



Dominique Voss, a college student in the Netherlands who spent a year as an exchange student at Chippewa Valley High School, is creating a documentary about the Flint water crisis.

Photo provided by Dominique Voss

Former CVHS exchange student from Netherlands creates Flint water-based documentary

By: [Nick Mordowanec](#) | **Fraser - Clinton Township Chronicle** | Published June 19, 2018

CLINTON TOWNSHIP — The impact of the Flint water crisis has had a ripple effect around the world.

A prime example is Dominique Voss, 20, who hails from the Netherlands. In 2015, through a nonprofit program called Youth for Understanding, she flew around the world and attended Chippewa Valley High School for one year.

She said she has always had an obsession with the United States and its culture, first visiting back in 2013 as a tourist. Her experience was fulfilling, but it didn't satisfy what she really wanted: to blend in as an everyday American who isn't just in town to see the sights.

She was on a plane to Detroit just two months after signing up to be an exchange student.

"I lived with (a host family) throughout the school year," she said. "I attended classes just like any other student. I joined sports teams and clubs. I got the full American high school experience."

She enjoyed the American education system's openness in opportunity. She enjoyed being able to choose essentially whatever classes she preferred — she would have elected to take history, government and English classes even if they weren't required.

"One of the differences between American high schools and Dutch high schools is the wide selection of classes (the United States) offers," she said. "I was able to take photography, creative writing, yearbook and psychology. That made me realize how much I wanted to become a journalist."

She left Chippewa and the nation, going on to study journalism in her home country. She said she has always loved writing, taking photographs, filming and editing. She used to write original scripts and gather all of the kids on her block to participate.

While at Chippewa, she became enthralled with the crisis in Flint — even though no one really discussed it.

“It wasn’t until I got back to the Netherlands that I started to realize what had been and still is happening less than an hour from where I lived,” she said. “I kind of felt embarrassed to have missed that. I’m usually more aware of stuff like that.”

She began to follow Flint advocates, local news outlets and Gov. Rick Snyder to get updates on the ongoing situation. When funding ceased for the bottled water program, she decided to film her own minidocumentary to show that Flint residents relied on nongovernmental entities just to survive on a day-to-day basis.

She ended up interviewing residents, advocates and volunteers. She reached out to Flint public officials, but they ignored her requests.

“I wanted to show people from all over the world, but especially people from the Netherlands, what is still happening in Flint,” she said. “That’s why I wanted to start using bottled water as my only water source myself. It’s nowhere close to what the citizens of Flint have to go through on a daily basis, but that’s the point. What I did was an experiment. For them, it’s reality.”

Karen Milczynski taught Voss family and consumer science when she was at CVHS. The class centers on financial, time and stress management, and landlord and contract agreements, etc. — things adults encounter in the “real world.”

She remembers Voss as quiet and subdued, but she noted how attentive, focused and organized Voss was. She quickly noticed Voss’ ability to convey thoughts through writing.

“She’s always been real ambitious,” Milczynski said. “Big goals, big dreams.”

Last spring Voss returned to Michigan and surprised her teacher with a visit.

Voss is so humble, Milczynski said, that she never mentioned her pursuit in journalism, nor did she mention her intention to create a Flint-based documentary.

“(Voss) never even said a word about it,” she said. “I had no idea this was coming. ... Just the compassion and empathy that she wanted to convey to other people (means a lot).”

Voss discusses residents’ out-of-pocket costs for bottled water, and local officials’ and news networks’ responses.

“The investigative part is seeing people at their most vulnerable moments,” Milczynski said. “(Voss) has maturity beyond her years.”

For Voss, it was a cultural awakening. She realized why she loves the U.S. in the first place, where community support is vital to cohesion.

“I’ve seen so many people over these past few years collect money to buy pallets of water. I’ve seen them drive trucks and deliver water to the disabled,” Voss said. “They’ve tried to educate each other about their rights, and they’ve never once stopped fighting.

“Of course they would rather not be in this position in the first place, but the point is, they don’t sit and mope around. They get up and do something about it. That’s the message I wanted to get across. I think we can all learn something from that.”

Voss will be interning at a Dutch news network in New York this fall, and she said she is excited about where the future will take her. She is still very much obsessed with America, so much so that she plans to study American political science once she attains her bachelor’s degree.

As for the people in Flint she met and grew to admire, there's still work left to do. She said pipe replacements will take at least two more years. Even though she wishes the crisis would end, she knows the dynamics at play.

"You have to be realistic," she said. "None of the people in Flint will rest until the very last pipe is replaced and has clean water coming out of their faucet."

[Watch Voss' documentary on YouTube.](#)