

HC grad, HOBY KY alum says participation in global summit 'life altering' experience

Alisha Rhymer graduated from Harlan County High School this past May, but her knowledge of the world and human rights grew tremendously over the summer months.

Rhymer, an alum of the 2014 Kentucky Hugh O'Brian Youth Leadership Summit, had the privilege of participating in the Global Student Leaders Summit held in Europe. Her stops included multiple locations in the Netherlands and England.

Her group of 16 was made up of HOBY participants from across the United States. They joined with teens from all over the world for the 2016 summit.

"It was a life altering experience," said Rhymer reflecting on her trip just prior to her move this week to Eastern Kentucky University for her freshman year of college. Rhymer said the trip helped her to understand the importance of human rights and also how we must protect those human rights, no matter where you are located on the globe.

"There were some really touchy subjects," she said. "We were forced to look at things that a lot of people are uncomfortable talking about or trying to understand."

Among the speakers were Arun Gandhi, the grandson of Mahatma Gandhi, and Ndaba Mandela, the grandson of Nelson Mandela. She also heard from Pulitzer Prize winning journalists Nicholas Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn, to name only a few.

"It was crazy in general to hear, especially with Gandhi's grandson, talking about these intimate moments he had with his grandfather. He taught his grandson to be kind and patient without making it obvious that is what he was teaching him at the time. He told us that his grandfather told him 'there is a lot of violence that is not physical, but still haunts people. If we live in a world of violence we cannot have peace.'"

"The reason we had the conference in The Hague is that it is the International City of Peace," she said.

The Hague is a city on the North Sea coast of the western Netherlands. The city is home to the U.N.'s International Court of Justice, headquartered in the Peace Palace, and the International Criminal Court.

"They have the Peace Palace there," said Rhymer. "They have the World Forum, where dignitaries gather, such as the President, the pope and other world leaders to talk about making the world more peaceful. "

There was travel outside the summit, but Rhymer said it continued to focus activities on human rights.



Rhymer recalls with a smile her experience addressing an audience gathered at the Speakers Corner in England. While she didn't reveal what she said, she admitted to doing a lot more listening than speaking.

Her group toured the British Library and had the opportunity to view many original texts such as Magna Carta, a charter agreed to by King John of England at Rummymede near Windsor on June 15, 1215.

Her stop at the Anne Frank House, biographical museum dedicated to Jewish wartime diarist Anne Frank, was "emotionally moving, to say the least," said Rhymer. The house is located in central Amsterdam in the Netherlands.

The trip helped heighten her interest of American Sign Language (ASL) interpretation because it made her realize she will be able to help a lot of people access the world.

Rhymer said she made some great friends on the trip and plans to keep in touch with them.