



“I’ve always been independent and FW seemed like the ideal place to take that to the limit.”

-Marie Louka, ‘89

Marie Louka is a FWC/Global College graduate of 1989. She is currently starting a Rammed Earth Building Apprenticeship in Spain.

Name: Marie Louka

Year of Graduation: 1989

All Degrees Received: BA FWC, 1989; MSc Agriculture Education, University of Arizona, 1995

Why did you decide to attend the Friends World Program? How was the program different than others?

I attended the United States International University for four quarters and transferred to Arizona State University because they offered a degree in Agriculture. I was looking for a way to get back out into the world and ASU only offered semesters in London or Paris. Not the ideal places to study agriculture. I think that I stumbled on the FWC catalog in a library. I’ve always been independent and FWC seemed like the ideal place to take that to the limit.

What was your area of focus while in the program?

Organic Gardening and Agriculture

What are you currently doing professionally?

Professionally, right out of FWC, I completed the six month Apprenticeship in Ecological Horticulture at the University of California, Santa Cruz, then went on to manage organic gardens in the Dominican Republic and Spain. I then got my MS from the University of Arizona in Agriculture Education. I looked at what’s called the ‘Multiplier Effect’ of training. It’s pretty much like following the content of the message that’s transferred in the game “phone-line.” What was the original message and how did it change each time it was transferred? This was very much like my thesis focus at FW and the self-reliance, wing-it, and get-things-done skills I picked up at FW came in handy because I chose a non-traditional approach and subject for the school I was in.

What additional things have you done in the past that you think readers may find interesting?

I figured out that the underlying capability I have is to gather, organize, and disseminate information. I jumped into the dot com game in San Francisco. I spent about four years there as an Information Architect (data bases, software, and websites) and Information Manager. In a rapidly changing business, the FW skills came in handy again. I found it easy to move up the start-up corporate ladder. For the last seven years, I’ve gone back to SF to contract as an Information Architect, started my own Professional Organizer

business (organizing tactile information rather than data base or websites), build small business websites, and write technical manuals.

In another twist on the gather-organize-disseminate skill set, I'm currently in the process of creating a business in Spain, an apprenticeship for rammed earth building (www.madrugadatapia.com). The Rammed Earth Apprenticeship will combine components of the FW system (learning plans, mentors), the UCSC Organic Agriculture Apprenticeship (living on site, a combination of book and hands-on learning), and many of the volunteer jobs that I've had along the way. This next step combines my desire to afford others a learning environment that I have fortunate enough to partake in and my fanaticism for green issues (rammed earth, solar, wind, organic garden and olives, low water use, etc.). It's like a senior thesis; I'm taking all that I've learned so far, adding passions, working my network, and producing a product. I'm finally at a place where I can provide opportunity for others.

How have you been able to apply what you learned at Friends World to what you currently do?

First, I learned about organic gardening, how to survive in a country where I didn't speak the language or fully understand the customs, and all about group dynamics. My focus at FW was to not only learn the mechanics of organic gardening, but to understand how the locals learned about organic gardening and then how they modified this knowledge so that it would suit their environmental, social and economic situations.

What I learned at FW and have taken with me through my professional life is the ability to wing it and get things done. Because field situations were constantly changing while at FW and I was faced with the entire world as a platform for learning, I learned how to narrow things down, set up a plan, re-visit the plan when things didn't work out and, finally, to get things done (that journal!).

Is there any additional information that you would like to share that you think would be beneficial to the readers?

I think that most helpful thing for me has been my networks. One of the things I recommend to those just starting out is to create strong relationships. This means joining professional networking sites, creating your own brand (as corny and corporate as it sounds, it goes a long way!), supporting causes you believe in, and surrounding yourself by people who you want to emulate. And then, turn around and mentor someone.

Also, be professional in whatever you do.

One more thing! When you're working for yourself and working towards a dream, aside from learning how to save money to support that dream, one of the things I have found is that sometimes it's necessary to do whatever it takes. I've delivered flowers on Valentine's Day, taken horrid temp jobs, been a Secret Shopper, and built websites that I'd never add to my portfolio. All in support of getting this next project off the ground.