

AFS Peace Award Scholarship winner  
School Year Program from Australia to the Netherlands 2005-06 (AUSYPscNEDNH05)

## **Final AFS Report**

*Elizabeth Morton*

It has been a month since I have returned home to Tasmanian winter from the hot European summer, but the memories and experiences are still fresh in my mind. It still feels like yesterday I first saw Amsterdam, and only 3 hours ago that I began to really love the city and its life. To say I am homesick for Amsterdam and its people could be classified as an understatement, however I cannot deny absolutely loving being back home again, minus the piles of catch up work I have to do at school!

For me, my exchange experience was a whirlwind, a year that no words can describe. It is so difficult to explain how amazing every single day was, the ups and the downs are impossible to unwind for family and friends to have and insight as to what I went through as an exchange student. I feel horrible for not exploding with stories and adventures of Amsterdam and Europe, but I simply explain that it is impossible to remember everything in great depth because I was, after all, abroad for almost a year! To this, most people sort of shrug their shoulders and pretend to understand, so I gush that it was wonderful and really exciting and the best year of my life, which seems to reassure them a bit!

Before leaving Holland, I was warned and prepared as much as possible to adjusting to life back home, but I simply did not realise just how difficult it would be. I was told that friends may have moved on, lifestyles may have changed and that settling into my family routine would definitely be the most difficult aspect of coming home. I thought that because I had kept in contact with most of my friends, definitely strengthened my family relationships and was feeling generally pleased with the person I had moulded into. Ah, but I was most certainly wrong to think I would be exempt from the struggles that almost all returning exchange students face.

I am incredibly lucky with friends, I have slipped right into a new friendship group and I am absolutely loving that aspect, but things at home are definitely not so smooth. I would say that the biggest difference between Dutch and Australian parents is that the Dutch are far more liberal and open when it comes to child raising. I have had to come home to slide back into being treated almost like a child again (in comparison to the very adult way in which Dutch teenagers are treated). I am definitely struggling with that, but every day things get better especially with the help of my friends.

Before I left Amsterdam, I was quite confident that I had transformed into a mature young adult, someone who can adapt to new situations and easily talk to new people.

Every single way that I felt like I had grown in whilst I was away was put to test being at home, amongst Australians and people who know me. And I can happily say that all of my changes seem to be for the good and everyone certainly notices how happy and confident I am within myself lately.

There is honestly not a moment of my exchange trip I would take back, even the bad times, because I am now mature enough to realise that those experiences made me stronger and moulded my trip into the fantastic adventure it was. I will always remember AFS, and my sponsors for their role in me becoming the mature young adult I am today. So I thank you all for the wonderful opportunities an AFS scholarship provided and the fabulous year away, a year which I shall never forget and surely gush about for years to come. Thank you.