

## **Interview with Lina Hernandez**

Internship at Miss Cover

12 April - 26 May 2004

The idea to run an Internship project was initiated in August 2003 as a token for 30 years of business relationships with Holland. Information shared and discussed took shape and was roughly organized by the end of the year. All these were done at a slow pace, making sure that each step was correct, and that the message behind this non-profit volunteer work is well understood and accepted. But the real “run” began when we met our first applicant Lina. It is thanks to her determination in going through with her own plans and her trust in our good will that this Internship Program is worthy and beneficial. Needless to say, it should not go without giving due recognition to the efforts of the volunteer CONCORDIA team.

Lina’s verbal application for her interest to have an internship in Turkey was made early 2004, while CONCORDIA was still working on presentation materials and logistics of its programs envisaged. On our side the feeling was that the preparations to start the project running were still incomplete. On the other hand, she was under time pressure as her internship experience is part of her graduation process which was scheduled for July 2004.

It was a quick decision to respond to her request. We have tried to close this gap by making personal contacts. An opportunity to interview Lina, to better understand her needs and demands, was essential at this point. During one of our frequent visits to Holland this was arranged with ease. At another occasion, a brief meeting was set up with her Mentor at her school in Diemen. The purpose of this meeting was twofold. Firstly, to explain the scope of our programs and its purpose thus helping to create the necessary confidence of the school authorities for their support of Lina’s studies through her internship. Secondly, to improve our understanding of the school’s requirements as well as their established systems in which the value of the positioning and the importance of an internship experience could be weighed.

Following these preparatory attempts CONCORDIA’s volunteer team was set to work, visiting the potential Hosting Companies, searching for convenient accommodation possibilities, arranging the logistics, and at the same time speeding up the preparations of the essential written material to be used for processing.

### *1- Could you briefly introduce yourself?*

Well, I am a 23 year old student. I was born in Colombia and I moved to the Netherlands at the age of twelve. Presently, I am studying for my bachelor's degree on International Business and Languages at INHOLLAND Diemen school. This degree has allowed me to study for one semester in León, Spain and also do my internship in the apparel business in Bangkok, Thailand. At the moment I am doing my final thesis in Istanbul and hopefully I will graduate in July 2004.

### *2- Why and how did you decide to come to Turkey?*

Since I wasn't able to find a good and interesting assignment in the Netherlands, I sought help through my family network. Luckily an opportunity showed up in Istanbul and I took it right immediately.

3- *Could you describe your work here in Istanbul?*

Miss Cover (MC) was founded in 1983. It is a family business. MC is a manufacturer and exporter of men's & ladies' woven outerwear for the European market. They distinguish themselves by designing their own collection and they also do research to produce their own fabrics. MC is specialized in jackets, blouses, skirts, blazers, dresses, coats and trousers made of woven fabrics such as cotton, polyester, viscose, linen and lycra.

*Activities at Miss Cover* - For my thesis I am doing a research for MC about customer satisfaction and claim management and I am also looking into the implications for the apparel market after the lifting of textile quotas from China in 2005.

4- *What exactly is your purpose with this activity?*

My main purpose is getting to know the apparel market and business activities related to it. Also I have the chance to know another (business) culture and different way of life.

5- *What are your first impressions and thoughts about Istanbul and the Turkish people?*

Istanbul is a beautiful city with lots of history, many things to do, although very crowded, too much traffic. The people are very nice, warm, very helpful, and hard working.

6- *What were your expectations before coming to Turkey?*

To be very honest I don't know, I mean I knew it wasn't going to be like Thailand, where you do get a "culture shock" as people call it. But I think the reason is that it is not my first time in Turkey and I know lots of Turkish people in the Netherlands, thus I had an idea on what to expect. I knew a little about the way of living, the people, the food, the culture. I did not know much about Istanbul and I was really looking forward to live here for a while.

7. *Any surprises & astonishments?*

The "wake-up" call of the Imam at around 5 a.m.! This was quite unexpected especially since I am living just around the corner of a mosque. Although I knew about it, it gets you unguarded every time, especially the first few days.

I was pleasantly surprised on how modern and developed Istanbul is with all high modern buildings, department stores, and the underground. I find it much more developed than Amsterdam.

Moreover I realised that people in Europe have the wrong idea about Turkish women. They are very modern; speaking of Istanbul of course. On the other hand, I was shocked by the rudeness of drivers in Istanbul, I never experienced that crossing a single street could be an adventure in itself.

I was also amazed by the fact that Turkish people are capable of using every inch of the street to sell their goods. My favorite is the guy who has turned his van into a kebab restaurant! Next to his van you will find a small table with two chairs and an old bouquet of flowers for the ambiance I guess. And most amazingly he had regular customers!

A funny thing was that I went to this Latin party and exactly at midnight the waiters, started to serve soup, in the middle of the night, I have never experienced this in any country before. I have been told that it is a Turkish custom to have soup as a digestive to get sober. In Holland we would still ask for another drink instead...

And finally what I still experience is that many people on the streets think I am Turkish thus they usually ask me things or say things to me, but because I am not able to give an answer people look at me as if I have offended them in some way, which is not my intention...

6- *What are your future plans for your career?*

I am still not sure. Let's see what comes on my way. But since my internship as well as the context of my thesis are all textile and apparel related, I might as well follow this path. I find the textile business very interesting, tough and competitive and it is always good to take a challenge!

We wish Lina all the best in her future career. We could already feel that this success story will continue. Where and how – we are yet to see.

***Interview by Onur M. Ahmet***

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