



A beautiful young mind

Description

At 19, Nivatha Balendra is an inspiration to her peers and proves that age is just a number.

By Nadine Hennelly

This past spring I attended the TEDx Women conference in downtown Montreal. Sitting in the theatre with some 800+ mostly female attendees was electrifying, and to watch the line-up of incredible women up onstage share personal stories, give advice or offer some form of enlightenment, was well worth the ticket price.

As I sat there thoroughly engrossed in each woman's talk, I was surprised to see a very young woman get up on the stage and be introduced as the next speaker. Nivatha Balendra, 19, possessed a poise, a sense of confidence and intellect that would be the envy of someone twice her age, and possibly more. She spoke so easily and passionately about her wish to make the world a better place through helping the environment that she had every single person's attention, and received cheers and thunderous applause, with people jumping to their feet at the end of her talk.

Featured on the CBC news and in the Montreal Gazette, Nivatha Balendra received the World Economic Forum Prize at the Intel International Science and Technology Fair, and was chosen to be one of Canada's Top 20 under 20 to participate in the Forum in China, making her one of the youngest participants in the world to attend the conference.

Listen to Nivatha as she talks about her passion for sciences and pursuing her own path and dreams.



I just had to meet this incredible young woman, and when I spotted her outside during the TEDx talks intermission, I jumped at the chance to tell her how impressed I was with her and quickly introduced myself. She was so incredibly humble and kind, that I knew she would be someone that I really wanted to interview.

Nivatha Balendra was been featured on the CBC news, in the Montreal Gazette, and was chosen to be one of Canada's Top 20 under 20, receiving the World Economic Forum Prize at the Intel International Science and Technology Fair to participate in the Forum in China, making her one of the youngest participants in the world at the conference. She attended Royal West Academy, Westmount's Marianopolis College, and now studies at McGill. She's won several awards from the Terry Fox Humanitarian Award Scholarship, Gary Lanaro-Gagnon Memorial Award, Prix de l'Ordre des Chimistes du Québec, and the McGill University Earth/Mine Energy Research Group Award, as well as an apprenticeship at INRS-Institut Armand-Frappier to name just a few of her accomplishments.



As I sat down with Nivatha at my studio this summer, I asked her what inspired her and her thoughts about following her passion for science, developed during high school, and for which she credits her participation in science fairs. "By looking no further than my own Montreal backyard, and through a great deal of research", Nivatha said she was able to discover a new breed of bacteria in the soil that can help clean up oil spills in an environmentally friendly manner. A mounting body of research has since shown the importance of microbes that live inside of us, and scientists have now been slowly cataloging species that live outside us in nature. Bacteria make up roughly 60 percent of the Earth's biomass and there are more microbes in a teaspoon of soil than there are humans in the world.

After spending some time talking with her, it was impossible not to feel inspired by her youthful enthusiasm and natural curiosity. What also struck me about her was her ability to refuse to let rejection stop her from pursuing her dreams and her passion. Perhaps some of that comes from her parents, who immigrated to Canada during political



unrest in Sri Lanka and arrived here with next to nothing. They had to work very hard to be able to provide their daughter with a great education and she feels deeply indebted to them and credits them with always encouraging her to follow her dreams and pursue her true interests.

Nivatha is also an accomplished dancer, having studied Bharathanatyam (South Indian classical dance) for more than 14 years.

Photo: Nadine Hennelly



Nadine Hennelly worked and lived all over the world. A former committee member of the Musée des Beaux Arts de Montreal, she was also on the Committees for the NYC Ballet, The Whitney Museum, The Bachelor's Ball, Knock out and The Kitchen in New York City. She also contributed her creative talents to The Alzheimer's Group, la Fondation Les Petits Rois, and Le Garde Manger pour Tous. She can be reached at nadinehnadine@aol.com

Category

1. Article | Lifestyle
2. Poetry | Essay | Short Story

Tags

1. interview
2. Nadine Hennelly
3. Nivatha Balendra

Date Created

October 2015