

Meeting a Heroine on the path to Global Citizenship



By Brock Weir

The face of astronaut Roberta Bondar smiling down at people from the mural at Yonge and Wellington left an indelible impression on young Allison Kondal when she and her family first moved to Aurora.

She couldn't quite explain the connection at the time, but it is something the Sacred Heart Catholic High School student has carried with her ever since.

Dr. Bondar was the subject of countless school assignments, essays and hours of personal research and now, this March, Allison could have the chance to meet her idol in Berlin as part of the Science and Innovation Summit.

Allison was recently named one of 10 students from across Canada awarded the EF Tours Global Citizenship Scholarship. The program was 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 online via YouTube on what it means to be not just a Global Citizen but a citizen of the world.

The trip will take the students on March 7 to the United Kingdom to take part in the inaugural We Day U.K. in London, the inspirational summit for young leaders founded by Canadians Craig and Mark Kielburger. From there, they will travel to Munich, and then on to Berlin for the Science and Innovation Summit with Dr. Bondar.

"It was probably the first time I was actually speechless," says Allison of when she found out she had secured a spot in the scholarship program. "My heart was racing and I was happy dancing around the room. The feeling was just inexplicable and there is a moment where it clicks when you realise you're actually doing something.

"[After being struck by the mural], I found she is everything I hope to be when I grow up. Getting the chance to meet her is the biggest thing. She is just amazing and I can't describe it."

Perhaps it is unsurprising that the Science and Innovation Summit is what Allison is looking forward to most in this journey. A self-described "logical" person at heart, she has always had an affinity for science and math. As part of the York Catholic District School Board's (YCDSB) Advanced Placement program, she attends school at Newmarket's Sacred Heart.

She says the Summit will truly open her eyes to all the possibilities that are out there in the world.

“As a Grade 11 student, I have no idea what I want to go into,” she says. “This is going to really open my eyes to exactly what I can become and hopefully inspire me to take what I know and choose a direction. Right now I want to be an Engineer Without Borders.

“Science is always regarded stereotypically like The Big Bang Theory, where they are theoretical physicists who make jokes and don't have much impact on the rest of the world outside the scientific community. Engineers Without Borders takes what I love and applies it to the whole global community to show people that, yes, this actually matters and science actually matters.”

As part of the program, Allison is going to take on what it means to be a global citizen. Whether she is applying math and science to the world in a way that will resonate to the masses, or simply travelling to experience the diversity the world has to offer, making a difference requires one key ingredient.

“I think a Global Citizen means taking your passions and skills and applying them to the issues that are present in our community, be it in our own local community, or internationally,” she says. “To be a Global Citizen means to be aware and educate yourself. Even if you don't take action, know what is going on so you can make opinions that are true and not prejudiced.”

In the months ahead of her flight to London, Allison is working hard to indeed make that difference at the local level. Invited to participate in the YCDSB's Horizons program to build young leaders, she and her fellow students have put their heads together to form programs, including a bullying prevention community that tackles not just bullying, but also drug and alcohol awareness and safe partying.

While their first official meeting is this week to chart the course of their programs, it has already gone a long way in showing her fellow students that leadership roles are out there.

“People at my school who are on student council are the only people regarded as true leaders in the school community and others are completely apathetic, thinking “there's nothing we can do,” she says. “I think it is just important to let the students know we are part of something bigger than ourselves.”