

# FINAL REPORT FORM

Your name: Marika Shiga  
Your scholarship award type (check one):  Academic-Year  Multi-Year  Cultural  
Your award year/start date: October 2010-2011  
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**Please answer the questions below using all the space you need (the boxes will expand as you write). You should send copies of this report to your scholarship coordinator at The Rotary Foundation, and host and sponsor district governors and counselors. The report should be written in the language of your Sponsor country and in the language of your Host Country.**

1. Describe your academic achievements (honors and/or degrees received, etc.) and discuss how this experience will further your pursuits (professional, academic, volunteer, etc.).

Through this scholarship I was able to complete a year long master's program, and received a Master of Arts in International Development Studies with a 4.0 grade point average. In the field of International Development, a master's degree is a huge step in the direction toward a career in the field- most UN professional positions are, in fact, only open to those who hold a master's degree. More than the degree itself, the specialization in international development allowed me to focus on and develop- in concrete, academic, and practical terms- a passion in my life that I had been involved with for many years. The in-classroom academic education in addition to the fieldwork for my master's thesis helped to better prepared me and propel me forward toward my career ambitions in the field of international development, now with more focus, confidence, and sense of where I feel I can best contribute with my talents and interests (primarily in strategic partnerships, strategic initiatives, advocacy, and development).

2. How has your experience changed your outlook on your host country and sponsor country? How have you contributed to The Rotary Foundation's mission of world understanding and peace?

Particularly considering the topic of my thesis, on Development and Peacebuilding in the violent ethnopolitical conflict in the deep south of Thailand, I feel that one thing I have taken away from my perspective of Thailand that is dramatically different than my preconceived is my understanding of Thailand's own ethnic diversity. As an American, diversity is something that I have grown up being very aware and proud of. It was also something I assumed to be unique to few countries (of which did not include Thailand). However, a more in depth and complex look into Thailand showed me differently. I love how learning about the different ethnic minority groups- from the northern hilltribe Karen to the southern Muslim Malays- helped me to redefine what I think of as 'Thai'. I feel that I have often encountered foreigners abroad who question or are confused by the fact that I am American. They, perhaps expect me to have blonde hair and blue eyes, have done cheer leading in high school, and regularly eat hamburgers. I enjoy explaining to them that although I am none of these things, I feel that am in fact *very* American, as I represent the beautiful diversity that exists within the country, I explain how this can be seen as a benefit, something to be proud of. Ironically, or perhaps not, I found myself most sharing this message in my time in the deep south of Thailand, where the regional majority of Muslim Malays- a national minority- were constantly disbelieving that I was in fact American. It was here were I saw how ethnic discrimination and suppression can easily feed into and create violent situations of conflict. Another surprise that I experienced in the region with the Muslim Malays was that they were overjoyed when they found out that I was in fact 'a real' American. I was not sure what to expect, since my literature research told me that some civil

society organizations in the deep south do not accept US funding. However, many expressed to me how happy they were that someone from such a far away country like America would come to the deep south of Thailand (considered to be a peripheral conflict) to study and learn about the situation there.

On a more personal note, I feel that kindness and compassion is one of the biggest lessons that I have taken away from my experience in Thailand. There were countless times that I was blown away by the kindness of strangers, a kindness that went above and beyond. I especially took it to heart, as there were many times where small kind acts, even just a smile, would especially touch me if I happened to be feeling down, lost, or frustrated. What I took away from this experience in Thailand, is that you can never really know what someone else may be going through at any given moment, and usually the effort to be kind is so small, in fact most always free, that it should always be a first natural response. Connecting this also with peace and my studies about peacebuilding, is that it truly does start with and is maintained by all those many small acts of kindness and compassion.

3. Give specific examples of how you served as an ambassador of goodwill. How did you make a difference in someone else's life? Was there a particular experience that changed your life?

