

You go girl!

DRIVEN BY HER CHILDHOOD DREAM and armed with a camera, Rasha Al Saadi set out to Europe to film a documentary



Rasha Al Saadi believes UAE national women are intelligent and capable of handling challenging projects and last summer she set out to prove it – in Europe. Saadi, 21, a Communication and Technology Programme student at Abu Dhabi Women's College (ADWC), was awarded a scholarship by the French and German embassies in her final year of study. Her assignment? Travel to Paris and Berlin to film a documentary about girls from the Gulf region studying abroad.

"I always wanted to be a film director," she says. As a child she loved reading. Picking up a book and opening its pages was like watching the curtains part to let the movie begin. "Whenever I read a book, I would imagine the characters and locations. I visualised what I read in the story."

Saadi's imagination and yearning to be creative found an outlet in media production. At ADWC she wrote, produced and directed a documentary, *Mixing in the UAE*, which focuses on social and working relations between UAE national men and women. Impressed with her work, the lecturers encouraged her to apply for a scholarship that got her and a colleague from Dubai Women's College, Badria Al Khoori, the European assignment.

She was confident she could overcome the challenges of travelling abroad alone. It was her father who had to be convinced. "My mother supported me but my father was worried and concerned about my safety," Saadi says.

Armed with a camera and self-confidence, she set off to Europe.

Working in Europe was the opportunity of a lifetime, but it wasn't easy. For the first time in her life, Saadi was completely responsible for herself. She faced many challenges, including working with new people, collaborating with colleagues who didn't always share her point of view and even finding her way around the huge cities she was working in.

Today, those experiences have helped her become a different person. "I was a suitable candidate for the assignment because I could empathise with the girls. I can understand how it is for girls from the region studying abroad because when I was in Europe, I was one of them."

Upon her return from Europe, Rasha spent many months back at the ADWC editing her documentary. The completed version will be screened at educational conferences [such as the recently-held Education Without Borders in Abu Dhabi]. Besides shedding light on students studying abroad, she hopes the

Rasha Al Saadi ... 'We should not be waiting for something to happen but should make things happen.'

documentary will inspire other young women to go after their dreams.

She blushes at the suggestion that she is a role model for young national women. "Before this assignment I never saw myself as a role model, but now that I have returned from Europe, the younger girls are coming to me for advice. "I am careful to think before I speak because I know they will take my advice to heart," she says.

"I encourage them to utilise their talent to the fullest. The world around us is changing. We should not be waiting for something to happen but should make things happen. We have to prove to the world that UAE national girls are doing great things."

She is on her way back to Paris next month to study French for a year, then on to a Masters degree in media production at one of the city's colleges ... she isn't finished yet. When she is fluent in French and has completed her Masters, she plans to return to the UAE and establish a media production company – and revel in the fact that her childhood dream would play out like a movie. **F**

– Shannon Patterson Linden