

YOUNG OBSERVER

Cherished memories at 2011 Duke of Edinburgh International Gold Event

By Stacey Smith

When I started working for my Duke of Edinburgh Bronze Award when I was 14, I never expected it to lead to a once in a lifetime opportunity to attend a youth conference in Kenya!

Jovanna Douglas and I were selected as delegates for the International Gold Event (IGE) from September 2 to September 16 — along with National Director Tina Nash who was a member of the IGE staff.

First held in 1967, the triennial IGE gathers active Gold Award-holding volunteers from around the world — in an effort to instruct and inspire them to take leadership roles within the Award and their communities.

Both Jovanna and I are active volunteers within the programme. In addition to serving as national award assessors, I hold the position of Chair of the communications committee, whilst Jovanna is an organiser of the recently established BANX (Bermuda National Expedition) initiative and Chair of the Alumni and Friends of The Award Association committee.

Kenya native and former IC representative for the Africa region Olunga Otieno called IGE 2011 the "third biggest event on the continent after the World Cup and the liberation of southern Sudan".

Kenyan President Mwai Kibaki attended the official opening ceremony of the IGE on Tuesday September 6 — which included a soulful performance by the Kenyatta University Choir.

He told the 92 delegates under a finely decorated tent on the lawn of the Great Rift Valley Lodge & Golf Resort (GRVL) in Naivasha: "As young people



Jovanna Douglas at the IGE in Kenya

gathered here you are also citizens of the world. I encourage you to acquire the mind of a global citizen, with a clear world view. This will enable you to easily fit into whatever circumstances that you will come across in your lifetime."

Those inspiring words set the tone for the rest of the event, as

it was full of energy and content of the highest quality. Before arriving at the luxurious GRVL we had spent two days of orientation in Nairobi, where I met my roommate and soon to be close friend Lucky Gurre of Australia.

From the capital city the attendees travelled by two IGE-bannered buses to an exotic outdoor adventure camp in Sagana.

The foundation of lasting friendships were formed during that period as we slept in tents and bicycled on a variety of terrain through the nearby villages, squealed along whitewater rafting rapids, hiked for miles through the needle-filled shrubbery, cheered each other along the climbing wall and danced the nights away.

Oh, and let's not forget the frequent singing and laughter that occurred whenever time allowed, even while travelling.

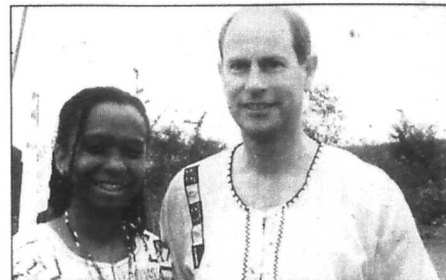
In fact, it's safe to say that the Swahili song 'Jambo Bwana' became the theme of IGE 2011.

After about three days of outdoor adventure and a five-hour journey to the Great Rift Valley, we received a heartwarming welcome to the GRVL.

Having formed a path for us to walk through, local primary schoolchildren generously handed us roses and souvenirs, while adults of the Maasai tribe dressed in vibrant colours and jewellery sang in their language.

All of us watched in awe while dampening our faces with the hot cloths, and sipping the sugar-sprinkled glasses of fruity juice that had been given to us upon our arrival. What an incredible honour to have been greeted in such a way. The word 'karibu' — Swahili for welcome — was repeatedly uttered by the locals. We settled into what would be our comfortable home. However, we realised that we would need to shift focus.

Following our initial briefing in the GRVL conference room, we were prepared mentally for a series of IGE staff-run workshops that would be instrumental in furthering the



Stacey Smith with the Earl of Wessex, the patron of the Duke of Edinburgh Awards, which were founded by his father.



Stacey Smith is given a traditional Masai welcome to the IGE in Kavara, Kenya. She and fellow counsellor Jovanna Douglas attended the event along with Duke of Edinburgh Award head in Bermuda Tina Nash.

development of the Award.

We were to each attend four out of six on policy, governance, fundraising, training, communication and research over the next two days. They provided opportunities to broaden our minds and create a dialogue with one another about the Award in our home countries and globally.

