



Interview with Serena Bartlett

February 2007

Q. What years and where did you study with Friends World?

A. I studied in Southampton and London as a freshman in 2002, in Lake Tahoe and Los Angeles in 2003, in Germany and London in 2004 and in Kyoto in 2005. I graduated in May 2005 in Southampton.

Q. What was your favorite center and why?

A. My favorite center was London, and I am very sorry to hear that it has been closed. I worked with an advisor there who was a constant inspiration. No matter what was going on with the rest of the class, when we met he challenged me and pushed me to do my own best, I recognized this effect on other students as well. Everything was possible in London, still my favorite city.

Q. What is your most memorable single experience with the Friends World Program?

A. On a trip to Berlin I had the opportunity to meet people my age whom had grown up on either side of the wall before it came down. I was able to pair book learning, the reading of various Eastern European manifestos and doctrines, and apply them in a real life situation, meeting the very people who had been directly affected by the resulting policies— and we got to drink a pint together. Experiential learning allows for the creative mind to live their education, not have it thrown at them in crowded lectures and busy-work assignments. I fear that the centralization of education in the current political climate will endanger this invaluable approach to learning.

Q. What are you doing now?

A. I have formed my own company, GrassRoutes Travel, the aim of which is promote localized travel, and ideas for sustainable living through guide books. I coined the term “urban-eco travel”, and have published the first book in our City Next Door Series, “Oakland: The Soul of the City Next Door”. I have been involved with many local “green” organizations in Oakland, and with the exciting movement of women’s entrepreneurship. Please visit my website: www.grassroutestravel.com to find out more and get involved. Our goal is to tie people and information together, so that it is convenient and realistic to make the way you live count towards global community and sustainability efforts. I have a West Coast book tour coming up, all the information will be on the website.

Q. How did Friends World help you to achieve your goals?

A. FW wasn't an international dorm plopped in London, or a month long guided course abroad. I was forced to be a citizen of each country I traveled to, and though it wasn't easy at times, it is in large part the reason I am able to be so resourceful now that I am in business. I opened banks accounts, went to the hospital, hunted for apartments, juggled work and finances with schoolwork- these are the skills I use now everyday, I can think creatively and solve problems with an open mind. FW inspires students to stay flexible at all times, reserve judgments, see all the possibilities. I would compare my experience to putting on a pair of goggles where I could see negative space. I wasn't being trained for the assembly line—that is for certain.

Q. What advice do you have for current and prospective students?

A. My advice to FW students would be to stay self-motivated and take advantage of the fact that you can do anything you put your hand to. Through discipline comes freedom, and at FW you have to come with your own. There will be one-on-one support unparalleled in other educational models, and support through the way, but it has to be you at the drivers wheel, initiating it all. Learn with others but don't compare yourself with others, we are each on our own path, going along at our own pace. Remember that the way you choose to perceive things will directly result in the world in which you find yourself. It was only when I believed I could write this book that it happened.