

Alumnae Spotlight: Seanna Magee, Class of 2002

Since graduating from St. Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, Nova Scotia last May with a B.B.A (Bachelor of Business Administration), Seanna has challenged herself in exceptional ways, through work, travel and volunteering.

Following graduation Seanna travelled to the Philippines to volunteer with Gawad Kalinga. Gawad Kalinga, created by Filipino born and bred Tony Mendlez, is the Filipino response to poverty. This project is uniquely Filipino in that the people themselves have identified the obstacles to development and the problems of poverty, and they are taking direct action. What started as re-building slum houses has led to better family-life, an increase in productivity, higher education levels, and even dramatic improvements in health. Diarrhea, what is considered the leading cause of children's death in the Philippines, is now becoming eradicated in GK villages. GK projects are also building friendships between the rich and the poor, and between hostile Muslim and Christian relations that exist in the Philippines. GK encourages volunteers to come and build, not to just give money. They have launched their own version of the Peace Corps, the Builders Corps. They have currently built over 900 communities, as part of their ambitious 7-7-7 Campaign—building 700,000 houses in 7000 communities in 7 years. This ties into their 1MB Campaign—to rally 1 million builders around this cause.

Seanna was based in Metro Manila, where there is an estimated 5 million squatter families. This left a deep impression on Seanna. She was also moved by the way the families opened up to the volunteers, and the way they shared everything they had with her. “We were building in the extreme mugginess of rainy season, and the wives cooked lunch for about half of the street, and there I was, being offered a share of what I knew would barely go around for all.” Eating and building with the community allowed for the chance to meet everyone. The project dictates that you have to help build your neighbor’s house before you can get a house yourself, and in this way everyone works together.

Companies from around the world are becoming involved with such a successful and such a compelling cause. Procter and Gamble, Unilever and Citigroup have all contributed. Westerners often donate \$1000 US, which builds a house for a one family. Youth volunteers can participate in the 5 day challenge, where they are part of a massive campaign of team, each aiming to build a house in 5 days— all designed with foundations and walls that can withstand 175 km winds (350 km in the areas more susceptible to typhoons).

GK, Seanna says, is not only re-energizing a country, but the world, as the international community slowly comes to know about the project. “I can confidently say that when I return to the Philippines, if I do after 10 years or so, there will be dramatic decreases in the issues that plague this country right now.” Gawad Kalinga’s website is www.gawadkalinga.org.

Following her volunteer experience in the Philippines, Seanna walked 800 km across Northern Spain, completing the Camino de Santiago, a medieval pilgrimage currently experiencing a revival. During her pilgrimage Seanna dined with fellow pilgrims aged 18 to 69 and of diverse backgrounds, all who seemed to enjoy walking the Camino.

After all her travels and volunteer experience Seanna has settled into working on the marketing team of Canada’s Catholic Television Network, Salt+Light Television. She is enjoying exploring the world of Catholic TV and its steady growth out of the big ideas that sprouted from World Youth Day 2002 in Toronto. Staffed by an energetic young and talented team

