

Rotex Round-Up

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Submissions by:

District 5060 Outbound Students

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After the past nine months in Lemgo, Nordrhein-Westfalen, Germany, I am coming to the end of my exchange year. I've been in three different families, gone on two different Tours, and have had some life-changing experiences. I recently got back from my eighteen-day Europe Tour with 47 other exchange students, and had an absolutely incredible time. In eighteen days we visited 8 different countries, and 14 different cities, all with one bus. I made such friendships there, it's hard, impossible, to put into words. I cried my eyes out when I had to say goodbye. My third and last host family picked me up after my tour (which was a little strange, because I was exhausted, had dirty clothes, and only wanted to sleep) and I quickly settled in. My host-parents took off two days after I got here to visit America, so my seventeen-year-old host-sister and I lived on our own for a week. That was pretty cool. I live away from the city now, on a farm, so it's always quiet here. That was something new too, my first two families were in the city, and I could go anywhere with my bike. Now, I could bike fifteen minutes to the "next-door neighbors."

I am quite involved in the musical aspect of my city: I sing in a chamber choir directed by my first host-father (I used to sing in the big concert choir of his, too, but I can't anymore), I accompany the school choir, and I sing a couple solos now and then, too. The Germans definitely have a bigger respect for music than us North-Americans. There aren't any more language-problems, but it was quite the hill to climb at the beginning. My tip to every single exchange student would be to at least TRY to learn the language before you leave. It will help, A LOT!!! I'm not really looking forward to going home, because I don't want to say goodbye to my friends here. I have absolutely amazing German friends. I feel like I've known them my entire life and I am totally immersed in their group.

This year has been life-changing, unforgettable, and one of the best times of my life. Just like Rotary said, there were good times, and bad times. I am only grateful that I was able to make it past the bad times and now only focus on the good.

See you soon Canada!

Amelia Min Venditti

I'm really sorry about not responding/updating in such a long time but I'm sure you understand how busy things can get. I am currently in my new home (The Camaná Ice Factory) where my family also works.

We own the factory. I am going to high school again, but to their "Sr. year" which is with kids the age of sophomores. The thing is I already graduated from high school here this last December. All my friends are studying in Arequipa or Lima now and only comes home for weekends. I recently went on a trip across South America for pretty much all of March which was really quite extraordinary. February finished up nicely with another batch of carnival madness (water balloon-throwing in the streets mostly) and in March, we had a good start to our trip by missing our bus to Arequipa. We were, of course, last minute packing and also it was my host-sister's birthday party; it was pretty crazy. Well, we arrived to the bus station to see the bus running away down the street. It was quite demoralizing. Someone said "The bus stops at the PUNTA!!!" which is the beach. So, we got in my car and my mother sped us down to the beach where we boarded. It was pretty silly actually. One of our friends was supposed to ride with us and was sitting on the bus with a raised eyebrow. Anyway, after that, our stay in Arequipa was pretty constructive. I got a package from my parents (after waiting about 2 hours in the post office and meeting some Mormon missionaries) and we also got to say goodbye to our friend from Arizona who went home. We set off in omnibus the night of March 6th, all 30 of us. There were 10 kids from Rotary Clubs outside of Yanahuara (in Arequipa) and we were all very enthusiastic about the trip. 10 hours later we got to the Bolivian border and were exhausted and tired and hungry. It was also freezing. We, could, however, see Lake Titicaca. We also were confined in the bus for 2 hours until the border opened. Upon crossing the border and changing money to apparently "fake-looking" boliviano coins, we once again set off. I was rewarded with a huge migraine in La Paz where the altitude, once again, took a hold of me. I relaxed after shopping around and slept for 12 hours on our second day of the trip. From La Paz we traveled (by plane!!) to Santa Cruz, on the edge of the selva (jungle). The thing is, the last time I went from La Paz to Santa Cruz there was a strike on the highway and we tried to go around (it was a 22 hour bus trip) and the protesters got angry and threw a rock through our window and hit a girl in the eye. I was elated about going by plane. Santa Cruz was very humid. From there, we took our 12 hour train trip to Brazil. We ended up in Campo Grande, where, thanks to a misunderstanding, we were separated between two hotels. We had a free day to browse the town and play in a fountain in the park, along with practicing our Portuguese....hehehe that went well. Anyway, we then went to Rio de Janeiro. It was really really impressive. The buildings were pretty and everything was HUGE. We went to see the (HUGE) Jesús standing on the hill with his arms outstretched. From there I could see, it seemed the whole world. It's a neat experience. We also went to the "Sugar Loaf" by cable-car. It was pretty sweet as well.....hmmmm I got to go to Copacabana beach!!!! And I realize why someone would write a song about Ipanema. I was taken aback by the beauty of it all. I kidnapped some sand from the beach as a memory. From there we went to the hometown of 2 girls who live in Arequipa this year. Blumenau is predominantly German in heritage. We went to a bbq in the house of one of the girls which was really amazing. I could NEVER imagine going home after half of my year (...not to mention with all my exchange student friends!!!). From there we went to Florianapolis (another beach in southern Brazil) where the water was a

