

BACKPACKS TO BRIEFCASES

Canada's international youth programs help young people travel and work toward their career goals

The following article was prepared by Joel Kom, a 2002 summer student with the Communications Bureau of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade.

Annik Lussier laughs when asked to describe her typical day. "There's never a typical day at work," she says; some days she spends as much as 16 hours at the office.

Since October 2001, the 26-year-old journalism graduate from Ottawa has been a reporter at the *Cairo Times*, one of Egypt's most prominent and independent English-language newspapers. Annik was placed there by the National Council on Canada-Arab Relations (see p. 15), one of the many implementing organizations of the Youth International Internship Program of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade (DFAIT). Despite the unpredictable nature of her work, she loves it.

"The things that I'm learning here equal any master's degree," she says. "It's been a tremendous learning experience."

Annik still vividly remembers her first day in Cairo. Her senses were overwhelmed by the cacophony, the pungent smells, the traffic and crowds of a city that swells unofficially to a population of 16.5 million in the day, when workers flood in from surrounding villages. "It's chaos," she says, "but it's organized chaos."

The past year has opened her eyes to some of the wonders of the world. Cairo is a series of contradictions: one moment you are enveloped by dust in the bustling and heavily polluted city, and the next moment you can be staring in awe at monuments dating from 2000 B.C.

Seeing the Pyramids has given her "such respect for history," Annik says.

She writes at least two stories each week for the *Times*, whose mostly foreign staff includes Americans, Britons, Canadians, Egyptian-Americans and one Egyptian. She often covers international issues—for example, Egypt's response to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. She also writes about important national issues—for instance, the difficulties faced by human rights groups in Egypt. Exploring such topics gives her great satisfaction: When told by her editors that her article on human rights was being used by diplomats as a reference, Annik says, "I felt I had contributed to change somehow."

Annik's biggest challenge at work is trying to get information efficiently. Multiple telephone lines and voice mail have yet to come to Egypt, she says; more often than not interviews are conducted in person, and tea or juice must be served before you can get to the point. She found the ceremonious approach frustrating at first, but eventually she accepted that this is how things are done in Egypt and throughout the Arab world, where the traditional offering of hospitality is an integral part of the culture. This is one of the many reasons she has come to love the country.

Helping young Canadians contribute

The Internship Program is one of DFAIT's flagship youth programs. It gives unemployed or underemployed Canadians a first opportunity to gain career-related international work experience, with pay. Established in 1997 under the Government of Canada's Youth Employment Strategy, the program supports projects developed in cooperation with private and non-governmental organizations. Every year it helps arrange 400 six-month internships.



DFAIT Youth International Internship Program intern Annik Lussier in front of the *Cairo Times* building in Cairo, Egypt