Soil Horizons: How did you get interested in pursuing a career in science, fieldwork, and soils?

Polizzotto: I just enjoyed being outside growing up. In high school, I liked science classes, and I especially liked chemistry. But when I went to college (University of Rochester), I think I had a pretty limited view of what people studied in college. I was going to be a chemistry major, but right before my sophomore year—the day before classes started one semester—I found a geology class. I like being in the mountains, so I just decided to take the class on a whim.

From there I learned about a geochemistry class within the Environmental Science program. And to me, that sounded like an ideal topic, where I could merge my personal interest in the environment with my more academic interests in chemistry. I started working in the lab of Ariel Anbar (now at Arizona State University), and from then on, it spurred a fascination with geochemistry and scientific research.

I think as an undergraduate, I had very little idea about lots of things that were going on at the university—like all of the research that drives a good deal of university activities. I really had no idea that existed. I worked in Ariel Anbar’s lab for three years conducting analytical environmental chemistry research. I learned tremendously from Ariel and the graduate students in his group—not just about particular research topics but also how academic research worked. I have no doubt that without that opportunity, I would have been on a different career path.

Soil Horizons: Looking at the bio on your website, it says that you also majored in music?

Polizzotto: I’ve always played music, and it is one of the reasons I went to Rochester for college—the music program is phenomenal. I’ve played in bands of varying quality since high school (and still do), been a piano instructor, and played at some weddings, but I was never good enough to be a full-time professional musician. It’s more of something I just enjoy.

Soil Horizons: Once you were exposed to this world of research, did you know you were headed into soil science at Stanford and a career as a researcher and professor?

Polizzotto: No, not at all. Again, as an undergrad, I don’t think I really had a sense that the discipline of soil science existed; that there were even departments of soil science. You have a limited