little chillier but still burning compared to Camaná's beach. Well, from there, we had another 24-hour bus ride to Iguazú. That day in bus was worth it. We went not only to Iguazú National Park but got to get really close to some really huge waterfalls. In Iguazú I got to stand at a point where I could see Paraguay and Brazil at the same time, while standing in Argentina. One really silly thing they made us do going into Argentina was that we had to get off our bus to (get this) Wipe our feet on a mat. Then we could get back on the bus. We teased the Brazilian girls about the Argentineans not wanting "Brazilian dirt" in their country. From Iguazú we headed to Buenos Aires. Being 2 or 3 days ahead of schedule, we stayed almost four days in Buenos Aires. I am so so happy we did. By the way, my favorite part of the whole tour was Buenos Aires. The first night there, I called my friend Lauti who was in Yakima last year and we went out to dinner in the center and then took a walk by the river and went to a museum and got to talk. Seeing Lauti was really nice, but the biggest thing was that we kept in contact all year. I can't wait to see that happening. I hope if I ever go back to Perú I'll have a place to stay with some friends. That is the joy of exchange: you make friendships from all over the world. Anyway, in Buenos Aires I got to "explore" a bit more, if you will. We took a tour of their version of Independence Hall and the Presidential building, but we also had a city tour taking us to "La Boca". I don't know if any of you are up on soccer, but, apparently Boca Juniors is the best team from Argentina. A couple guys on the tour bought a variety of Boca Juniors scarves, hats, and flags. I was sad to leave Buenos Aires and head south, but then we went to Bariloche. It seemed like home. I really liked Bariloche as well. There were mountains and ski resorts close. The town of Bariloche itself seemed like an Argentinean version of Whistler in BC. Personally I think it's a bit more exotic to go on a skiing trip to Bariloche...hehe. Anyway, we got to go to a lookout and see all the lakes nearby. One of my friends who is going on exchange this year is going to Patagonia and that's really neat because it's gorgeous. The thing about Argentina is they speak a really silly form of Spanish. Wait...I'm not saying better or worse, just silly. Anyway, they say "vos" instead of "tú" for "you". They also have another verb form. Also, instead of the y sound they say "sh" which sounds really odd. But, I tried to speak like that while I was there. Anyway, we got to go out one night in Bariloche and I got to see the stars. This year the only stars I can see that I recognize from the US is Orion's belt. I know there are others, but I also see some that I know I had never seen before. I think that is really neat. From there, we went to Chile. Now, you have to know something about Chile. Perú and Chile have this little...thing....you could say "rivalry". Down south in Puerto Montt it really wasn't bad at all. I really liked the hotels we stayed at in Chile. Both of them had kitchens, so we cooked. One night we cooked dinner and we got to eat breakfast in the hotel/apartment. Also, from Santiago, we took a day-trip to Viña del Mar and Valparaiso. It was really pretty seeing the Chilean coast. They told us that Viña del Mar is where all the people from the big city go for summer. I realized that is similar to all the Ariquepeños coming to Camaná in summer. I also gathered some sand from the beach there. Everyone was pretty much out of money and frustrated that the Chileans didn't understand us, plus everything is really expensive in Chile, plus Perú is better (hehe), so we were pretty happy about

taking a PLANE from Santiago to Arica, about 40 minutes from Perú. (My ears didn't pop from the plane for about 2 days, though....) Upon crossing the border, everyone was really content and also we bought Inca Kola. YAY! Anyway, then we went to Tacna and a restaurant that one kid's host family owns, then ended up in Arequipa. We stayed in Arequipa a couple days to get cds of everyone's photos. From there, I've been going to school, making new friends and writing about my experiences here. It seems so short now, now that my year is almost over. It's weird how my WHOLE year now just seems like days on a calendar. Alright, I'll stop reminiscing....I hope everything is going well. I really miss you all.....I'll be seeing you all soon. (Relatively speaking).

Take care,

Bonnie Klohn

Sponsor: Kamloops.

Host: Chambery, France

How can one sum up a year in a foreign country?

To start, I could talk about the differences in culture.

Beyond the wine and cheese, I began to discover the deeper differences only at about the 8 month mark. It takes really a lot talking and above all listening to discover really what and more importantly, why, this group of people feels a certain way.

Things like their work ethic, and family values, respect in the community are all things that take time to understand. For example, the school system in France is such that hardly any students take time off in between high school and university. They are all shocked and amazed to find out that so many Canadians take time between the two. The French eat dinner as a family, and lunch too on Wednesday, all the time. If everyone home, there is no question, they eat together. My family did too in Canada, but it is much more common here. Things like this really show the values of the people; education and family in this case. Its really isn't better or worse than Canadian values, but simply, (I think we all know what's coming next :) different.

It's for that that I love the experience that we're having. Guided visits of cities and hotels defiantly don't teach you as much about the way the people really live here. When you're among them, you have to live like them, eat their bread and drink their wine and eventually you grow to understand why they do it like that.

I could talk about the language:

When I came here I already spoke French on an understandable level. However, there was still a lot of progress to be made.

