

World traveler studied plant use as food and medicine

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Sunshine Best just graduated from the School of Professional Advancement with a Bachelor of Arts in Health and Wellness, focusing on ethnobotany and medical anthropology. She previously traveled internationally to study plant use in different cultures around the world. (Photo by Paula Burch-Celentano)

Not all paths are easy, but a little drive and ambition can go a long way in achieving one's goals. This is none truer than in the journey of Sunshine Best.

Best just graduated from the School of Professional Advancement (SoPA) with a Bachelor of Arts in Health and Wellness, focusing on ethnobotany and medical anthropology. She served as SoPA's student speaker.

Originally from Barbados and raised in Toronto, Canada, Best comes from an impoverished background and has had virtually no resources to rely on other than herself. She worked multiple jobs ranging from personal chef, bartender and waitress, among others, to get herself through school, even coming close to being homeless along the way.

Best finished her studies in Sustainable Urban Agriculture and Horticulture in Chicago in 2009. The next year she sold everything she had in order to travel the world.

"My goal was to not just see the world but to learn about how different cultures grow plants without chemicals, how these plants are used as food and medicine and cultivate a deeper sense of human connectivity," she said.

Best's primary interests have been specific to the African Diaspora and/or previously colonized communities whose knowledge has been systematically eliminated or decreased. In looking to her future, she considered her ideas of expanding technology to help improve the social, environmental and scientific challenges related to access and knowledge.

"I feel as if my life would be a waste if I didn't make every effort to build towards something worthwhile, making life easier for others and fulfilling for me," she said.

Best has spoken at conferences around the world, and received multiple fellowships, including one at the University of Oxford. She has built and continues to volunteer at a community garden in a low-income community on the West Bank as well as schools in low-income neighborhoods in New Orleans. Following graduation, she plans to earn her PhD.

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