



Another Taste of Freedom as a College Student

College had started in the city of Gent, while I was still in America. Two weeks into the school year I finally joined my class mates of who I only knew my life long home town friend Inge Van den Broucke and a high school friend Elke J. The class had already bonded by the time I joined in, which was a beautiful gift, I instantly connected with so many new friends!

My new class mate friend Elke Winnepenninckx rented a three story student home with her siblings. Early into the school year one of the rooms became available for three weeks and Elke spontaneously offered it to me to stay there during that time. Gent is only a fifteen minute commute from my home by car or train, so there was no real reason why I would be renting a student home in Gent. Did I hear this correctly? I was offered a free room to live in for three weeks? My heart danced the happy dance! I could for sure not refuse that offer! But would my parents

agree with that? How do I bring that one to the table?

Being honest and open is the best way I thought. I flashed back to the time I was fourteen and decided to buy myself a second hand moped with my savings money without consulting my parents. That one didn't go over very well! I bought the moped on a Saturday. The seller asked if I had the approval of my parents, and I said yes, which was a lie. He believed me and there I went, driving it home, wondering where to park it now that I bought it. When my mom came home from her work day at the bookstore she immediately noticed the moped in the garage and asked who's it was. "It's mine." I replied and proceeded to explained myself. My parents didn't approve at all and wanted me to take it back immediately but it was to late in the day. It was Saturday night, the bike shop was closed for the weekend and I had to be back in boarding school early Monday morning. My brother who was only twelve and wasn't the legal age yet to drive the moped was told to drive it back to the store while my mom was driving her car behind him. My dad was not able to drive a moped or a car because of his impaired eye sight. I learned a very big lesson right there!



Learning from my mistakes, I decided that honesty is the best way to move forward in life. Forward back to college life. I enthusiastically explained to my parents the exciting news that I was offered a room in Elke's student home in Gent. It was only for three weeks and it didn't cost me anything. This was THE opportunity I thought to learn to live on my own and I was surrounded and supported by Elke and her family. I being the oldest daughter of three siblings was always the trail blazer. My parents were learning how to handle and respond to all my exciting ideas towards freedom and independence! They probably didn't like that idea very much but supported me anyway! My parents weren't allowed to do what they wanted to do by my dad's mom and promised themselves they would support their children in their goals and freedom. I am immensely grateful for that!

My parents have always supported my expansion of learning and experiencing new things. My mom invited me into many experiences in life. I can recall many ideas she came up with while asking me if I was interested doing these things. I always said yes. This led me to several years of ballet school, gymnastics club, swim club, girl scouts and even a chess club. One day when I was eleven years old my mom asked me if I would be interested in going for a two week vacation to Majorca by myself. She knew an older Spanish couple that lived there. I would fly on an airplane by myself (securely guided by flight attendants) and go on a vacation to this Island in the

Mediterranean Sea. Sure I said again without much thought and there I went, by myself on a airplane for a two week adventure in Majorca. Once I was there I felt home sick, but what could I do, I was literally on an island in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea! I didn't speak Spanish and they didn't speak Dutch. Calling home didn't help, it only made it worse. I had a hard time for the first few days, I talked to myself and gave myself some hope thinking I was almost half way. The last week was much more pleasant and went faster.

Little did I know then that all these experiences, the two weeks by myself in Majorca, attending boarding school, the three months in America as an exchange student, experiencing my own student apartment and freedom as a college student in Gent were all preparations towards the big future change in my life of moving permanently to America.

Those three weeks living in Elke's student home in Gent were life changing! I tasted the freedom of having my own space. I learned to be responsible for my own time, my school schedule and the prepping of meals. I learned a lot from observing how Elke and her sisters handled their household, shared their chores and cooked their creative healthy meals I had never tried before such as tofu, seitan and tempe. I cruised the city with my own bike. In the day time I biked to school and at night I often visited other friends' student apartments or went out with friends exploring the buzzing night life in Gent.

Being born in the City of Gent and those freedom giving and life changing experiences as a college student there are why I still call Gent my favorite city in the world.

The end of those three amazing weeks were approaching soon and I did not like the idea of giving up this new found freedom and space. While I was sitting in class, I thanked Elke for her gracious gift that I truly enjoyed and told her I was sad that the three weeks were coming to a end.