I came to a point in my exchange about a month ago, when I realized that I really had become better at French, despite the feeling of lack of progression.

The longest word in the French language is "anticonstitutionnellement" meaning anticonstitutionally, its pretty close, and the other day in history I asked a question that went like this, "So they French people never really thought the depression would end, is that why they reacted anticonstitutionally?" WOW the entire class stopped turned around and started clapping.

No, not really but we did get a good laugh.

Its really rewarding to laugh when the French laugh, understand their deeper thoughts and be able to communicate without an extraordinary effort.

During the bus trip through Europe the Franglais that was spoken was incredible. Sentences such as "I'm just going to march over there" or " I will te explain it later" were so common we ceased to notice our deficiency in English. It was just easier to say the word that first came to mind. Everyone understood.

So really, doing my best here to sum it up:

This year has been full of blissful understandings; of triumphant moments, where everything was clear for the first time, be it the language, culture or just something as simple as the bus system. Now, just as I feel that I'm coming to a point where it's under control, where I search to find things to understand, as opposed to just trying to keep my head above water, its time to go home. I have so many mixed emotions, but most of all disbelief. I knew one day it would come to an end, but deep down inside I never really trusted myself on that one. I feel, of course, happy to see my family in Canada, but scared too, to return to find my LITTLE brother taller than me. I am going to miss France, not so much in the sense of the country, but rather my life here; the mosaic of people that make up what this exchange has really been about for me.

Going home also means changing lives again. As if three times I had to change houses, cram suitcases and relearn so much more than where the cutlery goes, weren't enough, I have to do it twice more. Once to go home, and then again in less than 2 months after that to move to university.

It has been a year of learning and understandings achieved. I have loved it, and will continue to, especially now, for the next 4 weeks, before I turn the page, and start another adventure.

Jennie R

All things considered this last 10 months and four days have been nothing more and nothing less than a whirlwind. After my family left India from our Adventure Extraordinaire in the South, my life has been a quest of trying to find a stable host family, something to do with my remaining months, and the perfect pair of Indian shoes. In the shoes department I succeeded, but other than that my greatest success has been to accept the constant chaos in my Indian life and just go with it. I've shifted hosts 9 times in the last 7 months (all times being purely coincidental- I'm starting to believe that I actually cause families to move, have family problems or want to renovate their homes) and during this time I have also managed to learn Reiki up to the second level, practice pranayama and yoga, celebrate Holi, roam in Pune and the Himalayas, shop with an iron fist, experience earthquakes and curfews, and maintain a social life. Soon I'll be working in a school for slum children where I have been recruited to teach a unique blend of English and ballet, which I am fairly excited about as it will be one of the only times in India where I am getting to go anywhere near touching poverty. Holi came in mid march; it was by far the best Hindu festival that we had seen so far. The roads were terrorized by people of all ages fully determined to change the colour of the city. By the end of the day, my hair, skin and clothing had been fully tie-dyed to match the rest of the soaking, dancing and crazed population. The insides of my nostrils and ears have not been the same since. So how do I sum up a year where every day has been different, where there hasn't been a single constant for me to talk about? I started thinking about what I was going to tell the Rotary club at home in my presentation. I can't honestly tell them that this year has been a steady incoming flow of self confidence and cultural learning – the only steady thing has been my increase of weight and decrease of money. But perhaps if one thing could be said for this year is that it has set me up for life. The forty nine weeks spent here has shown me life in one million shapes and forms and has taken me to a thousand places in the world and in my mind. When I compare the shape of my being at the beginning of this year, I think that I was somewhat like an island dweller, if that makes any sense. In a way I was unborn and my life began in India. I will tell them that I saw floods and fires and accidents and earthquakes. That I saw babies and weddings and festivals and birthdays. And I will tell them that I saw temples and workplaces homes and schools, trains, buses, beaches, jungles and cities. I will tell them that I got cursed by he-shes and blessed by gurus and that I danced a lot and got sick a lot. And that the people I talked to, was interviewed by, watched me and were watched by me all will never see their own or my own culture the same way simply by my being there. Now I'm going home in a month. I remember looking into a toilet bowl ten months ago and thinking that these days would never come. It's

called a roundup for a reason so I will round this up: my own imagination could not have conceived such an adventure for myself; my life is changed forever, and I will remember India with chills up my spine – and that is a good sign- for eternity.

Jennifer Da Costa

Hello Canada and Rotary friends. I'm writing briefly as I'm just getting ready to go on my 3 week Trek away trip around Australia! We travel a bit south and then through central Australia and then down the east coast via the Great Barrier Reef. The only part about it that I'm not looking forward to is the long long bus trips. The first day we travel 900km. Life has been going by so fast. I've just recently moved in with my last host family and I love them. I finally have a younger host brother. They took me on a road trip to Melbourne and Adelaide where we celebrated my host dad's mum's 70th Birthday so I also got to meet the family.

Before I moved Mum and Sheldon (my brother) came to visit. It was SOOOO good seeing them. A bit strange at first though because you only remember certain things about people and of course they change as well. But all it all it was the best having them. We stayed with my councilor and then spent some time in Sydney sightseeing. My favorite part was the Taronga Zoo which I reckon has the best views of Sydney....lucky animals.

