

Bridget

EF Tours aims to break down barriers caused by language, culture, and geography so that students from two different worlds can interact, share, and learn about both each other and themselves. But I believe the biggest barrier currently challenging cultural interaction is what could be described as a slowly developing “fear” of heritage. Traditional cultures and societies are being pressured by globalization to modernize centuries old traditions and historic ways of life. It has become harder for young people to connect with the roots of their family, heritage, and traditions. Without such connections to your own culture, cultural interaction with other culture quickly becomes impossible. I believe this global epidemic must be the cause of both outrage and careful examination. How can we, as a generation, keep our culture and heritage alive as globalization quickly becomes the easier option? How can we learn from our traditional pasts to make a brighter future for all? The biggest cultural barrier facing tomorrow’s leaders is not a physical one, such as language or distance, but the entire separation of a generation from its cultural past. All cultures and peoples have something important to share with the world, and I believe it is important to keep these pasts alive, not just in textbooks, but in the hearts and souls of those whose ancestors faced them. I am strongly committed to maintaining cultural clarity and integrity in today’s fast-paced, corporation-oriented world.

As I’ve grown older, I’ve realized that I am fascinated not by things, but by people. In history class, I never wanted to read about battles, or treaties, but instead the peasants at home, the soldiers at war, or the kings on the throne. I’m intrigued by the people, the traditions, and the lifestyle. When my family visited New Mexico a few years ago, I cared not about the pre-historic rock formations or great sandy plains, but instead about the Native American ceremony we stumbled across at a pueblo. They danced not for show, or tourists, but for themselves. For me, such dancing exemplifies

the true beauty of culture. Our heritage allows us to connect with our roots and pasts not to show others, but to learn more about ourselves. For the past seven years, I've taken Irish dance classes at a local studio, steadily progressing through the ranks. I enjoy the exercise and camaraderie, of course, but more importantly, I enjoy the music, twists, and jumps which connect me to my family's homeland and the art of my ancestors. As my own culture began to play a more prominent role in my life, enhancing the connection of other youth to their own heritage became both a passion and major effort of mine. This past year, I enrolled in an online advanced placement human geography course. The work has been challenging and the learning intense. But the knowledge I've gained about various cultures and lifestyles has only piqued my interest in cultural studies. I know that action cannot happen without understanding, and my courses, particularly human geography, have given me the background information necessary to truly understand the importance of culture. Using this knowledge and an understanding of the diminishing role that culture is playing in the lives of youth globally, I have begun working within my community to strengthen the ties of young people to their culture. In leading by example, I've danced at international festivals. In an effort to learn about the past firsthand, I've organized visitations with history-telling senior citizens. Only by fully understanding our own traditions and past are we able to share and learn from others, as EF encourages us to do.

My work, I know, is just beginning. Helping to connect people to a heritage, past, or history creates an increased sense of community and also individual identity. I feel that the EF trip to Berlin, Prague, and Lucerne can serve as a major catalyst in my life. First, I view it as a potential stepping stone for the expansion of my efforts to make culture studies an issue of greater importance within my community. Touring such beautiful, culturally-rich areas with other bright, independent, and community-service minded students is an opportunity I can only dream of. I hope to learn as much from

my fellow travelers as I do from the historic sites and local people. I know that by continuing to expand my knowledge of different cultures, I am invaluablely preparing myself for my dream profession, a life devoted to protecting essential human rights when threatened by violence or hatred. By understanding the cultural differences between us all, it becomes easier to negotiate and create peace with the opposition. I also hope to gain the knowledge and skills necessary to continue and exponentially expand my work as a high school student in reconnecting the youth of the world to their traditional cultures.

The second reason I foresee this trip making an incredible impact on my life and my work with the community is because I do not view it as a prize, or gift, but instead as an investment. EF tours is taking a chance by choosing me to represent the company and my country in these places, and I do not take such a commitment lightly. I hope to turn every breath, every minute, and every experience into knowledge helpful in changing the world. It is not my hope, but instead my *expectation* that the faith shown by EF Tours in selecting me will be paid back in full through community service and leadership in action, both immediately and as I move onto my life's work.

EF Tours strives to connect students across oceans, national borders, language barriers, and different lifestyles. But I believe that the biggest barrier is not something tangible, but instead a slowly growing "generational" gap as the youth of the world become more globalized and less culture oriented. By using my passion and knowledge regarding culture, I have begun working hard within my community to strengthen ties from youth to their heritage. By allowing me to travel to Prague, Berlin, and Lucerne, EF Tours would be recognizing my commitment to increasing the importance of culture in the lives of young people, both currently and in the future. By narrowing the cultural gap, I am moving towards achievement of my true dream: helping the world's youth to

connect with the traditions, heritage, and beliefs which have carried us so far and can continue to guide us safely in this turbulent 21<sup>st</sup> century global community.