



~Mistique Davis

INTERNATIONAL *Education* *Scholars*

BY MICHELLE MARTIN DEININGER

Davis is funding the \$200 “Random Acts of Kindness” scholarship with savings from her summer job working the graveyard shift in an Amazon warehouse.

Though she just completed her freshman year at Fresno State this spring, Mistique Davis, 19, has already established a scholarship at her former high school in Stockton. Her aunt, who advised her to perform random acts of kindness, was her inspiration.

Toward that goal, the scholarship doesn't require straight “A's” or a college focus. Instead, she asks applicants to describe random acts of kindness in their lives, and to write themselves a letter that she will mail back to them at a future date.

Such creativity, determination and a “Let's do this” attitude have carried Davis from the California foster child care system, which she entered at age four, through an accomplished high school career. Next up for Davis? A stint in Cape Town, South Africa as one of just 10 Frederick Douglas Global Fellowship recipients in the country.

The Fellowship is funded by the Council for International Education Exchange which

serves to increase minority student access to study abroad opportunities. Roughly 700 students applied for the 10 awards.

“I've always felt the need to understand people,” Davis said, explaining her interest in the program. “The why. And to fight for them. Not everybody has the voice I have.”

The opportunity to participate in a cultural exchange - to network, experience the world, and learn from the other fellows - is a tremendous opportunity, Davis said. She heard about study abroad programs after arriving at Fresno State, couldn't afford them, but started saving money just in case. When she learned of the Frederick Douglas fellowship and saw she qualified, she went for it. English teacher Bradley Samore - “an awesome individual” - helped her craft an application letter and personal statement. “I go to office hours so my professors know me!” she said.

The coronavirus pandemic has delayed the group's travel until 2021, but next summer, Davis and nine other fellows will spend a month in London and South Africa, receiving three course credits for work enhancing their leadership and intercultural skills.

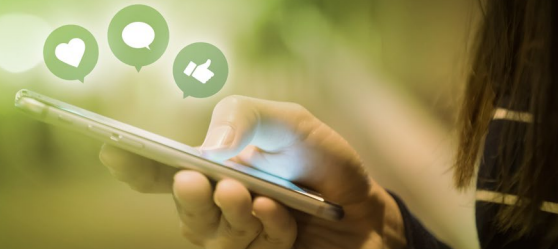
Davis is laser-focused on her future career plans; majoring in kinesiology, her goal is to work as a physical therapist for the NFL. She envisions caring for athletes' physical as well as mental health, and helping guide those who don't get drafted with backup plans for their lives. A former athlete who excelled at cheerleading, stunt and track, Davis believes mental health isn't always given the attention it deserves in athletics.

There is no doubt Davis is headed straight toward the future she's planning; goals are something she simply makes happen. Consider Davis in eighth-grade: Weary of bullying and student conflict at her school, she wrote a contract for students to sign pledging that anyone fighting could not attend the school rally. But the school didn't actually have a rally, so she created one. She met with her principal, lobbied teachers, and the rally was born.

Davis found her “forever home” when she was five years old, and believes the family she was placed with “is a really big factor in who I am today.”

“My mom always said to reach for the stars so if you fall on the moon you'll be ok,” she said. “But I'll keep going and going till I get to the stars.” ★

IT WAS AN UNFORGETTABLE POST ON SOCIAL MEDIA THAT CHANGED THE COURSE OF SARAH CARR'S LIFE.



Sarah Carr, now 27 years old and a master's student in social work at Fresno State, was living in Michigan in 2015 when she watched "Stop This Traffic," a short film about human trafficking in that state. It changed what she knew about her country, and called her to action.

"I had always thought that human trafficking was something that happened elsewhere, not in the United States," she said. "That really had an impact on me. These youth need people to look out for them."

A Visalia native, Carr was working at a domestic violence shelter in Kalamazoo. Driven to alleviate some of the suffering she saw depicted in the video, she began educating others on that horrific topic, and decided to pursue a master's in social work.

Her drive to make a difference in the lives of young victims took a thrilling turn this spring, when she was awarded a Fulbright Scholarship. A highly prestigious and extremely competitive award, the scholarship will enable her to expand her research on human trafficking in Sri Lanka.

"Fulbright will change the trajectory of my life," she said. "Fulbright scholars are global leaders and catalyze social change in our society. I am honored to join the lineage of Fulbright scholars who have made profound contributions to research." ~Carr

Rishad Gandhi, Coordinator of the Study Abroad Office for Fresno State's Division of Continuing and Global Education, cheered Carr's tremendous achievement.

"It's incredible - it's something she will have for the rest of her life," Gandhi said. "I'm very proud of her."

Carr and her husband will travel to Sri Lanka next spring. Exact dates and length of their stay will depend on Coronavirus pandemic developments. While there, Carr will research Sri Lanka's strengths, needs, gaps and challenges in the country's efforts and services to combat human trafficking, gaining a crucial global perspective.

Though her area of research is a tragic aspect of life, Carr will also have time to avail herself of uplifting parts of a new culture. An avid runner and singer (her undergraduate degree is in music from Olivet in Illinois), she has already discovered local Sri Lankan groups she can join to pursue those hobbies there.

"I'm looking forward to immersing myself in the culture, getting to know my neighbors, making friends," she said. "The longer I could be there the better. To see the world from another corner will shift our perspectives and increase our creativity, empathy, and understanding about how people live in other parts of the world."

Carr chose Sri Lanka largely because her mentor, Dheeshana Jayasundara, associate professor in the Department of Social Work Education at Fresno State, is Sri Lankan, and helped Carr make the connection.

"She was there every step of the way pushing me and encouraging me," Carr said. "She really helped me see my potential. I honestly don't know that I could have done it without her."

Carr's future plans include pursuing a Ph.D. in social work, teaching, becoming a licensed therapist and continuing her music – goals certain to be enhanced by the connections and career opportunities that accompany a Fulbright.

"Human trafficking is happening right in front of us, in every city and town," Carr said.

"I encourage readers to become educated on how to recognize the signs of human trafficking and do their part to prevent it. There is a pressing urgency to collaboratively care for the vulnerable members of society." ~Carr ★



~Sarah Carr

FOR INFORMATION ON HOW TO RECOGNIZE OR REPORT HUMAN TRAFFICKING, VISIT WWW.POLARISPROJECT.ORG