

## Experiencing it the Dutch way - Joy's Summer Highlights

Summer 2018, I had the opportunity to travel to the Netherlands to attend a camp for hard of hearing young adults, followed by a short, extended two day vacation afterwards. It was the first time I had ever experienced traveling with other deaf/hard of hearing peers, and it was an amazing adventure.

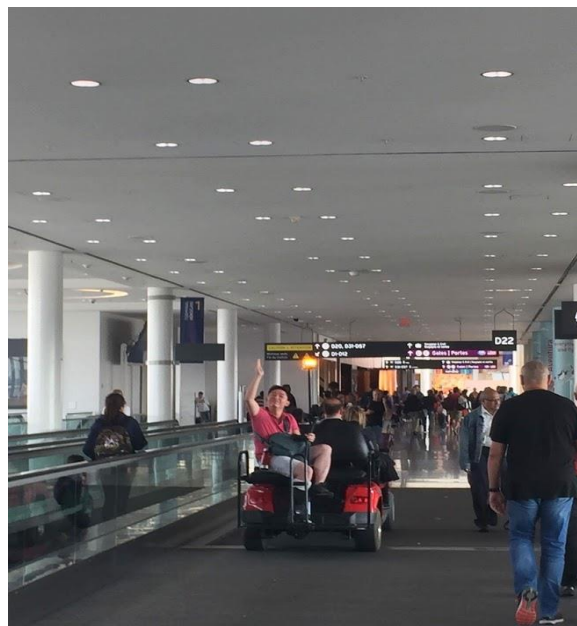
We left by airplane early morning of July 29 and flew from Vancouver to Toronto, and then from there to Amsterdam, in Netherlands. It was a long and exhausting trip to the final destination, but travelling with a group of friends (also Canadians) certainly made it more enjoyable.



*Left: Bowen; Top left: Nicole, Top right: Rod; Right: Tasha, Centre: Joy*



*Waiting for our flight*



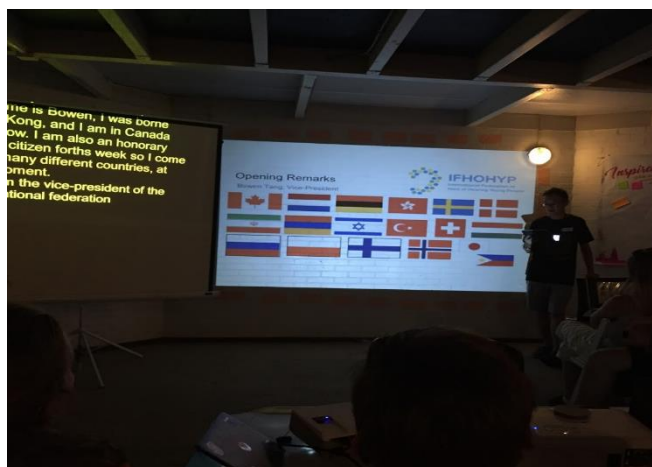
*One of our friends, Clovis, had a fractured foot and was wearing a cast - so he got to cruise around on an airport passenger cart.*

On July 31, we finally arrive in Amsterdam. On the way to Eindhoven, to the campsite, we saw some beautiful scenery along the train route.



The International Federation of Hard of Hearing Young People (IFHOHYP) Summer Camp 2018 was truly a multicultural experience. With 18 countries and a total of 70 participants, the camp was off to an exciting start. The week was packed with fun activities and many opportunities to meet other deaf and/or hard of hearing young adults. The main language used at this camp was English - with so many different native languages, this was definitely a challenge. However, everyone was cooperative and we all made it work.

To kick off the camp festivities, on the evening of arrival day, we had a welcome meeting followed by an icebreaker activity composed of 15 true or false questions all related to the Netherlands, testing our knowledge of the country. After all, we were on Dutch soil. It was a fun starting game to see how many people had just about as much knowledge as I did - *which was very little!* Interesting facts: did you know that the Netherlands is 6 meters below sea level? Or that the tulip flowers originated from this country?



*At the welcome meeting. Bowen is on the far right with the Roger transmitter lit-up, making him look like Iron Man in the dark*



*Ice-breaker activity*

At the camp, the participants are assigned to rooms of 12 to 13 people with two people sharing bunk beds. We had a variety of nationalities in our room - Canadians, Danes, Dutch, Germans, Honkongers, Israeli, and Polish. On the first night, we made friends with a few of the girls in our room. Two of the girls with their beds closest to us, were the Germans. We named it the German-Canadian corner.



*The dorm*



*German-Canadians - Bottom left: Joy, Top left Nicole, Right: Luise, Centre: Juliane*

On the second day, we played traditional Dutch games. There were over 15 different games set-up on the field that we could complete within our own groups. In addition, there were some obstacle courses for competition between two teams. In order to receive points, the assigned teams had to work together to win the games -- which took collaborative effort of brain power, strength, and endurance.



The following day, we were treated to an excursion outside of our camp facility. We took train rides to neighbouring cities. Each teams are given pictures of different buildings and sites (along with its name and the city, but not the address), and we are tasked with locating the monument and taking a group picture with it.



