

Crossroads International - Debbie Karrel

By DANIELLE THIBEAULT

This week, in the second of four articles, we talk to Debbie Karrel, one of three UNBers who was chosen to participate in this summer's Crossroads International program. She is a fourth year Phys. Ed. student.

"During my first year here, a Proctor at our house (Murray House) had gone with Crossroads the year before and showed me some slides and I was interested; and the next year, a friend of mine went and I just got more interested so I just took out an application went through the regular channels and was lucky enough to get accepted." This is how she describes her first interest in the Crossroads program.

At first she wanted to go to Africa because all the people she knew in connection to Crossroads had gone to that part of the globe, but when she arrived in Barbados she was not disappointed and now that she is back she is more than happy to have worked there this summer.

Debbie left with a group of four other kids all of whom were from the west coast. Three were working for the YMCA - the other two girls (including herself) were working for Com-

munity Development.

Having a gymnastic background she decided to set up something new for the kids - an organized Recreational Program.

She was hired to work with the government in Community Development, mostly to do recreational work. She set up two different gymnastic programs in Recreational Centres.

On Monday, Wednesday and Friday mornings she would work in one of the Recreational Centres from 9 am until noon and there she would attend three classes of an hour duration each with three different age groups of children. Then during the afternoon, 3 pm to 6 pm she would move on to another centre and start over again with three more groups of kids.

On Tuesdays and Thursdays she worked in yet another Community Centre playing games like netball, soccer, table tennis, dominoes and chinese checkers.

The main emphasis in her program was teaching her gymnastics program. This began as soon as she got there.

Most of the kids that she taught were from poor districts and the schools they attended had either no gymnasium, no gymnastic equipment or not enough phys. ed. teachers.

Contrary to popular belief the illiteracy rate there is only two percent.

Debbie adds that "though the Bajans are branded as lazy people, in terms of their culture they are not. They work under a very hot climate so the pace of things there is much slower than it is here."

Unlike many of the other islands in the Caribbean, there is no white-black problem there.

In Barbados, white people are quite well accepted, probably because tourism means so much to them. The sugar cane industry is still their main industry, but this is slowly declining in both importance and size.

Debbie had no trouble adapting to the Bajan way of life, though she adds that they do speak a rather quick and heavily accented English.

Using Canadian currency she found that prices were not too high, (the Bajan beewee being half the value of our Canadian dollar.)

The natives cannot afford to buy such things as meat and bread and so they live on cheaper foods like rice, and starchy foods like yam and bread fruit. They also consume a large amount of fruits such as: poppas, mangos, plantain and akenes, which are typical Bajan canics. Apart from this there is a wide variety of foods available, provided you are able to pay for it, but Debbie adds, she was on a budget so they bought and ate mostly Bajan food and liked it very much.

Because their economy is becoming more and more dependent on tourism and the number of tourists is so high there are many entertainment spots in the cities. At night, there is something to be found for everyone.

There was also the time Debbie got on a bus with five grocery bags and the people helped her by each holding one of her bags during the ride. And when the time came to get off the bus, one girl who Debbie had never seen before, offered to help her carry the bags to her house.

Barbados is not the biggest country in the world as it is only approximately 11 miles

long and 14 miles wide. And because the country is all sea-shore you can sail, swim around, water ski and scuba-dive to your heart's content. There are also some very fine golf courses for the pro.

The roads are so very narrow and winding that its dangerous to drive fast. Especially in the country which is covered with sugar-cane fields so that its practically impossible to see the next turn.

The speed limits are 30 miles per hour in the country and only 10 m.p.h. in the city. This is probably better understood if you take into account that the streets are always crowded with people, said Debbie. Barbados really isn't the place to go if you don't like people because no matter where you go on the island, there are always people, and lots of them.

They are everywhere, with carts, donkeys and sheep.

Because of this, the mototist has to be careful and the Bajans are very careful and are always courteous, even though they do drive awfully fast.

A note of interest to the motorist here: the traffic police may drive around on bicycles but they are very quick at picking up the four digit licence number of the speeding passer-by.

The school system there, she said, is based on the British system of education which can best be explained by saying that at the age of 11, each child in Barbados will write an exam and the top 1,100 will be sent to the Government schools, which are the best high schools in Barbados and the rest will attend the Comprehensive schools. The certificate from these schools is not rated as highly as those from the Government schools so many kids just drop out after a few years and most girls will end up working as maids for the "luckier" middle class people.

The salary will be very small: maybe 20 beewees a week, rent: 12 beewees and the rest will go to feeding the kids if she has any, and chances are she will.

So the children run around eating crackers and cheese and akenes all day and rice a few days a week.

But that doesn't keep them from smiling and being happy.

Even though they are poor, there is always something to eat and something to wear and they don't have to worry about the seasonal changes of the weather which eliminates a lot of problems.

They'll use most anything as an excuse to celebrate and there's always a holiday somewhere, usually on Monday. And no matter what holiday it is, everyone will pitch in and make it look like a national feast day.


And though their surroundings may not be the best, there is always a place for happiness. They belong to the school of thought that proclaims: "You don't have to be rich to be happy." There are coconut trees, mango trees, and bread fruit with their tantalizing fruit for the picking. Who could ask for more..? Not the Bajans!

There are always coconuts, mangos, poppas, bread fruit and the like for a party. A little drink here, a little dance there, a lot of music and finger-snapping and songs everywhere.

Like Debbie says, "Getting Barbados was a treat."

As Crossroads is only allowing one-term programs to give as many people as possible a chance to participate, Debbie will not be returning with Crossroads this year. She isn't sure whether or not she would like to commit herself to two years with CUSO (Canadian University Students Overseas) but she doesn't regret her stay in Barbados one bit. She feels that she put a lot into her summer program this year, but adds that she feels she got a lot more in return. "It's been my best summer so far, I'll remember it for a long time."

NEXT WEEK.. In the 3rd interview of this series of articles Crossroads we'll talk with Dan Fenety, the third UNBer who was with the Crossroads program this summer.



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