Roos Coppens, who was sitting on the other side of me in class said, "Hey you can stay in my student room, I am never there, I live with my boyfriend in his apartment. My grandmother pays for my apartment, she knows I am staying with my boyfriend and she would not mind you staying there". What? Did I hear this correctly? Was I dreaming? I was offered another student home to live in before the three weeks were even over? Incredible! I would love to accept this gracious offer, I thought, and live in Rose's student room. Immediately feelings of guilt kicked in. I can't really stay there while her grandmother is paying. Is this an okay thing to do? I was questioning the integrity of my situation. I didn't dare to accept this gift. Somehow I felt accepting this free offer was not okay or acceptable. Maybe I can ask my parents if they would be willing to help pay or maybe there is a way I can make some money to help pay for the room. I didn't know Roos' grandmother and I felt there had to be some contribution from my side.

Friday after school I took the train home from Gent to Deinze. While walking from the train station to our book store, just two blocks away, I was wondering how to approach the subject with my parents. I really wanted a solution to show up. When I walked into the store, my mom was very busy with customers and I went upstairs into the kitchen. My grandmother was just leaving the kitchen and asked how my week was? I shared my adventures and told her I was really enjoying living as a student in Gent. I also shared that I was offered a free room by my friend Roos and that I really would like to take on this gift but didn't feel like I could just stay there for free without contributing in the rent. Without a pause my grandmother responded, "I will pay for the room." What did she just say? I couldn't believe it! My grandmother was offering to pay for the room? I had totally not expected this as a solution, and so fast! Was I really going to have my own room in a student home for the rest of the year? This was probably not what my parents were really hoping for, but they did let me go. Because of my grandmother's contribution I was able to keep that room through all years of college. Recently, my mom shared with me that she didn't feel she had a choice in the matter. There were many instances where my grandmother had made major decisions for my parents without their consent or input. I see now that their relationship was based on manipulation and control. As a teenager I knew there were conflicts between my parents and my grandmother but I wasn't aware that paying my college room was another act of controlling my parents life without their input.



Living as a student in Gent was a very significant time in my life. I learned more about life, the world, the system, the culture, relationships and myself by living on my own in Gent than I could have ever learned in books or from school in a life time! In my experience school teaches you one thing very well, and that is how to retain information just long enough to be able to take the tests. Besides the information the schools offered me, from pre-school at age two and a half through college, I was not provided any authentic life wisdom or valuable life experiences. They didn't teach me how to navigate life or how to respond to life's challenges. My experiences living on my own in the city taught me all of this and much more. It helped me grow and expand in so many valuable ways.

I did graduate with excellence with a Bachelor degree in Orthopedagogy. Not because I am smarter than those who didn't go to college. I wasn't a perfect student! I loved

the freedom of living on my own as a student in Gent and was enjoying my time outside of the class room much more then the time inside those walls. I didn't spend much time studying and I learned how to pass the tests with excellent scores, sometimes with the help of some incredible miracles!

Miracles Do Happen!



**Mieke's Voice 2019©Mieke Benton
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(Sharing permitted with my name and email included)
(With a simple email let me know if you like
to be added or removed from this list).

Mieke's Voice - Part 1

- Week 1 - Introduction part 1
- Week 2 - A Rough Start
- Week 3 - Vision
- Week 4 - History Lesson
- Week 5 - Bookstore Caecilia
- Week 6 - Invisible Hand
- Week 7 - My family, a circle of 5. Part 1 - My parents Anny & Hugo
- Week 8 - My family, a circle of 5. Part 2 - My brother Jeroen
- Week 9 - My family, a circle of 5. Part 3 - My sister Kathleen
- Week 10 - My family, a circle of 5. Part 4 - Something about myself, Mieke
- Week 11 - Encounters with extraterrestrials
- Week 12 - The Movie E.T. - The Extra -Terrestrial
- Week 13 - What happens after the body dies?

Mieke's Voice - Part 2

- Week 14 - Introduction part 2
- Week 15 - Expressing my authentic nature
- Week 16 - Sexuality - part 1 - Unity
- Week 17 - Sexuality - part 2 - Separation
- Week 18 - Mieke's Voice - Part 1
- Week 18 - Sexuality - part 3 - Menstruation
- Week 19 - Intimate Relationships
- Week 20 - America - part 1 - Newspaper Article
- Week 21 - America - part 2 - Stepping into a movie
- Week 22 - Another taste of freedom as a college student