



2016 Closing Ceremony Speech by Celia Aranda Reina

5th May 2014

Take a breath, child.

Italy. Two years. The adventure starts. I am extremely happy and, at the same time, already nostalgic for what I'm going to leave behind. I don't know what I'll find there. I don't know what to expect. I know nothing. My way, my adventures. Everything starts today.

25th August 2014

Tic, tac, tic, tac... It has arrived, the night that never ends. In a few hours I'm leaving behind all that I have ever known. In a few hours I'll be a 1.358 km away. Will I be ready for the challenges that I'll face? Will these two years fly away and, in the end, feel they have been a waste of time?

27th August 2014

First day in Duino. I go down to Porto to see the sunset. Indescribable. Breath taking. This is my new home. I knew how to arrive to Porto even if I have not been here before, because I've watched the lip dubs from other years too many times. While I was walking down I asked myself how many stories of people like me these streets have been a scenario for. Many years, many people who come and go away, many unique and unrepeatable moments...

[...]

These were my first thoughts before actually knowing what Duino is. I was excited, yes, I was really looking forward to the day I would leave my country and start a new life far away. I wanted to learn as much as I could, make friends from all over the world, absorb knowledge as a sponge, travel and live a lot of adventures. I wanted to discover, to experience, to enjoy life just for the sake of it. It sounds beautiful, doesn't it?

Now I realize how superficial these thoughts were. However, what can you expect from a 15-years-old girl who had barely been out of her home and didn't know how the world was like? Now I look back to the 481 ± 5 days I have written in my diaries, while being here, and I smile.

Before coming here, I didn't like things back at home. I was sick of my environment, of how there is no motivation, no reflection, no thought. I was sick of the problems that flooded TV: unemployment, high dropout rates from school, too much nationalism and no perspectives whatsoever for future. And sadly that was not only on TV: that was my everyday life. Then I arrived here.

Here I have met many different people: you. Each one of you are very particular and unique in your own way; motivated, full of dreams, energy and passion. However, I realized that your reason to come

here was similar to mine. We were deceived by the world as it is. We were disappointed by how the relationship between cultures, countries, nations and religions is either non-existent or full of conflicts due to the fear born of ignorance.

I hope we still are deceived and disappointed. Why?, you may legitimately ask. Because we have done nothing yet.

Some of us have been here for two years. Some of us have been here only for one. Some of us have been here for almost a lifetime. And it is true, that while we are here we learn more than we ever did. Not only in class, but also from our peers and teachers and experience itself. It seems to me that I have learnt much more here in two years than in the previous fifteen before arriving in Duino. It seems to me that I have lived much more here in two years than in the previous fifteen. More intense, more challenging, more exhausting; destructively and constructively both at the same time but it has been the most rewarding time in my life so far.

Here I have met the most strange and extraordinary people that I could ever imagine. From them, actually, from you, I have learnt how important it is to listen. The most valuable thing I'm taking from my UWC experience are the stories that we have written together in my diaries, every day. The ones I have heard from you, the ones that we have lived together, the ones that you have inspired me to write. Here I have discovered the power of words and communication. Thanks to those late night conversations, infinite class discussion, Mensa talks, the lyrics of our songs, or just random questions that lead to deep philosophical debates, I have had the opportunity to listen to real stories about the world outside.

The world outside my ideal utopia of simplicity and optimism, without social conventions or pressure; the world outside our bubble of Duino, where there isn't anything worse than getting a bad grade, Mensa food, Maths class at 7 in the morning or having a fight with a friend due to a misunderstanding. Listening to you I've heard stories of war, nationalisms, persecutions, physical and psychological violence, the lack of basic resources, corrupt governments, human rights violations and oppression that are happening right now, somewhere in our planet. All these stories have changed my perception of the world.

But while these many different perspectives of the world have radically changed me, the world outside is still more or less the same. What we have lived together in the bubble of Duino has stayed in the bubble of Duino. What is the impact we, you and I, the people who are listening to me right now, have had in the world outside? Until now, not a big one I'm afraid to say. But that is the whole point of it.

Our life in Duino, although short, is infinite. All what we have shared is infinite. All that we have created is infinite. It will follow us wherever we go, from now on, as a shadow. All the experiences we have lived will come back to our minds at the most random moments of our existence thanks to a song, thanks to a colour, thanks to a smell, or a word, or a landscape. Our memories will remain, although many of them may be altered through the glass of time, to be maybe better than what they were in reality, but it doesn't matter. What matters is that we will remember. We will remember when we understood for the first time that building a community is not as easy as we had thought. We will remember that it takes time to get to know people. We will remember that is difficult to commit ourselves to our ideals, yet we try, because it is necessary. We will remember the first time we were

ourselves here. We will remember how we forgot about our differences and united because of a common objective.

We have not lived all these things in vain. All these things that we will remember, all this love, all this effort, all these difficulties, opportunities, discoveries; all these challenges that we have overcome must be the spark of our fire.

This fire is the one that has to change all that we hated before arriving here. This fire, born not from our disappointment and deception but from our conviction and belief in a more peaceful, sustainable and fair world, based on the evidence of our experience here, has to burn to ashes all wars, all kinds of violence, of oppression, of misunderstanding. This fire must burn all injustices and build a new world. And we are the ones who carry the fire.

Dear family, querida familia. Gracias por darme las alas para volar tan lejos y alto como he querido y confiar en que las usaría bien. Gracias a vosotros seguiré con mi camino con alegría y convicción, segura de que no habrá límites suficientemente grandes como para pararme, porque yo soy más grande y fuerte que ellos.

Dear teachers, you are the ones seeing generations and generations of students like us, and still believe in the power of education. Thank you for your commitment with this cause, for not giving up even if sometimes it seems pointless to keep teaching. I can promise you that you have had a deep impact on many of us, and that your words and your wisdom will be alive in our minds and our hearts. Thank you for encouraging us to go further, to keep trying, to go on and follow our passions and do something meaningful with our lives.

Dear primi, you still have a year ahead in this place. Make the most of it, please. Take your time to face the challenges, to learn, to listen, to change. To understand and to love. In a year time you'll be in our same situation, so get ready to go back to the real world to make a change.

Dear co-years, our two-year journey finishes today. But also our real mission starts today. We have to spread the word, spread the fire. Duino has given us the tools and experience enough to discover our potential, and now it is time to use them to make an impact. It is time to carry on with our lives, wherever we go and whatever we do, and do our best to make the world a better place as we dreamt before coming here.

I'm not going to say goodbye to you because we are together in this mission, and as long as we try our best to spread the word and the fire our paths will cross again.

Answering the question I asked myself two years ago before coming: no, these two years have not been a waste of time. These two years have taught me that we are the ones writing history, the mother of truth, and that is why the world will be Tlön, UWC or whatever we want to write with our fire.