



My brother Jeroen as teenager

## America - part 1 - Newspaper Article

While my parents were remodeling their apartment buildings in Oostende, a coastal city in Belgium, we three teenagers , my sister Leen age 16, my brother Jeroen age 17 and myself age 19 stayed at home in Deinze. At that age we distanced ourselves from each other. We each had our own friends and activities going on.

One day something unusual happened. My brother walked up to me and handed me a small newspaper article. “Here”, Jeroen said, “Maybe YOU would like to do this.” Several things in this situation felt strange to me. My brother was reading the newspaper? He saw something I might like to do? He cut it out and brought to me? I was not expecting this.

Curiously I looked at the small little article and read in English; *“Would you like to be a youth counselor in America? As an exchange student you will be working for two months in a summer camp in New York and one month traveling by van in groups exploring the USA. Must have a degree or experience with youth counseling and speak fluent English. If interested call XXX by this date”*.

My brother always had an interest in the US but being a youth counselor was not something he wanted to do and knew I probably would be interested. He gave it to me thinking this would suit me better. It took me by surprise but quickly I got very excited by this possible opportunity! “Heck yes, I would love to do that. Thank you!”, I said. I had been a kids and youth counselor since age 12 and loved doing it! I wasn’t perfectly fluent in English but was convinced I spoke good enough to do the job.

Then I realized I had to first have the approval of my parents so I called them up. “Dad”, I said, “Jeroen gave me a news paper article looking for people who are interested in being a counselor in the US. I would love to do that!” He asked me to read the article to him which I did. Being the wise dad he answered: “Well that sounds interesting, we will look at the article and see if it is real or a scam. When we are back home we can call the number and go from there”. He didn’t say no, he kept the possibility open. I could hardly wait for them to come home!

Finally they did come home and we called the number. The women that answered explained about the program and invited us for a meeting and test if my English was good enough. I was overjoyed. My parents agreed to take me to the appointment. All went very well. I was accepted as a participant but one more thing had to fall into place. My parents made it clear to me that I first had to graduate from my last year of high school.

Dang, I knew I was not passing my German class. In Belgium if you don’t pass a class you have to re-do the exam at the end of the summer vacation. That means you have to study hard all summer if you want to pass and go to the next grade. In special circumstances, if it is just one class you don’t pass, your teachers together as a group can make the decision to let you pass, but they have to find a good reason for it. Even if they did let me pass

there was still another hurdle! The trip to the USA started a few days before the official graduation ceremony.

I decided to go to my teachers and tell them the truth. I asked for a meeting and explained my situation. I told them I was pretty sure I would most likely not pass my German class and shared about the amazing opportunity in front of me. Working for 2 months in New York, as a counselor in a camp for disabled children, and then traveling with the group for a month in the USA. I also shared that my plan was to go to College for a bachelors degree in Orthopedagogy, a degree to work as a professional counselor with disabled people. I knew if I didn't explain my situation I wouldn't pass and couldn't go. I asked them if it was possible to consider me passing German class. I also requested if they decided to do this to let me know in advance so I could leave on time for the trip. I spoke my truth and left it in their hands to decide.

The teachers had a meeting about it, they were aware I didn't pass German class, but decided this trip would support me in expanding my English and it would give me such a great learning experience and support me in many other ways. They called my parents to let me know they decided to pass my German class and let me graduate. They asked me not to mention this to the other students till everyone was done with their exams. They let me leave early, before the graduation ceremony.

I was ecstatic! I was going to America!!!!!!!!!!!!

A group of 44 European exchange students left for America! I was 19 years young and ready for the time of my life!

Thank you Jeroen!

Mieke's Voice - 2019©Mieke Benton  
Starshowerusa@startmail.com  
(Sharing permitted with my name and email included)  
(With a simple email let me know if you like to  
be added or removed from this email list).

#### Mieke's Voice - Part 1

Week 1 - Introduction part 1  
Week 2 - A Rough Start  
Week 3 - Vision  
Week 4 - History Lesson  
Week 5 - Bookstore Caecilia  
Week 6 - Invisible Hand  
Week 7 - My family, a circle of 5. Part 1 - My parents Anny & Hugo  
Week 8 - My family, a circle of 5. Part 2 - My brother Jeroen  
Week 9 - My family, a circle of 5. Part 3 - My sister Kathleen  
Week 10 - My family, a circle of 5. Part 4 - Something about myself, Mieke  
Week 11 - Encounters with extraterrestrials  
Week 12 - The Movie E.T. - The Extra -Terrestrial  
Week 13 - What happens after the body dies?

#### Mieke's Voice - Part 2

Week 14 - Introduction part 2  
Week 15 - Expressing my authentic nature  
Week 16 - Sexuality - part 1 - Unity  
Week 17 - Sexuality - part 2 - Separation  
Week 18 - Sexuality - part 3 - Menstruation  
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