The policy workshop for example, stressed the value of having a clear understanding of one's national youth policy and increasing the level of youth involvement in decision making structures in an effort to not only develop the Award, but each nation. As the workshops began, so did the delegates' preparations for the four "regional nights" representing the Americas, Africa, Asia-Pacific (AP) and Europe, Mediterranean and Arab States (EMAS) regions of the Award.

Everyone had a blast as we witnessed and joined in on comedic skits, dances, songs, sampled international food and generally gained valuable insight on a variety of cultures.

As part of the Americas region, Jovanna and I prepared slide show presentations on Bermuda and shared cans of ginger beer! The IGE continued to roll along with a safari trip to the savannahs of Lake Nakuru National Park where we saw a variety of wildlife, and the dele-

gates also spent two days volunteering at primary schools.

Jovanna Douglas went to the Longonot Township Primary School and I assisted at Empash Primary. We not only painted walls and cemented the floors of classrooms but also planted trees.

I enjoyed getting to know some of the students at Empash and by the time I left my neck and wrists were adorned with beautiful beads from a few of the girls who I also presented with gifts. In addition, donations of school supplies that the delegates collected from our home countries were presented.

For the second and final week of the IGE we were joined by the trustees of the International Award Association and the staff of the International Secretariat, which is based in London.

All (including the Duke of Edinburgh's son Prince Edward — Chair of the IC) attended workshops on various topics that were presented by the delegates during the youth forum. The point of the youth forum was to create an opportunity for meaningful discussion between the attendees and the International Council in an effort to establish a strategic plan for the future. I was a member of the Communications workshop whilst Jovanna Douglas took part in the

workshop on Environment & Sustainability.

Upon conclusion of the youth forum each delegate pledged to contribute to the Award in a particular manner over the next three years. My pledge is "to use creative methods to spread Award awareness" whilst Jovanna Douglas pledged "to help improve the New Start Project the Award at the Co-Ed prison facility from 2011-2014".

As the unforgettable IGE was coming to a close we enjoyed a bush dinner where we were each given handmade Maasai scarves.

There was also an opportunity, if one so dared, to add crocodile and ostrich to the evening meal! At the final night however, Prince Edward gave a closing speech and we were entertained by Kenyan dancers and musicians.

However, once the food was digested the dance floor quickly became crowded with delegates, staff members and many others present who were eager to make the most of our final moments together.

The IGE 2011 was like a dream that one would want to hold onto and never let go.

To be surrounded by so many ambitious and humble young people from virtually every corner of the world was a rare experience that I will forever cherish.

About the Awards

The International Award Programme is based around three Levels, each successive one requiring a greater degree of commitment.

BRONZE is for those over 14. The minimum period of participation to gain this Award is 6 months.

SILVER is for those over 15. The minimum period of participation to gain this Award is 12 months.

GOLD is for those over 16. The minimum period of participation to gain this Award is 18 months.

It is possible to start at any Level — some participants work their way through all three, while others start at Silver or Gold.

To gain an Award, participants must complete activities in four Sections for a specified minimum period of time. There is an additional requirement of a Residential Project at Gold Level. Participants decide what they would like to do for each Section.

Service

Participants engage with their community and discover the impact that we can have through: Community service projects, Conservation work, Voluntary service in hospitals or community homes, More specialised training such as lifesaving, first aid or rescue services.

Adventurous Journey

The Adventurous Journey is about adventure and discovery. Participants gain an understanding of the environment, and the importance of working together in a team with a common purpose. It can be on foot, by bicycle, boat or on horseback. Training, preparation, self-sufficiency and self-reliance are the key elements.

Skills

The Skills Section is about developing personal interests and learning practical skills. There are almost limitless possibilities to choose from. There is no set standard that participants must reach; they set their own goals and measure their progress against them.

Physical Recreation

By undertaking some form of organised and regular physical activity, participants show perseverance and improve their fitness. Their goal is to record their individual progress. Most team and individual sports are included, such as football, athletics, and archery.

For more information on the Duke of Edinburgh's Award Programme in Bermuda contact the National Director Tina Nash at 537-4868 or director@theaward.bm. You can also visit us at www.theaward.bm, on Facebook at www.facebook.com/TheAwardBermuda or on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/TheAwardBermuda>

For more information on the International Award Association visit www.intaward.org