

Who is Doing What  
**VWS Alumni Corner**

**Interview with Magda Bereza, Class of 2012**



**VWS:** Tell me about your work and education after graduating from the VWS. (post-secondary schooling, travel, work experience, family, etc... )

**MB:** The first big thing I did following graduation was travel to Sweden in order to start a year-long program called YIP. YIP is an International Youth Initiative Program located in Järna, Sweden. My year at YIP was a life changing experience, and was like a bridge between High School and the world which lay beyond.

**VWS:** What led you to go to Sweden?

**MB:** I never imagined myself going to Sweden. It was the program which led me there. I heard about YIP through two VWS alumni who have also done the program. Knowledge about the program came to me at just the right moment and I knew I had to go there. Given the journey I took with my Grade Twelve Project, I knew after graduating that I wanted to travel and meet people who wanted to engage more deeply with social and environmental global challenges.

**VWS:** Can you tell us more about the program there? How has it impacted your life?

**MB:** YIP is a social entrepreneurship program directed towards young people between the ages of 18 and 28 who want to create positive social change in the world. It is an international program, so every year about 30 people from around the world meet in the magical place of Järna to live, learn and grow. The location of the program is so beautiful! You have the fairytale forest, abundant gardens, majestic anthroposophically inspired buildings, and the fjord (which I swam in and ice skated on during my year in Järna). Living and learning together with people from different cultures and upbringings was an invaluable experience and taught me to collaborate, be patient with myself and others, showed me to see the world through different lenses, and allowed me to step into myself more fully. It was a beautifully intense year which really impacted my life. I also made friends for life. It is a truly unique program which I highly recommend to anyone that is curious about it.

**VWS:** What did you do after YIP?

**MB:** After YIP I returned to Vancouver for eight months to regroup. It was a difficult transition coming out of such a tight-knit community into “regular society”. During my time back in Vancouver, I worked at two different coffee shops, played soccer, and applied for university. Upon considering my different university options I decided to go back to Scandinavia and begin my Bachelor’s degree in International Environment and Development Studies in Ås, Norway. I wanted something different out of my university experience; I wanted adventure and to be in an international group of people again. Also, unlike in Canada, tuition in Norway is free. Before I started my studies I spent a few weeks travelling around Europe and visited my friends from YIP as well as former VWS exchange students. When I finally got to Norway, I was ready to be intellectually stimulated again. My three years at the Norwegian University of Life Sciences (NMBU) was great! I am so grateful and appreciative of my time there, and thankful to have met so many wonderful people. NMBU really taught me to think critically and to make connections I hadn’t considered before. Because the classroom was very international, I was exposed to many different opinions which made for some interesting conversations and debates. Through NMBU, I was also given the opportunity to go to India for a month-long field course in order to apply “in-class learning” to the “real world”. At NMBU we were also encouraged to go on an exchange and so I did an Erasmus exchange at the University of East Anglia (UEA) in the UK. I wanted to go to UEA because it has a renowned International Development program and I wanted to deepen my learning as well as experience university in a different country. I was also very eager to play soccer (football) competitively on a university team which was not possible at NMBU since they didn’t have a team. So my time in England was mostly spent in the library and on the football field (which I loved). After completing my Bachelor’s degree I moved to Sweden to start my Masters Degree in Human Ecology: Culture, Power, and Sustainability at Lund University.

The two years at Lund flew by, and after successfully defending my Master's thesis titled "The Cow in the Room: Addressing Meat and Animal-derived Food Consumption in the Age of Climate Change" I graduated with a MSc in Human Ecology.

**VWS: How did Waldorf education affect your life and your choice of career?**

**MB:** I did my Grade Twelve Project on Industrial Animal Agriculture, and its effects on the planet, the animals, and on the human body. This piqued my interest to further my studies in this direction. Since graduating from Lund University this past June, I moved back to Norway to be with my partner. He is Norwegian and has one more year left of his Masters degree. As we don't know where we will be in a year from now, I am currently working two different jobs in the Oslo area and learning Norwegian. In the future, I would like to be involved in work which focuses on the sustainable production and consumption of food. More specifically, I am interested in engaging with the social barriers and opportunities for shifting from resource-intensive animal-derived foods to plant-based foods in a western context. I think Waldorf really shaped who I am and how I am in the world. In addition to the underlying philosophy, having small classes and dedicated and passionate teachers was so important. I must also say, having to do a Grade Twelve Project really prepared me for university and writing university-level papers and dissertations. It also allowed me to independently investigate something I was interested in, which ended up inspiring my life and choices post High School. Since graduating I have met quite a few people who have also gone to Waldorf, and I have to say there is a very real Waldorf connection. Despite coming from different parts of the world it is there, which goes to show just how special Waldorf is.

**VWS: What advice would you give to this year's upcoming graduates?**

**MB:** Don't compare yourself or your journey with others around you: everyone has their own unique path! Also, do what excites you as opposed to making decisions out of fear. I heard this quote by Howard Thurman a few years ago and it has really stuck with me. He says, "Don't ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive". I think this is so great! Finally, even though it can be scary and uncomfortable, step out of your comfort zone – growth comes outside its boundaries.

**VWS: What are your fondest memories of your time at the VWS?**

**MB:** My fondest memories are the fall trips, the Christmas Fairs, the soccer season (and seeing Tibor smiling after we won first place in 2010), receiving new exchange students, and the sweet relief after finishing class plays and the final Grade Twelve Project.

*Interview by Ronaye Ireland for Development  
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