

Dear Congregation at North Church,

How are all of you? I sure do hope you all had a wonderful Thanksgiving filled with love, family, fellowship, and of course, yummy food! I myself got to have Thanksgiving this year, but more about that later. Where do I even begin? I am having the **TIME** of my life! I have been blessed with such an amazing opportunity to be able to travel and experience the world at the ripe old age of 18 years. Well I'll probably be 19 by the time this is read to you. I can't believe that I will already be 19 and I'm pretty sure my parents and especially my grandparents are thinking the same thing. In 18 years, I have already been to four different countries! I've spent some time in Germany, The Netherlands, I spent 1 week in England, and of course my beautiful host country, Belgium!

I have been living in Stavelot, Belgium for the past 3 ½ months. It's a small town, comprised of maybe 5,000 inhabitants. It's about 2 hours southeast of Brussels and 1 hour south of Liege. Everyone knows everyone, and you always see people saying "Bonjour" and giving the "European" cheek kisses. Let me tell you...those are the weirdest things to get used to and you only do it certain times. When I came here, people kept kissing my face and all I could say was "WE DON'T DO THIS IN AMERICA! I WILL GLADLY SHAKE YOUR HAND!" All in all, I've gotten used to the bisous (bee-zoo:kiss). I go to a school with only 200 kids (from 5th to 12th grade), talk about a change from Amherst High! There are also cows, sheep and roosters living in the backyard of my school, but that's normal here ☺ My French is getting better and better each day, I'd like to consider myself fluent already. Yes, I still make mistakes, but some of you as well as me, are still making mistakes in English so we'll just say I'm fluent! I don't live near anything relevant, which is perfect! I have to take the train if I want to go shopping or to go to the movies, but that just makes it so much better and special. Taking the train is super easy and I've been able to explore what Belgium has to offer me! I think about it a lot, and I tell myself, I couldn't be luckier to have been placed in a perfectly, small town. It's different and I get to experience this kind of life for a year instead of what I live in every day back home. I like being able to walk to and from school, or around my town and just take it all in, the smells, the air, the people, the views (by the way are amazing).

My family is actually perfect. I live with a mom and a dad and a sister (and her boyfriend lives with us, but he doesn't say much to me, his loss.) I love having a mom and a dad in the same house. They are very nice and willing to take me places. They call me their "troisieme fille" (twah-zee-em fee-uh) which means third daughter ☺ I call my parents "maman" and "papa," I help out around the house, clear off the table after dinner, I take the dog out for walks when she needs it and no one is home. Needless to say, I don't just live here I am part of the family. They made me feel welcome right away (although the only toilet in the house doesn't have a door, it's covered by a shower curtain...but I guess you get used to it. The luxuries of living in an old house.) At dinner, we have conversations, typical "how was school?" and "what did you do today?" I love it, it gets me talking, and using my French. I can now speak and understand better than I can read! Very exciting for me. My sister and I, we've hung out a few times, but she's always with her boyfriend, or working, or at school. The language barrier I think caused a little bit of difficult at the beginning.

So every first Wednesday of the month, my entire district goes and does something. We've gone to the Blegny-Mine, seen World War II landmarks and, a 1960s Exposition. We are all close in this district, but not like back home since there are over 250 of us. On Saturdays, we have the option to go places as well. We've gone kayaking on a famous river, to Namur to see parliament buildings and parliament people,

