



## A Visit With Jessica Rimington

Cape Cod native Jessica Rimington realized at a young age that you don't have to be an adult to change the world. She adopted that mission locally and now reaches out globally. Today she is a sophomore at Georgetown University, where she is majoring in Culture Politics, but her activist roots began early, while she was a student at the Cape Cod Lighthouse Charter School. She has spoken to members of the United Nations, represented the United States at the Children's Earth Summit in South Africa, and co-founded the Cape and Islands Youth Council on Sustainability. While some high school graduates take a year off to travel, Jessica founded the One World Youth Project, a nonprofit organization that connects youth around the world.

BY MINDY TODD

PHOTOGRAPH BY LINDSEY TONG

**Mindy Todd: You founded the One World Youth Project when you were 18. It's operated by 'youth ambassadors' ages 16-21. What is the goal?**

**Jessica Rimington:** The One World Youth Project pairs youth in the United States and Canada with youth in the rest of the world, to create dialogue and get youth talking as friends. Once they have this common base of understanding, they can move toward action.

Our platform for action is the United Nations Millennium Development Goals. We provide communication tools for cultural exchange to take place; like with a school in the United States and a school in Tanzania. Then we work on a curriculum that helps youth design and implement a local service project related to its specific millennium goal.

**MT: In 2002 you were one of two students chosen to represent the United States at the Children's Earth Summit in South Africa, where you experienced some prejudice and ultimately began the One World Youth Project. Tell us about that experience.**

**JR:** Pretty much right after I arrived, I was woken up at 2 a.m. by some South African students I had met. They told me to come quick down to the hall, that they wanted to vote the United States out of the Summit. It was like walking into this secret meeting. People were sitting by country groups, speaking their own languages, many of which I didn't understand, but there was some angry dialogue going on.

It became clear that it wasn't about who I was as an individual, because they didn't know me as a person yet. They just knew me as what I represented, coming from the United States and whatever stereotypes they associated with that image. We were able to work through the conflict, but when I got home I started wondering, since I was the first person many of them had met from the United States, what if I hadn't been there? Would they still be thinking the same things?

Would they still have the same stereotypical images of all Americans? I thought the answer might be yes. I also noticed when I came home to Cape Cod that many of the young people I knew were really ignorant about the lives of youth abroad. It seemed that if we are going to get anything done to change the world, we have to start with some sort of understanding of each other and who we are working with.

**MT: When did you first become interested in making a difference in the world?**

**JR:** I think it was in sixth grade. I joined the Jane Goodall Institutes program for youth called Roots and Shoots, and I had a really great teacher named Barbara McManus at the Cape Cod Lighthouse Charter School. She taught me a lot about the environment and how it intersects within the animal and human community, and all about sustainability issues, or what I would later know as sustainability.

**MT: You have accomplished so much already, at such a young age. Do you ever get discouraged?**

**JR:** I think everyone gets discouraged sometimes. It is hard sometimes to keep pushing forward and to keep fighting for the opportunity to make a difference. But I have never lost hope. There is nothing as exciting as feeling you are part of a global community and knowing that together you really are making a difference.

**MT: As a high school student, you co-founded the Cape and Islands Sustainability Youth Council, and it is still going strong.**

**JR:** My friend Joe McGrath and I started that at Cape Cod Academy. It helps youth on the Cape from five different schools to talk about issues of sustainability as it relates to Cape Cod and the Islands, and then create small local projects.

**MT: Do you have any time for hobbies?**

**JR:** I've been dancing my whole life. In D.C. I do Afro-jazz and modern dance. I really like to write and hang out with my friends.

**MT: You've traveled now to more than a dozen countries. Do you see the Cape as a place in your future?**

**JR:** I was born and raised here, and there is no place else in the world that I've ever felt so relaxed. I belong near the ocean. ♫

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*Mindy Todd is the host of The Point, airing Monday through Friday at 9:30 a.m. on the Cape and Islands NPR stations.*

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