*My group hard at work!*



*One of the sites*

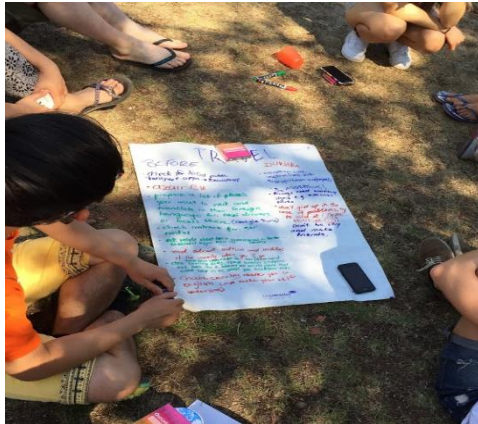
The fourth day was filled with inspirational workshops and activities led by fellow campers. The workshops I've decided to attend were: a presentation on Community, a Challenge Life exercise on physical and mental boundaries, and an exercise on non-verbal communication. All the workshops motivated me to take what I've learned and apply them to practice in other areas of my life, especially in my interactions with people. It was also in these workshops that I've gotten to see just how mobile the CART providers, known as palantypists in Europe, can be. In one of the workshops, one of the providers had a keyboard strapped to her body and a mobile device, in front of it, displaying words that were spoken.



*One of the palantypists providing access at one of the workshops.*

Fifth morning at camp was a short documentary viewing followed by group discussions on specific topics. The documentary, called "[Hard of Hearing, so what?!](#)" by Stan van Kesteren, was about a hard of hearing individual on a journey to find ways to address challenges in communication, background noise, and hearing exhaustion. In the film, it emphasized the importance, in deaf/hard of hearing individuals, of having qualities such as positivity, self-advocacy, resiliency, and maintaining a balance between mental and physical health. For group discussions, the topic I chose to take part in was on traveling as a hard of hearing person and what kind of tips and advice we can share with each other when we visit other

countries. Some of the helpful tips include being assertive about our needs and letting others know how they can help, preparation and research on travel destinations beforehand, and utilizing local technology and resources available.



*Group discussion on tips for accessibility when traveling*

On the same day, from the afternoon to late evening, we went to a theme park called Efteling: World of Wonders. The amusement park had lots of roller coasters, a mini fairytale forest, haunted house, and an impressive water fountain for the water shows in the evening. One of the amusing aspects of going on the rides with other hard of hearing people is the fact that everyone has to take off their hearing aids or cochlear implants prior to getting on the rides to prevent them from falling off mid-air on the roller coasters. While our devices were off, we could not hear each other, but still found ways to communicate through typing notes on our phones, pointing, or gesturing.



On the second last day, we visited the Klimrijk Brabant tree top ropes course. It was a physically challenging activity where we had the option of completing various levels -- ranging from 1 being the easiest to 4 being the hardest. Through this event, I've learned to push myself, physically and mentally, to try and complete all four courses. In the process, I've also discovered the importance of teamwork and establishing a buddy system with another person. As the levels become harder, it was helpful to provide words of encouragement and lend a supportive hand where needed.



*One of the ropes obstacle course*

An additional observation that I've made note of during this tree-top obstacle course was that it's a great, quiet activity where communication can still take place as you can only talk to the person who's in front of you or behind you, but not when you are on the ropes in between the platforms. Also, it was important to keep in mind that language provided during safety and instruction orientation was accessible. We had a palantypist present, who made sure all verbal instructions were accessed, but some campers may not be as fluent in English resulting in potential language barriers.

On the evening of August 4, we ended the week-long camp with a series of wonderful performances and shows put on by campers. The shows ranged from singing, dancing, to personally-made videos, and a skit. The final morning was a mixture of sad and happy farewells.

In the span of nearly a week, new friendships were made, new experiences were created, and a new community was established - bridging together seasoned campers and new, first-time, campers. It was amazing, at this camp, to see so many different cultures, languages, and personalities mixed in one place. At the same time, we are all brought together by similar experiences we share in being deaf/and or hard of hearing and understanding of each other, through our personal struggles and successes.



Photo credit: Budi Loonen

After the camp, a few of the fellow Canadian campers stayed on to explore Amsterdam. A few of us (five people) stayed at the Air B&B in Zaandam, a short 15 minute commute from the city centre, Amsterdam Centraal. On the way to where we were staying, a scary had incident happened. In Amsterdam they have lots of river canals throughout the city, but my friend, Bowen, and I did not realize this. Three people, Nicole, Tasha, and Rod, in our group had gone ahead and the two of us were following behind. We heard beeping sounds, and red lights flashing, and the first thought that came to our minds were - *“there are no train tracks around here...”* and then the bars came down with the two of us caught in between. We made a run towards the direction we had came, and threw our luggage underneath the bar, scrambling to get to the other side. We made it safely! The bridge was pulled up to let a ferry pass through. Lesson learned: always *remember* to stop and watch surroundings whenever there’s red lights and beeping sounds.



The drawn-up bridge

The next day, we went on a tour of the Anne Frank House museum. In the museum, they had audio listening devices, with guided speech of specific rooms throughout the tour. We asked if there were any visual information provided for our access. Thankfully, they had a full transcript that went along with the audio device. Having read the Diary of Anne Frank in elementary school, I definitely enjoyed the tour and seeing the story and the secret annex live in person –

even though the story was very saddening. Towards the evening, we met up with the other group of Canadians and took a river canal tour through the city, followed by a nice dinner after. The old buildings were fascinating to watch, with its beautiful architectural designs and the little details. It was certainly difficult for me to leave to go back home the next day.



*Anne Frank House Museum*



*Joy at the River canal next to the Museum*

I would like to thank the summer camp planning team, and to IFHOHYP, for such an unforgettable opportunity. I look forward to the next one. Additionally, it was such a fun experience travelling with the Canadian hard of hearing group - everyone was so inclusive and supportive of each other. Whenever there were things misheard or miscommunicated, we took the time to help each other understand. Wherever our next destination takes us... I can't wait!