

Aurora student's dream comes true as young leader meets her heroine



By Brock Weir

Aurora's Allison Kondal is rarely left speechless, but spending March Break in Munich as part of the Science and Innovation Summit just did the trick.

Allison, a student at Newmarket's Sacred Heart Catholic High School, has always been moved by the smiling face of astronaut Roberta Bondar beaming down from the mural at Yonge and Wellington, but has never been able to precisely explain why she was drawn to this Canadian pioneer.

It was this smiling face Allison had in mind when applied for the EF Tours Global Citizen Scholarship, a program founded by Education First to give Canadian students a first-hand feeling of leadership and inter-cultural relations.

Student leaders were invited to submit videos on YouTube on what it means to be a Global Citizen, and she was selected from amongst the crowd to travel first to the United Kingdom to take part in the United Kingdom's inaugural We Day celebration founded by Canadians Craig and Marc Kielburger. From there, they travelled onto Munich where her dream came true.

"All my life, I have been looking at pictures on Google, our Town Mural, reading books she has written and the documentaries and stuff about her, and then suddenly she emerged as a real person, and it is just?? recalls Allison, trailing off before taking a moment to collect herself in her excitement recalling the experience of encountering Dr. Bondar following the summit.

"It's was like nothing I have ever felt before. Getting to meet her is surreal and I don't know how to describe it.?"

While she is at a loss at just how to describe it, Allison and her fellow students had a chance to hear Dr. Bondar speak about science and her contributions to the field, as well as obstacles she encountered while being a trailblazer. Afterwards, when speaking to her, Allison recalls introducing herself by saying, "Hi, I'm Allison and we actually have you on our town mural!?"

She did not need to get any more specific and Dr. Bondar immediately knew where her young fan was from.

"I actually got to fist bump with her!?" she laughs. "It was surreal seeing someone who has done so many different things and is so talented in so many different fields, standing in front of you, and congratulating you on something you have done. It is the weirdest role reversal in the world.?"

Having left for Europe with her group on March 7, returning home last week, she says she came back with exceptional memories of extraordinary people who done extraordinary things. The students came back closer and as they have reconnected on home soil, they have been planning ways to support each other in all their future endeavours.

Just before leaving on the trip, Allison had a game plan to get to know everyone with whom she would be sharing the experience, not just on the basis of what they have done in leadership roles within those high schools, but also on a personal level.

Lessons done on the ground provided that opportunity, included exercises to determine just what kind of a leader each student was, whether they were introverted or extroverted, wired for logic or math as opposed to the arts, to focus on their passions.

We Day festivities also provided them a chance to look within themselves. While there, she brainstormed new projects she could implement within Sacred Heart surrounding such initiatives as their Relay For Life benefit for the Canadian Cancer Society, all the while learning that to be exceptional is attainable.

She also realised why Roberta Bondar almost instantly had a place in her heart.

I am passionate about science, but I like creative writing, art theory, photography and seeing Roberta Bondar, and seeing that she is passionate in a multitude of things from science, to biology, to photography, is proof that you can apply all of these things that you love and make a career out of the your passion.

Beyond everything, meeting Dr. Bondar was the most inspirational moment of my life. To think of all the effort she has put into becoming what she is, it was a moment I fell in love with being who I am and doing what I do. I think my heart will probably stay there forever.