

MAINE WOMEN MAGAZINE

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DON'T MISS! Remarkable Veteran *Gretchen Evans* is Going Strong

207's Beth McEvoy
Tells Maine Stories

ZELIA LUNT'S DIARY:
Back to School in 1843

Romance Novelist
KATANA COLLINS



Inspiring Global Ocean Stewardship

*Lexi Doudera and
Saltwater Classroom*



Left: Exploring the dynamic environment between the high and low tide is always a favorite activity for participants, including these students in Portland. *Center:* The goal of all Saltwater Classroom programs, such as this one in Camden, is to inspire students to keep learning about our oceans, forming a passion and an everlasting commitment to ocean stewardship. *Right:* Here, students part of a community program in Sayulita, Mexico hold their quadrat, ready to sample the intertidal zone at their local beach. This program was Saltwater Classroom's first program taught entirely in Spanish. *Photos courtesy Saltwater Classroom*

BY PAM FERRIS-OLSON

Growing up near Penobscot Bay, Lexi Doudera was always engaged in learning about the Maine coast and the ocean. One of the highlights of this marine education came when she was a student at Camden Hills High School. Lexi had the chance to spend ten days in a marine science program based in Cape Eleuthera in the Bahamas. There she worked with researchers who were studying lemon sharks.

Now the 26-year-old is applying her accumulated knowledge about the ocean in her capacity as founder and Executive Director of Saltwater Classroom. Saltwater Classroom is a non-profit educational organization that applies hands-on and virtual programming to teach environmental education and inspire global ocean stewardship. It is designed to connect youngsters aged 9 to 12 years old with the ocean through engaging educational opportunities.

As Lexi sees it, “Education is a fairly simple solution to environmental problems that can really change the way society thinks about and treats the environment.” Lexi chose to focus on students in grades 3-6 because she says that studies have shown that is an optimal time to teach environmental education. Students in this age group are naturally curious as well as old enough to understand the relationship between cause and effect. They also are “competent, talkative agents of change. They have amazing peer influence on other people their age but also on their parents, their families, and their communities.”

Lexi was fortunate to grow up in Camden where the local school is part of the Five Town Community School District. The district is an exemplar of providing excellent educational opportunities in Maine. Lexi studied Spanish beginning in kindergarten,

so by the time she went to college, she spoke Spanish very well. Her K-12 education, enhanced by the learning opportunities afforded her at Northeastern University, were pivotal in steering Lexi to conceive of and found Saltwater Classroom.

Lexi's fluency in Spanish served her well when she participated in a six-month study abroad program through Northeastern. She traveled to western South America, to Chile, to study coastal urban sustainability. Chile is the southernmost country in the world and the closest to Antarctica. It is most definitely coastal—the country's geography is long and narrow, with the western edge lying along the Pacific Ocean. And it has large urban areas. For example, Santiago, the capital of Chile, is one of the largest cities in the Americas, with a population of more than six million. It is located within an hour's drive of the Pacific coast.

Lexi points out that 40 percent of the world's population live within 60 miles or so of a coast. Think of such heavily populated places like New York City, Miami Beach, and Los Angeles. Since these cities, and others worldwide, such as Tokyo, Mumbai, Shanghai, Lagos, Calcutta, and Buenos Aires, are coastal, they can experience significant impacts of climate change, including hurricanes and flooding. Being on the coast also increases these cities' reliance on the ocean for food resources. Lexi says these are all reasons why cities should be urgently concerned with sustainable growth and why education is such an important element in achieving this. “A well-thought-out curriculum implemented city- or country-wide can have a serious impact on how a generation of people view the environment.”

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Event - OCR 20+ obstacles on the Kuller Trail of Ragged Mountain

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• GET FIT!

(Set the Scuttle as your goal to train and lose that COVID weight we all added)

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In Chile, Lexi volunteered in a fifth-grade classroom, where she realized the particular value of teaching students about the ocean. Lexi gained additional insight through two internships. One was with the Conservation Law Foundation, a New England nonprofit that advocates for the environment. The other was with the nonprofit Ceres. Ceres works with investors and companies to advocate for bold action and policy solutions on environmental issues. Lexi's classroom education, her internships, and personal experience laid a strong foundation from which she developed the plan and curriculum for the organization—Saltwater Classroom.

Lexi may have been the creative driver for Saltwater Classroom, but she had a support team. Two primary members are her parents. Her mother Vicki Doudera serves as a Maine State Representative. Representative Doudera is a member of the legislature's Environment and Natural Resources Committee. Lexi's father Edward Doudera is an attorney in Camden. Another primary supporter is a classmate of Lexi's from Northeastern University, Olivia Dawson. Dawson serves as Saltwater Classroom's Director of Education and, with Lexi, as a teacher for the program. Additional capable individuals are available, as needed, to help run workshops.

Saltwater Classroom's curriculum is based on case studies done in Boston and Chile and from Lexi's marine studies at Northeastern. When she launched Saltwater Classroom in June 2018, Lexi started with 15 students from Camden. Fueled by passion and dedication, Lexi has grown the program. Like so many other organizations, Saltwater Classroom experienced setbacks due to the COVID pandemic. The organization lost revenue from cancelled programming. But it also discovered the value of virtual education. In November 2020, Saltwater Classroom held a 3-week program using virtual programming. It was a success. The program reached more than 200 students working from a range of locations including Mexico and Savanna, Georgia. "It confirmed the idea of integrating technology in education."

Lexi hopes that someday Saltwater



Saltwater Classroom's interdisciplinary curriculum combines elements of marine science, like sampling seawater in Camden shown here, as well as art, music, and conservation. *Photo courtesy Saltwater Classroom*

Classroom, now based in Portland, will operate in 50 countries. She loves “the idea of students around the globe connecting about the ocean.” And, in anticipation of taking Saltwater Classroom to Mexico, nearly 75 percent of the curriculum has been translated into Spanish.

This July, Saltwater Classroom held a 2-week in-person learning experience at Waynflete, a school in Portland. Tessa Anable, Director of Enrichment at Waynflete School thought Saltwater Classroom was a great fit for the students. “At Waynflete, we are all about the environment and teaching students to understand, love, and care for it.” She felt the curriculum was a good combination of “games and hands-on exploration in the sand, mud, rocks, and tide pools of our local beaches and rocky shoreline. Our campers were engaged in the scientific ideas, and they loved the fun activities.”

Lexi's plan for Saltwater Classroom is to continue in-person sessions during the 2021–2022 school year. In the longer term, Lexi wants to develop a “deep dive” workshop on the Gulf of Maine, as well as a Maine-specific curriculum.

Saltwater Classroom's recommendations for how to help the ocean:

- **Keep Learning!** Education leads to appreciation, value, protection, and an everlasting passion for the ocean.
- **Use Less Plastic** — Plastic is a huge problem for the ocean and marine life. It is one of the largest contributors to climate change. Every choice made to avoid plastic makes a difference.
- **Participate in Coastal Clean-Ups** — Removing harmful debris from the ocean environment is important. Organize a beach clean-up with friends and family.
- **Consume Responsibly** — As consumers it is our duty to consume responsibly. That means making choices about what we eat, what we wear, and what we buy. Choose products that are sustainable and smart.
- **Spread the Word** — Tell friends and family. Share with a teacher or a neighbor. Let them know why you love the ocean and how it needs our help and what they can do.

For more information, visit www.saltwaterclassroom.com or email Lexi at lexi@saltwaterclassroom.com and to hear

an interview with Lexi visit <https://wom-mindthewater.com/artist-series/artist-series-lexi-doudera>. •