This year-long and year-round master's program definitely challenged me; less in terms of my academic ability, than my academic endurance. The first term I tried my best to be involved with Rotary as I was getting acquainted with my Rotary host club and country. However, after an academically exhausting and intensive first term I realized I was not getting the most out of my scholarship experience. One thing that really helped to keep me grounded in my passion for service and in my drive to continue in the field of international development was my involvement with a group called the Rainbow Pencil Group (RPG). The RPG is a group of individuals who open up a neighborhood classroom every Saturday for children in a troubled low income community. Every Saturday all children are welcome for games, songs, arts and crafts, dancing, food, and learning. It is a safe, fun, and creative space for children who have very unstable family lives to learn together in a safe community environment with their peers. As a volunteer, in addition to Saturday school we would also plan educational fieldtrips. It was clear from the beginning that the benefit was mutual with those children. They were overjoyed to see me every Saturday, greeting me with big hugs and smiles, and I too loved and looked forward to all RPG activities. However, it wasn't till one day that the children and volunteers were performing songs at a local hospital when I fully realized how much they too really looked forward to those hugs and special Saturday activities together. When watching the young kids from this community dressed up in performance gowns and tuxes singing on stage into microphones, I asked the founder of the RPG if their parents ever come to see them sing, if their parents even knew how well they could sing and dance and command a stage. I imagined how they might be surprised and proud to see their kids dressed up, singing, dancing, and looking like professionals. He told me that most of the kids don't have parents they live with. That sometimes they, like the girl he pointed to on stage, live with an uncle or aunt, who just provide the bare minimum- literally just the bare minimum of food and shelter, and for the rest they essentially fend for themselves. He told me that for many of those kids, Saturday was the only day they'd get a hug all week. It broke my heart. And reinforced my belief that small gestures, small acts, small kindness, if even just to one person, can make a world of difference. After that those hugs meant so much more to me. I really can't say if I changed anyone's life there, but I can definitely attest to the fact that they changed mine. And for that I am forever grateful.

4. How would you describe Rotary to friends, colleagues, and family? How would you describe the Ambassadorial Scholarship?

I would describe Rotary as an international network of Rotarians- active, engaged, and ethical business people committed to making their community, both locally and globally, a better place. For me the Rotary Ambassadorial Scholarship has been such a gift. It not only funded my studies, allowing the further of my education, but also supported me as an aspiring young adult.

5. How have the materials or training that you received from The Rotary Foundation and your sponsor and host Rotarians prepared you for your success as an ambassador of goodwill? What specific suggestions do you have for improving the orientation process?

I did not attend the pre-departure orientation. However, attending my host club's district conference and familiarizing myself not only with the district's activities and event, but getting the chance to be a part of them, and meet the Rotarians that make up that district was the most meaningful and comprehensive preparation for me, both in terms of my orientation with Rotary in general and specifically feeling more prepared to best represent the unique spirit of the Rotarians in my district. So then, considering my own experience, I would suggest and recommend as much hands-on participation and attendance in Rotary pre-departure events and activities.

6. What advice or information would you provide to future scholars about living abroad as a Rotary Ambassadorial Scholar, cultural differences, representing Rotary, and your sponsor and host Rotary clubs?

I would recommend that Rotary Ambassadorial Scholars reach out harder. The more effort put in, the more unknown territories crossed the more rewarding the experience. I feel that one shortcoming I found in my own experiences was that within Rotary I made few (yet strong) individual bonds with Rotarians. I think part of this was based off an assumption that I had made, both at home and abroad, that Rotarians, as successful and obviously very busy people, would be too busy, I thought, to be able to spend time on me. However, I felt it wasn't till the end of my year that I realized- through two distinct teary eyed speeches, both upon my departure and my return home- that just as they (Rotarians) had given so much to me, that I also had a potential to give back to them. I had always thought it a one way street of giving, which was perhaps why I had always been a bit shy in some regards when it came to addressing and contacting Rotarians, for help, advice or a more personal relationship. More generally, I can also say that within my studies and especially outside of them (both in my eagerness to be involved in Rotary events and service projects, and my own volunteer and travel experiences outside of Rotary) the further out I reached, the more interesting and profoundly rewarding and meaningful my experience became; which in its own way makes sense- the further reach out, the closer you become.

7. How will you continue to stay involved in Rotary? Would you become a member of Rotary or Rotaract, recommend candidates for the scholarship, and participate in orientations?

I would love to continue to share my experiences as a Rotary Ambassadorial Scholar, and would also love to receive information on Rotary events and service projects to which I could lend a hand, or potentially become involved in. Throughout the year(s), I have very much enjoyed speaking and writing on behalf of Rotary and the Rotary Ambassadorial Scholarship, and would very much be open to continuing with this in my free time. Since I am no longer living in San Diego and am now currently 'in between' so to speak (in the process of finding a job, and hopefully relocating to New York), so I will have to wait to schedule in advance more speaking engagements and club visits in San Diego to a time when I can be sure of my schedule. However, until then I will continue to share with people about my experience and recommend the scholarship to those who I feel would find it a great match for their interests and ambitions. At this moment, I do not perceive myself 'ready' to become a member of Rotary, but with time it is something that I would definitely consider in the future.

Please also complete the Scholarship Evaluation Form and send a copy to your scholarship coordinator at The Rotary Foundation.