

# Brief visit home for globe-trotting St. Marys teen

St. Marys resident Jade Dhingra during her brief stay at home with parents Alan and Ann. She spent a year with Rotary Exchange in the Netherlands, but now she has departed again, this time for six months in Quebec and West Africa with Canada World Youth. (Slater photo)



seems so long ago now," she told the Journal Argus, when asked to recall when she first decided to apply for Rotary Exchange. At the time, she noted, she was inspired by the experiences of her friend, Elizabeth Sproat, also of St. Marys, who spent a year with Rotary in Mexico.

Jade was 18 when she applied, meaning she had already graduated from Stratford Central Secondary School by the time she left for the Netherlands. Because she was older than most applicants, unlike a lot of Rotary Exchange students from Canada, she didn't have to worry about re-integrating back into secondary school upon her return.

So applying for an entirely different exchange program, also with the opportunity to travel across the world, seemed natural.

It would be misleading, though, to suggest her age and level of schooling were the biggest factors inspiring her to apply for Canada World Youth. The biggest factor, by far, are the people with whom she shares her home.

The Dhingras, to be clear, are a Canada World Youth family. Older brother Noel travelled to Ghana with the program. And Jade's parent actually met on the program. Alan had been to Colombia the year prior to their meeting; a youthful Ann had just returned from an exchange in Senegal and met the dashing Alan as he led a "re-integration weekend" program that's mandatory for all Canada World Youth participants. Ann says that's because CWL sends young Canadians into communities that are so different from our own, that culture shock upon their return is a concern.

So, as Jade discussed her imminent departure for the first stage of the CWL exchange in Quebec (a group of young people from Benin will also be staying in Victoriaville) so soon after her return from a year in Europe, it's not surprising that Ann Dhingra offers her full support.

"Being with CWL really did change my life," Ann commented. "I'm so happy Jade will have that opportunity too."

Speaking with Jade, it's clear that her life has already undergone a transformation thanks to her year in Holland. She stayed in Bussum, a town about 20 minutes southwest of Amsterdam. She spoke no Dutch when she left, even though there is some Dutch in Ann's family background. Her first day of school was intimidating, especially because it soon became apparent that practically no one in the school — teachers, administrators, students — knew that there was going to be a Rotary Exchange student in their midst that day.

But it wasn't long before she could understand everything that was said to her, and not too long after that when she could express herself enough to get around on her own.

"I remember when I had my first thought in Dutch," she smiles. "I don't even remember what it was, but I just remember that it was something really insignificant. And I was so proud of myself."

The school she ended up attending had somewhat of an arts focus, and Dhingra had the opportunity to spend time in art galleries as part of her schooling. That's something that intrigued her, since she — perhaps inspired by the artwork, well-known in St. Marys, of her father — has a keen interest in art history.

Her stay also included a two-week tour of various European countries with the other Rotary Exchange students staying in the Netherlands.

"The only complaint we heard from her was that she was cold from being wet all the time, from riding to school in the rain," Ann reported.

Jade concurred, but added that she loved how bicycle culture is so prevalent in Holland. Nearly everyone cycled to school, even if they lived quite far away. Busy destinations like train stations sometimes had double-decker bike racks; you would reach up and pull down a bicycle slot, lock your bike inside, then let it spring back up so there was room underneath for some else's wheels.

Other challenges and opportunities will certainly present themselves when the time comes in early December to travel to a small community in Benin. Jade Dhingra's enthusiasm for learning about other parts of the world is contagious. You could talk with her for hours about her experiences, and her future plans.

But she didn't really have time for that. Days before her departure last week, she laughed, "I haven't even unpacked yet. I've still got some of my luggage from Holland in my room."

Stew Slater  
NEWS EDITOR

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Doors open to public 7:30PM to 9:30PM  
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Parade 11AM • Contestants 10:30 sharp!  
(At Kirkton Vet Clinic)  
• 4H Achievement Day Dairy • Pet Show  
• Following Parade • Baby Show at 12:30 PM  
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Clown • Dog Agility Show • Interactive Display from Upper Thames Conservation Authority

### Optimist Fun Zone • General Admission \$5

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• Straw Bale Maze • Farmers Olympics  
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