I'm coming to a point; well no I've come to a point, where I feel a great pride not only for my own country but Australia as well. I've been getting a lot of comments about an Aussie accent too! Celebrating Australia Day was amazing. I and the other exchange student from America sang the national anthem at the tops of our lungs twice at a live concert we went to. We also celebrated Anzac Day where they pay their respect to those lost in the wars.

I've been quite active with my club and when Mum was here she came to meetings and volunteered with us all. We were getting up at 5am on Easter weekend to serve campers hot brekky at the local Folk Festival and I've been helping out at the netball canteen. And of course I've been to many Rotary functions that take place such as meetings and guest speakers.

All in all this has been an amazing experience and I wouldn't change it for anything. This has been nothing but the best experience of my life. I've gained so much respect for the world and how other people live and by doing so I've grown up. I've matured into an adult who has confidence and a great deal of independence. I'm very hurt to think about having to leave this place that I now call home but I

do miss my home in Canada as well. Reality will set in soon as I busily apply for university. Living with and watching how 4 different families interact has been amazing and taught me to appreciate how great life truly is at home. I've also got to admire genuine qualities of my host parents and siblings (loving host mothers who will do anything out of their way for you and fun loving dads who are just big goofs at times but still there when you need them. The hardest part of leaving will be saying goodbye to my friends and families who have become true loving families to me. But it's better to have loved, grown, and opened my eyes to the world knowing that this journey would someday have to come to an end, than to have never done it at all. I'm truly thankful from the bottom of my heart.

Outbound Youth Exchange Student – **Kristiana Sibson** to **ARGENTINA**. (Dist. 4820)

De mi corazòn, de la Argentina.

For being considered the "land of silver", through paperwork, waiting and a plane ticket, I stumbled upon a gold-mine.

August 15th, I took my first few steps in Argentina – little did Ellen and I know that at the time, we were stepping through the wrong area of the airport – which might have explained the lack of people exiting where we did and it must have been our smiling where-are-those-Rotarians-look that a gracious taxi driver told us, in English, we arrived at the wrong gate. Upon arriving at the International Flights area, *there* we found Ellen`s family and the Rotary representatives waiting for us and with signs coloured and decorated, Canadian flags galore! Soon after, we were both rushed off to opposite ends of the parking lot, and I was taken to lunch with the Rotary couple, and had my first tastes of asado (Argentine bbq) and flan: lots of fat, lots of flavour-lacking potato salad and chinchulin. To you all, I dare not lie: I was disgusted and had fears of having to live off bread and water for the entire year. ...But as we all know, first impressions are usually not the ones that tend to stick around for, say, a year. ;)

My first month I was a faithful reader of my dictionary, the hand gestures and consistent Spanish of my counsellors Josefina and Cuqui, and days keeping my eyes glued to the sidewalk... and *still* managing to trip on the uneven tiles!

Along came September: Hello Spring! School started for a month after my arrival, which by this point, I understood the majority of things being said, but after getting used to understanding the voices of my Counsellors, the kids at school appeared to be speaking Portuguese, nevermind the Spanish that I came

to learn originally! Luckily, I was received well by my classmates, meaning I was invited out, presented to `cute cousins` and introduced as "She speaks English!". Another stroke of luck with my school experience was that the teachers acknowledged my presence... and the fact that we didn't speak a common language, therefore omitting me from tests (I took my first test in November). Consider yourselves lucky, North-Americans! Tests are handed out, multiple choice, true-false, diagram-filled, space-provided, grade A paper... here, lined paper with a school stamp. This, my friends, is a third-world highschool exam! (Don't get too excited though, they DO hand out questions you have to answer too).

A curious phenomenon in my school – perhaps because it is a private Catholic school – is the notable lack of toilet paper. One actually is required to ASK for toilet paper from the Preceptor (like a secretary). I thought the no-TP was just for a day, a protest against waste perhaps... but if so, the protest continues. All these curiosities aside, my school has committed teachers, social sciences and biological science programs, and every morning we are expected to stand in lines to salute the provincial and national flags before classes. Oh, and about the uniforms? Hearhear for time saved in the mornings!

Throughout the year I had my share of friends and families, all of which made my experience, made it real, feel special, and something that overall simplified – and intensified – my experience here in Argentina.

The family I was with for my first three months was a family that was required to take me out of obligation, seeing as their daughter was finishing her year abroad in New York. With this family, most times finding common ground was like walking on thin ice: ice breaks out below before any real steps can be taken. My host parents were frustrated with the little Spanish I knew, and just didn't seem to have the time to just want or be able to spend time with me. Now with the girls, my three host sisters? I got along so much better, language differences and all! The difficulty in my family I discovered nearer to the end of my stay with the family, was the static between my host-mum and I, polar-opposites in aspects ranging from the days of the week to wash clothing, all the way to how many days of the week a student should be with friends. As so many other exchange students in the past have commented, felt, or thought, I too thought at this time that I was doing something wrong, and went to my host-parents to talk about it the day before I was going to switch families. Through talking to them about it, I realized the "static" was just our different sets of values, and although values cannot change easily, I felt the change after speaking to them: relief, free of anxiety and worry, and most of all, glad to have settled things in that family before moving onto my next. I left no strings untied, nor any confusion in my wake. Only afterwards when I spent the Christmas holidays with my counsellors did I come to see and respect my experience, and their family so much more, in that household – I knew, then, that I survived the hardest part of my exchange, and perhaps even the hardest three months of my life as well.

