

La Brea girl to fly T&T flag

...at Westminster Abbey

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La Brea scholar Christineil Thompson on her way home on Monday afternoon from Naparima Girls' College, San Fernando.

Photo: Tony Howell

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Fifteen-year-old Naparima Girls' High School student Christineil Thompson is flying as high as the \$2m flag at the National Stadium. The Sobo Village, La Brea, student was awarded a trip to London, England, after winning the Trinidad and Tobago Commonwealth Essay Competition 2009 in the 14-18 category. Thompson will be flown to the UK next year, courtesy the Trinidad and Tobago Electricity Commission. While in England, Thompson will be given the opportunity to carry the national flag at the Commonwealth Day Observance, to be held at Westminster Abbey. Touted to be the largest interfaith celebration in the United Kingdom, this event will be attended by Queen Elizabeth II, who, last Friday, opened the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) at the National Academy of the Performing Arts, Port-of-Spain.

News of Thompson's award came last Thursday at the conclusion of the Commonwealth Youth Forum, when the winners of the competition were announced. Prime Minister Patrick Manning attended the closing ceremony. The competition, organised by the National Secretariat for CHOGM 2009 and the Royal Commonwealth Society, was open to secondary and tertiary students. Competitors were asked to write a letter to one of the visiting Commonwealth leaders and tell them what T&T could teach the world. Thompson said it was her English teacher, Miss Rattan Singh, who informed her Form Five class about the competition and the first prize, the trip to England, to encourage them to take part. About 16 students entered and three, Asavi Rawlins and Emily Seelochan, as well as Thompson, were among the top ten finalists. Still on a high, Thompson, in an interview on Friday, said she entered but did not expect to win.

"My essay was a letter written to Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd," she explained. She drew on the diversity of the people and our strength in unity, rather than the disharmony differences have been known to cause in other countries. The global economic downturn, she told Prime Minister Rudd, has demonstrated the resilience of our people and the thrift of even the young ones. Thompson also talked about the values of the Commonwealth organisation and how decisions hammered out at its meetings can bring about betterment for all the countries involved. She recalled that about two weeks ago, someone from the Prime Minister's office called her mother, Christine, to inform her that she had qualified to attend a workshop aboard the Caribbean Princess.

"My mother was surprised because she did not know I had entered the competition. So on Thursday, she accompanied me to the workshop and lunch aboard the ship and the closing ceremony of the Youth Forum. "I was most surprised when my name was called as the winner in my category and my mother gave me a standing ovation." The first of three children for her parents Christine and Neil, Thompson said the reality of the situation is now beginning to dawn on her. "I am excited, I have never travelled to the United Kingdom before and I am really looking forward to my trip next year." Naparima Girls' Principal Patricia Ramgoolam, who was in Tobago when the Guardian broke the good news to her, was overjoyed. "This is great news. I am so happy for Christineil and the other two who were also among the top finalists," she said.

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