

# The Road to Hope

By Greg Chandler

As it happened, Rachel Syens '11 of Holland, Mich., went to college just a few miles from home, but it wasn't a choice she took for granted.

Quite the contrary, Syens started visiting colleges the summer after her sophomore year of high school, and over a two-year period visited 15 colleges and universities in six states, ranging from Hope to Harvard University.

She knew what she wanted. Most of the schools she visited were smaller, liberal arts schools, such as Calvin and Kalamazoo colleges in West Michigan, Wittenberg and Denison universities in Ohio and Lake Forest College in Illinois.

"I was looking for a college with a strong emphasis in the liberal arts, which for me,

meant a school where I could take a variety of classes and where I could continue to play in the orchestra without having to major in music, and become involved with a variety of opportunities," she said. "I also wanted a Christian school where I could continue to build upon and grow in my faith."

Born in Holland, Syens became familiar with Hope as a youngster, frequently attending theatre performances and sporting events. Her parents, Marvin '75 and Jodi Japinga '75 Syens, graduated from Hope, and her grandfather, Norm "Bunko" Japinga, is a longtime college employee and enthusiastic supporter of the athletic program.

But when it came time to select a college, it was solely Rachel's call.

"We told her right up front the decision was hers, but we wanted her to go through a pretty thorough investigation (of her options)," Marvin Syens said.

In her junior year, Syens visited Hope during a college visitation day. She then had two overnight visits to campus, which sold her on the campus atmosphere.

"Everyone seemed really friendly, and it just felt right for me to be there," Rachel said.

Syens was accepted at several of the schools. In the end, she selected Hope.



Freshman Rachel Syens of Holland, Mich., didn't need travel far to move to campus in August, but the trip was backed up by hundreds of miles on the road and serious

research. She and her parents (Jodi and Marvin, both Class of '75, pictured) visited 15 schools in six states in the two years en route to Move-In Day 2007.

"We're thrilled. We're absolutely thrilled," Jodi Syens said. "We would have been happy with any choice that she felt good about."

"We know she's going to be getting a great education, and we like the faith-based atmosphere," Jodi said.

moment she stepped on campus to move into her residence hall.

"On move-in day, there were tons of OA's (orientation assistants) waiting around, ready to take all of my luggage up to my dorm room," she said. "One guy even helped us take apart the bunk beds and move the furniture around."

Rachel says her favorite part of the weekend was a Saturday night experience at the Dow Center which organizers dubbed Playfair.

"When the doors opened, we were sent running through a line of OA's and of our peers that eventually snaked throughout the entire gym, giving out high-fives and getting excited," she said. "Then we spent the evening playing all sorts of games in groups, partners, teams – it was just so incredibly fun."

Like most incoming students, Rachel is adjusting to being on her own and managing her time. She's also having to adjust to differences in class schedule from when she was in high school.

"In high school, I was at school all day, and I had the same classes every day, five days a week," she said. "In college, it seems strange to not have class until 2 in the afternoon, or have a two-hour block of no classes during the day, but I'm sure in time, I will get used to it."

Like many of Hope's incoming freshman class, Syens combined academic excellence in high school with involvement in activities outside the classroom. She played the bass in the school orchestra, served as the character chairperson of Holland High School's National Honor Society, was involved in the SADD (Students Against Destructive Decisions) chapter, and also participated in the Model United Nations program hosted by Hope. She says the Model UN experience, where she had to take on the role of a delegate of another country, was an eye-opener.

"You had to use a perspective that was not your own. It gives you a different perspective on the world," she said.

Syens plans to be involved in Model UN this school year as a student advisor, and will also perform with the Hope Symphonette and Orchestra. She has also expressed interest in writing for *The Anchor*, the college's student newspaper, her mother said.

Syens's interest in world affairs also influenced her choice of major. She plans to major in international studies, possibly with a minor in communications. She is enthusiastic about her classes, and couldn't be happier to attend college in her hometown.

"It's a place you want to be, and it's a place you want in your town," she said.