My next family, the familia Guiñazù was in another city – having to do with being closer to Buenos Aires, the Capital– and right from my first few hours being in their household, I felt at home... And even was expected to set the table for dinner, just like my host-siblings!

A few days after my settling into the household with my host-parents, and 4 siblings, we drove in their little Peugeot all the way down to the south of the province, to a little city of 500 people called San Blas. I had heard that the "beach" experience in Argentina would be as in Mar del Plata or La Plata, where there are thousands of people on the beach, very shallow water, bronzing lotion and a few local soccer players... Bahía San Blas is a fisherman`s town, and during certain times of the year, in winter, it is basically uninhabited, one supermarket, one gas station, one apartment building (that we rented in for 9 days). That week, full of fishing, being in the sun, skipping rocks and catching over 80 fish in total over the week, the little fishing town, Shark Capital of Buenos Aires would sit very high on my list of places to come back to. Thank goodness none of us walked out of the town with a scar of our experience fishing for sharks one afternoon! .. Okay, so we didn`t catch GreatWhites, but little 2-, 3-footers!

The Guiñazú`s , complete with "our" new little cousin Josefina born in February a few days after I got back to Pergamino, have been kind enough to invite me back to celebrate family member`s birthdays all throughout March and one in April, and on the odd occasion I make a phonecall to check up on everything going on there in Pacheco, there in the city where I feel like I grew up all over again, surrounded by family.

Being at school again, in my "final year" for the second time – this time with Argentine compañeros – I have just been enjoying my time in this country that I now can equally call my home, can equally say I`ve lived in, I`ve walked in, I`ve cried in and, undoubtedly, grown up in.

Ive come to such a point living here, that no longer do I feel so much a stranger, or a student just having been here but a few 10 months, rather I feel as an immigrant would feel: I miss my home, but am just so in love with Argentina and the customs each day is made easier rather than harder. As goes through with each exchange student in a unique way, I think each of us comes to terms with the country, a sort of sense of being at peace with the good, the bad and the lines inbetween. No matter where one goes in life, there exists that challenge to adapt, the challenge to be, and the challenge to be true to oneself and beliefs in life itself. Positivity, "aprovechando" (making the most of) the days and nights, being free in thought and way, and comprehension have been aspects that have allowed me to live my life, start a new one for myself here, and with the added support of the Rotary club – ¡VIVA!

Speaking of Rotary...

Once a month I get to join in on a meeting to give a little bit of an update of how Ive been, how school is going, what I have been doing etc and just to be able to chat with the other Rotarians. Although the exchange students here seem to have less involvement in the projects that the club is performing at the time, the exchange students do not go unnoticed, nor without dinner-invites on occasion! Some Rotarians of which have children to be going out on exchange as soon as August! and still others in the coming year, however they remind me so much of how – I think? – my parents were asking the Inbound students about their experiences thusfar... and curious about the Inbounds countries!

Yes, once I was actually asked if we Canadians lived underground.

No.

Well, I cant speak for *everyone*.

And what makes more of an exchange? Oh yes, the EXCHANGE STUDENTS! Thanks to Rotary-organized trips to the North and South of Argentina, the 10 students in our district 4820 got to meet exchange students from other nearby districts here in Buenos Aires. Put a couple exchange students in a bus for 20 days and only pure havoc can break out, but with the best of music and best of stories!! So, informally, Id like to give a shout-out to the crazy Germans, dancing-stars Brazilians, the Belgium-France Alliance, guitarist from NewZealand, photographers from Austria and Denmark, the Producer from Bermuda, and the best-jokers from the States, the Unforgettable Western Canadians (What do you mean theres no pancakes left? WE MADE ABOUT 50!!), and of course, those ARGENTINOS that have opened my eyes to whole new styles of dance and music, and truly, the purpose of life: To live it!!

It is for now, and forever, that I will have a little piece of Argentina with me. Argentina as part of my childhood, Argentina part of my heart. And though I may be going to the other end of the parking lot now, I can always look back and see where I had been.

Liane Millington

I have to say that there are many things that I will miss when I have to go Home but there are some that I will miss more... like being stared at when I Walk into a room, being applauded when I conjugate in the "vos" form Correctly, being introduced as the "Canadian" (we are rare breed of stocky Northners), and the one thing that I couldn't have survived without, Ragnhild, my Norwegian roommate.

