

Jill Van Lokeren, Distinguished Alumni 2015, Visits Wyoming High School

Written by Rachel Carter.

Rachel Carter is a junior at Wyoming High School.

Monday May 18th brought a buzz of excitement to Wyoming High School as the Wyoming School Foundation and the Distinguished Alumni Society brought the 2015 Distinguished Alumni, Jill Van Lokeren, to speak to the students. Van Lokeren first addressed the school as a whole, and then met with each class in a panel question and answer session along with former distinguished alumni, Ambassador Thomas Boyatt ('51) and Dan Jones ('56).

Jill Van Lokeren graduated from Wyoming High School in 1986, and attended the University of New Hampshire. Not initially knowing what she wanted to do, Van Lokeren encouraged the idea of exploration and curiosity in college and beyond. "I'm excited to find out, and I'm going to be the best me I can be' should be the attitude undecided majors should have", she says. After finding her passions lay in the television business, Van Lokeren went in a liberal arts direction, graduating with a Bachelor of Arts in Communications. She worked her way through internships in New Hampshire and at the Sally Jesse Raphael Show in New York City, making sure to go above and beyond in every effort to make her mark.

Van Lokeren then set her sights even higher, sending her resumé to the Oprah Winfrey Show, because, in her words, "Why not?" After walking into Harpo Studios, she knew this where she was supposed to be, and did her best to impress, relying on her optimism and creativity. Van Lokeren credits her success in getting the job by even thinking that it was possible, and she encouraged students over and over to "dream big for your life," because "your life is yours to design." While moving up in the ranks, Van Lokeren transitioned from producing to supervising to writing scripts to become the executive vice president of Harpo Studios, and she is now on her way to California to become the creative executive vice president of the Oprah Winfrey Network.

In describing her journey through life, Van Lokeren strongly emphasized the idea of dreaming big for yourself. She urged students to gain as much experience as they could through internships, and to follow their passions and interests in life. "If you know what you want to do, get in the door and get noticed," she says. Van Lokeren also reminded students to be kind and to treat others as you want to be treated. She considers her job with Oprah the hardest work of her life, the passion of her life, what defines her as a person, and what she is most proud of. Van Lokeren credits all of her incredible accomplishments to her strong roots here at Wyoming High School, and she urged students to take the experiences they gain here, good and bad, and grow from them.

Joining Van Lokeren for Foundation Day this year was Ambassador Thomas Boyatt and Dan Jones. They took part in the panel question and answers sessions, and brought a different perspective and other source of inspiration to the students. Ambassador Boyatt's words of wisdom were both enlightening and interesting, adding another unique voice to the message of Foundation Day. Both Ambassador Boyatt and Van Lokeren attribute their successes in life to

hard work, believing in themselves, a little bit of luck, according to Boyatt, but most importantly, their strong foundation here at Wyoming High School.