

Kathryn Ausema – Semester in the Netherlands

During my study abroad term at Wageningen University, Netherlands, I was able to learn from leaders in the university's plant science department in addition to identifying with my family's history in Holland and travel with new friends. I chose to study in the Netherlands because I visited the country with my family once before and promised myself that I would return to study someday. This experience has enriched my career outlook by allowing me to define goals and reflect upon my background.



One aspect of life in the Netherlands that I miss greatly is the excellent biking infrastructure. I have always biked across Purdue's campus with caution because of pedestrians and the occasional unaware driver, and I had expected to do the same in Wageningen. However, I was quite surprised at the efficiency of the biking infrastructure throughout the Netherlands and the way nearly all drivers were extremely conscious of bikers around them.

Each morning and afternoon, a flood of students and faculty rode by my apartment complex on their way to the university. Very real bike traffic jams often occurred, although I never witnessed or heard of an accident. The distinct lanes on either side of roads, most of them raised, provided safe routes for bikers. Raised lanes and other safety measures allowed me to explore the

flat surroundings on my used bike. Cycling as a main mode of transport allowed me a measure of independence in addition to fair amount of steady cardio every day, which I considered to be part of my workout. However, locals and Dutch students I met largely disagreed, as many were introduced to some form of a bike as young as their family could allow.



Living in the Netherlands presented many opportunities to explore the inside of the country and surrounding nations. I was able to take trips to Copenhagen, Edinburgh, and Oslo with friends. These trips in other countries helped to build my confidence, and I often found myself (safely) outside my comfort zone. While traveling, I was able to journal most of the details of my memories and beautiful places. I know looking back on these will inspire me to keep traveling and exploring later in my life.

One very special time in the Netherlands was Remembrance Day and Liberation Day on May 4th and 5th, when the Netherlands was liberated from German occupation in 1945. I had been looking forward to this weekend because I enjoy learning about history, and the treaty between

German and Canadian forces was signed in Wageningen. Before celebrating liberation, the gravity of Remembrance Day was present and tangible. On the evening of May 4th, I joined a group to bike to the annual ceremony at the Grebbeberg Military War Cemetery nearby. Leading up to the ceremony, I listened to stories from my friend who had served in the Dutch army reserve. My friend's translation and clarification of the commemoration added so much meaning to the events. Due to the solemn remembrance observed on the fourth, there was truly a reason for celebration on the fifth.

In the time leading up to the weekend, I heard about the crowds that descend upon the town each year to join in the celebration of Liberation Day. But, I was still not prepared for the nearly 100,000 people who descended on the town of 40,000. Many streets in the city center were packed shoulder to shoulder. Wageningen was full of families and couples gathered to watch and give

flowers to the parade of elite military groups and bands. Five grandstands showcasing a range of musical styles, fueled by a few truckloads of Heineken and Bavaria, were also ready to entertain.

Meeting with friends for a picnic and the parade presented more of a challenge than I expected. Although authorities planned the day's activities wonderfully, the reality of maneuvering in the crowds in the previously calm town demonstrated a drastic change. That evening, the activities stopped at midnight as scheduled and the next morning most traces of the crowds had been cleaned up and handled. I was thankful to have such a nice day with friends, and simultaneously grow to understand more of my family's history. To me, Remembrance Day and Liberation Day represented the widespread and immeasurable impact of the Second World War on the lives of individuals. Waving to veterans, speaking with Dutch friends who had served in the Netherlands army reserve, and recalling my grandmother's story provided a lot of subject for thought.

During the Second World War, my grandmother and her family lived in the northern province of Groningen in a village called Loppersum. Her family suffered under German rule from 1940-1945 with the rest of the country. Although I did not visit my grandmother's hometown this spring, my family had the privilege of returning to the small town on a trip in 2015. All together, we were able to

recall the occupation from my grandmother's perspective. We learned that during the long awaited liberation in the April and May of 1945, my great-grandparents were forced to provide for the needs of retreating lines of German soldiers in their family's home. This wave was then followed by Canadian troops, which my grandmother's family was also selected to house. Bullet holes were still visible in my grandmother's home, and in the bell tower of the town's church. Memories conjured and created during the visit to Loppersum in 2015 provided a strong connection for my experience this past May, as I was again privileged to join Dutch culture by celebrating liberation.



These memories and others that were made during my study abroad term at Wageningen University are profound and valuable to me. I am so thankful for the experiences I have had and for the friendships I made during that time.