I would never say that two exchange students in the same house would be a Good idea but I am a product of the situation and I have to say that I Couldn't have lasted without the added support. The first I heard from my Host rotary was two days ago (I have been here for eight months already), and I attended a dinner with them and plastered on my best "rotary smile" and gave a stunning speech in Catalan (side note: to impress anyone here you DONT speak in Spanish you speak in Catalan if you want to be acknowledged). They didn't say much but I had three men ask for my phone number so that Their sons could phone me (they are worse then women, honestly!!!!). I have felt a little jealous of the students who are given everything by their host Clubs because Ragnhild and I haven't really been acknowledged. After the meeting when the president came up to me and said "you two girls are the

most amazing young ladies I have ever met" I couldn't help but feel a little pride. We kissed cheeks and then left. I can only hope that Ragnhild and I were able to give them a little taste of what the program brings to their doorsteps!! (and hopefully I get some phone calls from those sons).

I don't really have any Spanish friends, and I am not afraid to admit that. It's the truth and I am sure that I am not alone in this. I move day to day and learn more than I could have ever expected but I can't help but feel that I am missing out on a certain aspect of the culture. I have gone searching (don't think that I am sitting at home alone and feeling sorry for myself), for those Spanish friends and have come up dry. The language barrier has dropped away and I can even sing all the lines to "mi camisa negra" my mp3 player isn't my best friend anymore, and the computer won't hold my interest for more than the time needed to rattle off a quickie to mum. I am at loss for what more I can do but that is the only thing plaguing my mind.

The weather has turned to absolutely-incredibly-out-of-this-world-gorgeous and the beach calls my name constantly. I am done with school in 10 days and then I am off on my south of Spain adventure. Sevilla, Cordoba, Malaga, Alicante, here I come! I can't even think about leaving in two months, the idea of returning to a reality where I have to make real decisions beyond which night club I want to go to is rather frightening. AND I definitely can't imagine leaving Ragnhild behind, my mind is still struggling with that and I am sure that it will continue to fight the concept for a lot longer. Bessos Por tots (Catalan oh yeah...)

Morgan Klassen Distrikt 1930 Germany

Wow does time ever fly...It sounds like a cliché but it really is so...And I'm flying out tomorrow...There is a storm of feelings and a flurry to get ready!

And as Germany sets in bloom, poppies all over the farmers fields here, and the weather heats up and thunderstorms roll in...I could imagine myself living here for longer. Not only is the land more alive, but the people too after a long winter. There are more fests than I could list, with the typical 'German' brass music, and grilling, and school is coming to an end finally too.

The only downside to this time, is that we have to say goodbye...Two weekends before all the exchange students here in our district said good bye to each other...and I have never seen any cry like we did then...We were a really tight-knit group of 23...But now we have friends all over the world and that is valuable in itself...And today my class and I had to say good bye too...Haha after a year of getting up at six to be with these people they have really grown on me and I will miss them so much...

If I could sum up this year, that is, if I could even sum up this year, I would describe it not just as a learning experience, but as a living experience...How many people can say that they have spent a year overseas, learnt a new language (that is an extremely hard one by the way), and learnt how to live with dozens of different people, and to appreciate them for who they are and how they live even though it's different from what we're used to. This year was a challenge but as any exchangee could tell you, a challenge that was worth it.

Paula Burrows

I have now been in Japan for going on 9 months. The funny thing is I had to just count that on my fingers to see how many months it's been, I still remember counting down and thinking how long a year was. I can't believe how many valuable minutes I wasted back then trying to figure out how long I would be here. Now that it's almost time to come home I just can't believe it. It seems unfair. A year has always been such a long time but it's just speeding past this year. For my first day in Japan I was distraught. I thought that everything smelt like green tea (which I couldn't force down my throat) and that the air was heavy to breathe. I remember sitting in the shower crying on my first morning. I called home and cried, saying that I needed to come home right away. It's funny how quick I got over that. The next day my mum called and I told her I was too busy to talk. As soon as I took the time to talk to my host family I was completely content. I have had a few hard days over the months but I have never been homesick since that first day.

I have lived with a variety of different host families, none of them Rotarians. My first family was wonderful. I spent every weekend driving somewhere different with them. My 28 year old host sister Rie became one of the most important people to me throughout this exchange. School on the other hand was long. I learned a lot of Japanese, and had friends but no one to really talk to. My second host family on the other hand was very difficult. I had started to make friends from school, I joined the tea Ceremony club and I had met the other exchange students. I spent a lot of time with a certain Rotarian's family. Oku-Chan is not my counselor but he has acted as if he is since I got here. Whenever I'm unhappy I go to his house. I'm friends with one of his daughters and his wife is like my Japanese mum. I wouldn't be so happy if it weren't for him. My 3rd family I fit into wonderfully. Her daughter Tomoko is on exchange in Wenatchee right now. Right now I'm with my 4th family and it's truly like family. They are the first host family I have had that has allowed me out past the 9pm curfew as long as they know where I am and I have my cell. Everyone is quite young so they are very easy to speak with. They

enjoy having me here and have taken me on a bunch of trips and aren't at all bothered when I want to be with my friends.

Now is the happiest I have been since I got here. I have amazing friends at school and great friends that are exchange students. I can't believe I won't be here when my friends graduate next April. Last night they were asking what I wanted to do over summer holidays and I had to remind them that I was leaving a week earlier. It's going to be so difficult to say goodbye. I have 9 weeks left and in 2 I need to switch host families again, something I'm really not looking forward to.

