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Black views world in a different light

BY DOUG HARRISON

The Acton Tanner

John Black had his eyes opened during a three-week late summer vacation to British Columbia.

No, he wasn't sleeping out of boredom. Quite the opposite, in fact.

The Rockwood resident was the lone Wellington County student to attend the International Seminar on Youth and Development at Lester B. Pearson College of the Pacific on Vancouver Island to discuss the future of the Earth.

The college, which was founded 18 years ago, has a successful history in bringing together young people from more than 70 countries for a challenging program of academic study, service to the community and awareness of the importance of international issues.

Each day, Black sat in on lectures focussing on global issues by speakers from all over the world.

"I've never encountered people from different cultures," says

Black. "It made a difference when talking with them. It wasn't like watching the 6 pm news. It may be the best three weeks of my life."

The Erin District High School student was most impressed with talks by Peter Daghish from Street Kids International, who talked about his organization and Thom Henley, who informed him of the Penan Indians in Malaysia.

Henley explained how Japanese logging in Malaysia is destroying the Indians' homeland. The Indians live off the forest and if their land keeps being destroyed, they may not have a home in five years.

"Peter had such a command of the audience and he showed his life experiences with street kids," Black says. "He's a lawyer and he told us how his friends drive BMWs and have cellular phones, while he drives a beat-up automobile. His friends called him a failure for cutting back on the luxuries of having money, but he considered them failures for doing the opposite."

"He dared us to be a failure." Henley told Black and the other 179 youths that the Penan Indians make medicines from the forest.

"To lose an asset like that would be unthinkable," remarks Black, who discovered in conversations with South Africans that they have a cause to believe in with the freedom movement. "We'd lose so much knowledge if the Indians lost their home. There's no way the elders could pass the information on to their children."

Black says the problems in this part of the world are not comparable with the struggles in Malaysia. He adds there is a large difference with their low per capita income and here with our over-consumption.

Black also learned in his visit not to be influenced by the media in what we buy. He says it's needless when people purchase two pairs of shoes for each day of the week when they could do with that many total.

Black, however, did find some time for leisure activities like canoeing, sailing, learning a South American dance called gumboot and having his first experience at rock climbing.

"The trip wakes you up — it woke me up, anyway. It gives you the feeling that you can do something or at least try," says Black, who has joined his school's environmental club. He's considering lobbying the government to have a deposit put on pop cans.

"That way people won't throw them on the road," he says.

Black adds that youth today will have to be different than their parents and that recycling, reusing and reducing is a good start to making the world a better place to live.

"But there's a long way to go."



EYE-OPENER: John Black shows off the T-shirt and resource kit he brought home from B.C. (Doug Harrison photo)

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