Brussels to meet the governor and the Head of Parliament, and other parliament buildings. The Rotex, is very prominent for the inbounds. Rotex are the kids who were on exchange years prior. They set up events all the time and make speeches. They are also very willing to help us when we are in need. I think this is awesome because, 1) I know they miss their exchange and they can live another exchange through us, and 2) It's really cool to talk to kids who have already gone through what you will go through. With my club, there's me, an Argentinian boy, and a Canadian boy. We went to the Spa-Francorchamps Formula-One Circuit (just the most challenging and fan/driver favorite track in the world) and we got to ride in exotic cars!! It was the time of my life! I got to ride on this track that people just dream of seeing a race on. I rode in two Porsches and a Lotus, because after the third car I threw up everywhere....it was gross. I did also get to see the Formula-One Grand Prix with my host dad the first month I was here. I also went to go see a comedy play with my club, it was all in French, but I actually understood the majority of it (: It made me feel good about it. Plus, my club is filled with only men and two women. Well, this man is the cutest little old man ever. He sat next to me at dinner (my meetings are Tuesday night from 8-10:30) and he said, in English, "You're the American, right?" and I proceeded to say yes. He told me he would enjoy it "a whole lot" if we could speak in English, so we did. He told me that he loves Americans, as a lot of old men do, and it's because they either fought in WWII or had a relative who did. He talked about how much he learned from the Americans and that he was in the Air Force fighting with the Americans helping the Belgians. He talked about his Commander/Lieutenant guy and how much he appreciates Americans and he thanked me for coming from such a great country. I didn't know what to say, because it caught me off guard, but this is one man and story that I will never forget. (ps. my town is really well known for WWII efforts and battle grounds). That has made me even more proud of my country. I normally carry my flag around with me everywhere. You can see me coming from a mile away with it. The people in Europe don't understand our patriotism. They don't understand why we have men and women who lose limbs in the war, but yet, keep going back to serve in more tours. They don't understand that we have men and women who are willing to give their lives to protect the freedom of America. All I can say is, we're so proud to live in a country where we have our freedom and our rights and our duties. We are just brought up to love our country and our freedom (what one decides to do and think at 18 years old is their choice). And for those of you wondering, I voted in my first ever election all the way in Belgium!

I got to spend a week in England as an exchange student on an exchange...not too shabby. We were in Hull, England (4 hours north of London, not too far from Scotland). I was so excited to finally get a break from French! I got to speak English, obviously. Well, I spoke French with the kids from my school which was cool because *I* was the one translating for all of them. This is what made me realize how far along my language has actually come. It's a beautiful thing. And, it's also pretty awesome to say you can speak two languages ☺ We got to visit all sorts of towns and historical sites. We went to see Grease: The Musical, which by the way was spectacular, everything was spot on! We also had a scavenger hunt around one of the towns which was a lot of fun, putting a little competition into our week! I became a lot closer with my friends from school as well. My friend Maurine was placed into a very religious family, but was uncomfortable with it because she has never lived that kind of life before. The father is a pastor of an Evangelical Church and an American, they pray before every meal, and she had asked me to come for dinner one night. It was different for me as well, but I was really interested in their religion and I had an hour long conversation about theirs and Presbyterian faith. Not far apart, but not the same either. They invited me over for Thanksgiving meal the next day! I was so lucky to have been invited, I thought I was

going to miss out. What was difficult was explaining the meaning of Thanksgiving and how it started...all in French, but I managed. I didn't get to watch the Macy's Day Parade or go to the movies with my family back home, but it definitely made up for it. Honestly, what are the chances? ☺

Things I miss from home:

Music (there is no music program in my school, so no singing or instruments for me ☹)

Tim Horton's

Bagels

Hot Sauce (I finally ran out, dad!)

Toaster Strudels

froYo

Oreos

Cheetos

My Family and friends

Being able to fully participate in discussions

Being able to drive myself places

SKIM MILK

Being able to work to get money (I only get 65 Euros each month)

Although I'm living a life I never thought I would have the chance of living, it does have its hardships. Sometimes I become frustrated when the language doesn't come to me right away or if I keep making the same mistakes. It doesn't help that I speak English with the bi-lingual Canadian boy either, but it frustrates me that if I don't say something correct or if I'm having difficulty explaining something, he always has to hop in and do it for me. I don't enjoy that too much. Missing home, it's a little hard to do sometimes because I was so excited to leave. I don't mean to make that sound bad, but it was my time to get away from home. This is exactly what I needed. Yes, I miss them, but I don't miss home because nothing would be the same if I were there. My best friends are all gone. Jake went to the Air Force Academy, Mackenzie went to Switzerland, Mike is at Ithaca and Michael is at Niagara University. So that's why I don't miss home. I have become closer with my sisters which has helped a lot because back at home. The person I miss the most, yes I am going there, is my nephew, Aydan. I Skype him every so often, and he always asks me when I'm coming home or when he can see me again. I'm not used to being away from him or my nieces for that matter because they've always lived with me. I do get to see Lexie and Lucy, and Natalie and Hailie as well. They are all getting so big! Even through all of this, I keep telling myself, I did this for me, no one else. I did what I had to do to get where I am today and if I let this bother me too much, it would just take away from the amazing experiences I could have with people I may never have the chance of seeing again in my life.

03 December, 2012

I wish you all a great holiday season, a very Merry Christmas, and a Happy New Year. I grew up, my whole life, in North Church and I want to thank each and every one of you for being part of my bigger family.

Take Care and God Bless

Lindzee Powell