Lately it seems I'm wasting a lot of time counting down the days until I come home, trying to slow time down. It's been an amazing year. I never imagined that I would want to just live here for the rest of my life but I do. Everything from the aloe flavored yogurt to the melon flavored bread and bowing to people while talking on my cell phone has become normal. I think the culture shock going home will be huge.

I look forward to seeing the other exchange students in July. Hope the rest of everyone's year is amazing.

Rachel Hotchko

A lot has happened since the last update, but I don't think I'll be able to remember it all. I went to Slovakia for a week for a Rotary Ski Camp and learned to snowboard, a little, for I got really sick half way through the week. I like Czech Rep better than Slovakia. I can understand Slovak a little bit though.

Last week I went to Austria for 4 days. We went to Vienna and Salzburg. I absolutely loved Salzburg for it's a smaller city with a rich history and well-preserved palaces and castles. I even managed to meet up with my real sister while in Vienna. It was great to see her after 8mon.

The weather has warmed up here so much that I'm outside a lot jogging, riding bikes or just wandering around still amazed that I'm here. I go to school often because I miss my friends when I skip. I'm still learning more and more Czech everyday since it's such a difficult language. I can get around easily but now I'm learning the more complicated grammatical stuff and the correct situations in which to use them. My English has declined unfortunately. Here's a recent conversation I had with one of my other exchange student friends from New Hampshire.

Me: "Did you ever figure out what they were doing?"

Amanda: "They were... I don't know..."

That was verbatim. She didn't even realize what she had said until I started laughing and told her. College will be oh, so fun.

Tomorrow I'm leaving for Euro Tour. I'm really looking forward to seeing Paris, Normandy, London (again) and Brussels. I'm NOT looking forward to the 20hours required to get to Paris...on a cramped bus with 40 screaming Rotary students that never sleep. It'll be such a wonderful experience though and I'll be excited to see everyone. Immediately after Euro Tour we have District Conference with all the Inbounds, Outbounds and a few Rebounds. It'll be so much fun. Sleep will be scarce these two weeks.

I think that covers everything. I have tons of stories and photos that I can't possibly share, and they'll always remain powerful memories for me. I'm having way too much fun here :)

Samantha Graham, Host: Kotka, Finland

Since I haven't written since November so there is a lot to talk about. I honestly did mean to write all three of these, but the time just catches up with you so fast when you are off on one of these crazy adventures and somehow it is gone before you know it! I would not have even sent in one if it hadn't been for Phil reminding me. He did tell me about the second one too, but for some reason it just never got finished... but well, here is the final Rotex report:

At the beginning of December, Rotary Finland took all the exchange students in the country (including Estonia) to Muonio, Lapland for a week long holiday of Finnish culture! It was amazing! We took busses, and because I live in the south, I got to ride the bus for 20 hours each way!!! Talk about numb-bum! We had 4 days in "Lappi" which included tobogganing, a day at a ski hill (the Finns think they have mountains....ha!), dog sled rides, reindeer rides, snow shoeing, snow sculptures, sauna, a reindeer farm, a museum, and a visit with Santa in Rovaniemi. The view from the ski hill was amazing, because the days were so short that sunrise and sunset were the same thing and lasted for about an hour. The slope was lit with lamps for the rest of the time, but during that hour at the top of the hill it was like looking down on fantasy land with the clouds, white, and purple-pink-blue sky. Reindeer are such beautiful animals, but can apparently be quite dangerous. We were given strict orders NOT to pet the reindeer and especially not to touch their antlers. But we did get to feed the herd lichen through the fence, and three of the reindeer were tied to trees so we could get closer, although most people were a little scared! Sauna is something that I have come to love and will miss so much when I get home. The sauna at the camp was very big, so we could fit everyone in at once. There was no lake, so we made do with having a snowball fight in the back to cool off with in between sessions....but there are no swimsuits allowed in sauna and it was too much work to put them on/take them off, so it was a little colder than usual.

I think that the two biggest milestones in an exchange-student's life are Christmas, and the first change in host families. I got both in the same week! Fortunately I survived both, although I must say that changing families was a lot harder than Christmas. In fact, I was no more homesick during Christmas holidays than usual...in other words, not at all.

