverty, a subject on which he had written his senior thesis.

On March 1, however, Mr. Zuckerman was killed in a motorcycle accident in Huay Xai, Laos. He was 24.

"He really truly loved it over there," said his father, Phil of Bedford. "A lot of his interests were starting to come together. He was interested in medicinal plants and was working to see how the Laos people could benefit from growing poppy plants for medicinal purposes."

Mr. Zuckerman demonstrated a unique curiosity that extended from the Beat poets and jazz to Eastern and Native American philosophy, according to his godmother, Cooper Wright of Manhattan.

"From a very, very early age he would explore anything," said Wright, who recalled taking her young godson around New York City, at his request, to try to find an isolation tank. "He wasn't intimidated by complicated thoughts and . . . he didn't really close anything off because it wasn't part of a culture he was interested in."

At 15, Mr. Zuckerman decided he "didn't want to be in school anymore," his father said. He enrolled in the nontraditional Sudbury Valley School in Framingham, where there are no classes and students set priorities for what they want to learn. There, he dedicated much of his time to literature and music.

He graduated from Sudbury Valley in 2003 and took a semester to volunteer with the British organization Global Vision International, doing biological research in South America before enrolling at Marlboro College in Marlboro, Vt., in 2004.

As a freshman at Marlboro, Mr. Zuckerman gained his first exposure to Laos through a course on Vietnam. At the end of the course, the class traveled to Vietnam on a grant from the government, and Mr. Zuckerman researched how the division of the land from roads affected the animal population, his father said. Soon after, he decided he wanted to explore more of Southeast Asia and returned to spend a summer working on an organic farm in Thailand, his father said.

"The people who he worked with there were Laos, and he really became enamored of them and started to learn the language," he said.

Mr. Zuckerman also studied in India for a semester. In May, he graduated with high honors and bachelor's degrees in Asian and developmental studies.

After moving to Laos to teach at the Dream Center in Huay Xai, hourlong Sunday phone calls became the weekly practice between Mr. Zuckerman and his parents.

"It was something that really was very special to us, and I can't imagine what it would have been like if we hadn't had that," his father said.

Recently, Mr. Zuckerman had also been in more frequent contact with friends and other family members through e-mail and social networking websites.

After news of Mr. Zuckerman's death spread last week, memorials were held in his honor in Huay Xai, where the whole town came out in his honor, and at Marlboro College, where friends and staff recalled his "unbelievable and quite infectious sense of humor," said his father, who received photographs of the memorial in Laos and a video of the one at Marlboro.

"He was one of the funniest people you would ever meet," he said. "One of the things that was said at his college was that half of the words people use at Marlboro were invented by him."

In addition to his father, Mr. Zuckerman leaves his mother, Disty Pearson; and a brother, Chip, of Portland, Ore.

A memorial service has been held.

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