**IN CASE YOU MISSED IT, or want to hear it again – from VICKY BLONDEEL, in her own words:**

Good evening,
My name is Vicky Blondeel and I was honored to be your exchange student 14 years ago. As my parents both turned 60 this year and they never travel, my boyfriend and I decided to treat them with a trip to the western states of America. So we visited many national parks which among them were the Grand Canyon, Bryce Canyon, Yosemite ... WOW what a beautiful country you have!

So a little over a week ago I received an email from Jan Care to ask if I wanted to come and speak to you about youth exchange. Of course I wanted to do that, but what should I tell in a limited time... there are so many benefits and experiences to share...

I believe an exchange student should be open-minded and try new things, engage in activities they haven't done before... I had many of those "new" experiences which I thought was great! I also got a better understanding of the world and the different cultures. I can compare different ways of living and know that that is a good thing.

Youth exchange isn't about knowledge, but more about what you do with it. You have to live somewhere to fully get to know the local culture on the different levels. When you travel for 2 weeks you only get to see the tip of the iceberg of that specific culture, however when you live in it the experience is totally different. That is also the main reason why I wanted my boyfriend, Joris De Proft, to join us on this trip. So he could experience the Oklahoma culture. I know he is only getting a glimpse of it, but he will go home to his family and friends with new experiences and stories, but I had many many many more!!!

I also had to learn to adapt in many situations e.g. living with people who have a total different way of life, going to a school where the system is completely different than my own, speak to people you just met, trust people ...  I strongly believe this "adapting skill" is a good skill to have for my future life. I also made friends all over the world and we accept each other’s differences. I gained a lot more confidence. One example is that I have my own business and people working for me. I normally always refer to them as my "co-workers" instead of employees because we are all working towards the same goal: develop our business.

So as you can see, I gained many skills early in my life due to the youth exchange program.
Oklahoma became my second home thanks to you all! I hope you will give other students the opportunity to develop their skills under your wings! Thank you very much!

Vicky Blondeel

June 25th 2013