

# Masstown Resident Enjoys a Third World Experience

*By Vikki (Reid) MacLaughlin Having come from the small community of Masstown, then going on to post secondary at St. FX in Antigonish and finally settling and starting a family in Westville, Nova Scotia, it is safe to say that my worldly experience has been limited.*

Seven years ago I became a teacher and had been teaching mostly science ever since and it was time to get back to my true love, physical education. The opportunity came through an online post I had seen and I decided to begin my masters of education in leadership and administration with a group of physical and health educators. This led me to my most recent, unbelievable opportunity. For a masters course we were able to teach for two weeks in Belize and I could not say no!

Children in Belize do not get a physical education class. Knowing that phys. ed. is one of, if not the most important course students will take, we took on the challenge of teaching phys. ed. in Belize to children between the ages of 4 and 14. Upon arriving in the amazingly hot and humid climate we met a man named Gregorio (Greg). It was with Greg and his family we would spend the next two and half weeks.

This was an especially amazing experience because Greg and his family have the unique outlook on Belize since they lived in the jungle until Greg was around 13. While in Belize, Greg, as well as sometimes his brother Julian, chaperoned while we went on some amazing, once in a lifetime adventures.

We were fortunate enough to climb the Xunantunich Mayan Ruins, we climbed an unbelievable mountain in the jungle in Maya Centre, we went snorkeling with



Former Masstown resident Vikki MacLaughlin

sting rays, fish and coral in the most brilliant waters I've ever seen. We cut down a palm tree and had delicious heart of palm soup for supper, and went tubing through the jungle, eating termites and trying to avoid poisonous snakes. And though all of these things were incredible, it was the children of Maya Centre, Belize that stole our hearts.

We would take a short 5-minute walk to the school every

day and the children would come out as they saw us walking and join us on our way. It was little Amira, age 2, that kept us on our feet and smiles on our faces, it was a couple junior boys Ivan and Evan who would give us lessons on the animals and culture of Belize as seen through the eyes of a teenager.

It was Daisy and her sister Elmera who would walk us home everyday and ask us questions about Canada and "back home", who often caused us to talk happily about home and then miss it so much at the same time. For two weeks we taught 60-70 children who came with jeans without zippers, feet without shoes, from houses that weren't finished and homes with tarantulas, ants and cockroaches.

However, we also taught 60-70 kids who taught us that material things are simply things, that free play is the best form of physical activity, community is truly family and to live life to the fullest day in and day out.

I will be forever grateful for the children of Maya Centre, the opportunity I accepted, the lessons I learned, the relationships I made and the memories I now hold with amazing friends that will last a lifetime.



A family photo at the house where Vikki was billeted during her stay in Belize.



Vikki and the group who climbed the Xunantunich Mayan Ruins



Vikki MacLaughlin surrounded by a number of the students.



A group photo of students at the St. Jude RC School - Maya Centre.

# Ella Porter Completes 21 Day Tour of Finland

*By Mary-Emma Barnhill*

Ella Porter was recently given the opportunity to have a very unique experience, a 21 day trip to Finland through 4-H Canada's Going Global Exchange program.

The Onslow-Belmont senior member had been looking for scholarships on the 4-H Canada website when she found the Going Global Exchange Program. She loves to travel and experience new places, so she filled out the form on a whim, not expecting to get picked. To her surprise, she was contacted for an interview and initially chosen to go to Japan, but because of the logistics, went to Finland instead.

On the 20th of June, she flew out of Halifax and arrived in Helsinki, Finland the next day, where she spent the night with other International Farm Youth Exchange (IFYE) participants. She went to stay with her host family the following morning.

One of the highlights of the trip for her was visiting a dairy farm with robotic milkers. A relative of her host's mother sold robotic milkers and explained them in detail. She also got to experience Juhannus (Midsummerfest), which is a large summer celebration in Finland. She spent it at her host mother's family summerhouse outside of Mäntyharju, a municipality in the province of Eastern Finland.

Although she enjoyed getting to see many other places, Lahti and Helsinki were two of Ella's favourites. In Lahti, she visited a 4-H farm where youth from the city could learn about agriculture through the courses and camps offered there. She was also able to visit various places in Helsinki, including Suomenlinna, a UNESCO World Heritage site. Located off the coast of the city, Suomenlinna was once a military fortress.

4-H Canada's Going Global Exchange program is in place to help 4-H youth grow through an intercultural experience as well as learn about sustainable agriculture and food production. Some of their goals for the participants are for them to experience a new country, ex-

pand their global perspective, learn about sustainable agriculture practices, and explore issues related to food security.

Ella's personal goals for the trip were to experience a new country and culture within a safe environment, to grow as a

person by becoming more self-confident, well rounded, and independent, as well as to learn about agriculture and 4-H in a different context from the one she grew up in. Happily, this trip definitely enabled her to accomplish them.



A summerhouse belonging to Ella's host mother's family, where she spent her first weekend in Finland. (Ella Porter Photo)



This robotic milking farm was one of Ella's favourite places to visit. (Ella Porter Photo)



Two Finnish heritage cows at a 4-H farm in Lahti, a city and municipality in Finland. (Ella Porter Photo)



A cathedral in Helsinki. (Ella Porter Photo)



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