Christmas in Finland was very different from the Canadian Christmases I am used to. Christmas is a big deal to the Finnish people, but of course when you live in Santa Claus' home country it would be! (Yes, Santa does live in Northern Finland!) The difference of Christmas being a big deal in Finland vs. Canada is the relaxed manner with which the Finns celebrate....or the relaxed manner that the Finns do everything with. There is almost no commercialism and no holiday rush. The Christmas decorations did not go up around town until around December 15th-ish and the decorations in my house went up on the 23rd. (This includes the tree!) It was so weird, because it didn't feel like Christmas was coming at all! Christmas is a three day holiday, from the 24th to the 26th. On the morning of the 24th we awoke to find that the elves had left one early present under the tree for me and both my host brothers! I got the "Finnish Elf Book" which tells all about all the elves that live throughout Finland. The elves were sort of like the "Greek Gods" of the Finns, since they used to believe that there was an elf for everything.... or maybe like Irish Leprechans. The whole day revolves around eating it seems: there was rice pudding with a hidden almond for good luck to the finder, Christmas cookies and tea, meat pies, ham, potatoes with two of the courses, of course fish, pulla and pastries, and five different casserole flavours, with cake for desert! Each of the 3 days!!! That evening the family took a nice hot sauna and dressed up for dinner, then was the hard part of sitting around and waiting for Santa Clause to arrive. Here there is no silent night time visits, instead there was a knock on our door and Santa (or joulupukki) clumped right on in to the living room!!! Carrying all our presents!! We had to sing a song for him, then he played some games with us, I sat on his lap, and he handed out all our presents. After he left I went with my host mom to the evening church service, then watched some movies with my host brothers before heading off to sleep. The 25th and 26th are pretty much just days of relaxation, except that the food is the same.

On the 27th, right after Christmas, I moved to my second family. They live further from the main island on one of the residential islands. I had one day to unpack before they took me off on a family cruise trip to Estonia for a night! Estonia was not a whole lot different from Finland, although the city is older and everything is a lot cheaper with out Finland's 22% taxes. Alcohol especially.... The Finnish government keeps an eye on how much alcohol is consumed each year in Finland and if it feels that the people are drinking too much then they raise the taxes on it. The Finnish alcohol taxes are quite high now, so Finns buy mass amounts of alcohol in the duty free on the ships, and in other countries. My host parents must have carted home a year's supply! The ship was huge with 13 floors, a disco, a casino, several restaurants, a few bars, and a mini shopping mall on the "board walk". I got to spend a lot of time with my host parents, my 16 year old host sister Paullina, my 18 year old host sister Anima, and Anima's boyfriend Vesa. When we got home, however, I had a bit of a time adjusting. I was often quite

homesick for my first host family for the first week or so. It was a very different family and I wanted to go back to my perfect first one! The first visit back to the Haavisto's was a little strange, because I was like a guest, but it felt like I had never left. I do go back more often now, though, for dinner or just to hang out with my brothers when they are home. It didn't take long before I really did grow to love living with the Kuokka's... "Not better, not worse, just different!" My host families here have been really great. They really are my families and have taken care of me this year.

My Australian oldie, and best friend, left to go back to Australia on January 13th. It was sad for me when she left, and a little lonely at first since we had spent every day of my year so far together. But it was also neat to be able to spend more time with my Finnish friends, and make more since foreigners are less intimidating when they are not in pairs! The next week I got a newbie when the new shipment of Aussies came in to Finland. Brooke is great, and we get along, but we aren't nearly as close as Carla and I were. Probably since we don't go to the same school, but it is alright since I have such a great group of Finnish friends to keep me busy!

In the second half of the year I started to travel a lot more around Finland especially up to the north and to the west. It is great knowing all the exchange students in the country, because where ever you want to go you have somewhere to stay! I also have spent a few weekends with Heidi, my exchange student sister who lived with my family in Canada 5 years ago.

In April I wrote the national language exam for my Rotary club. I am not as fluent as I originally believed I would be, or really wanted to be, but yet I am happy with what I have learned. I can understand what is going on around me, and participate minimally in conversations. It is more than enough in Finland where they see me coming and the whole conversation switches to English! All students are fluent and love any opportunity to practice. It was good at the beginning when I needed to make friends, but now that I have learned some Finnish it is nice when they speak Finnish to me so I can practice too! Most of my Finnish skills were learned from my families.

Before I knew it was Easter and I was getting ready to move again, for the last time. My family took me on one last trip to one of Finland's oldest cities in the west. Just I and my host parents went, but it was nice since I got to visit the castle museum and other historic sites. Easter has officially become my favourite holiday now, and was much more fun than even Christmas! The food wasn't very good... if you have ever tried or even seen Mämmi you will know!... but the whole family was visiting. The sun came out so it wasn't quite so cold anymore, but there was still a lot of snow. The weekend before Easter weekend I dressed up like a witch and went to a few doors with the other neighbourhood children under the age of 12! It is like trick-or-treating I guess. The story is that every Easter the witches fly in and bring health and happiness to the people! The kids (and crazy exchange students) decorate pussy willow branches with bright coloured feathers and then go door to door where they recite a poem and exchange a pretty stick for "palka" which can be candy, money, or anything else! I only went to 3 houses (host brother, and both host grandmothers), but I was pretty proud of my supply of

palka! Once again there is a lot of food associated with the holiday. Then in the night before Easter Sunday we all put our hats under our beds, and when all the good little children are sleeping, the Easter Rooster comes into the house and lays eggs in the hats! Who said roosters don't lay eggs??!

Moving to the third family was a lot easier than before, and there were no problems. I got incredibly lucky with families. Now I live right in the center of town which is nice since I don't have to take the bus anymore and I am walking distance from everything.

Our Rotary district camp was in April. It was nice to see the other exchange students, but was more a business meeting and geared towards the Rotarians.

Russia, however, was absolutely amazing! I could never have imagined that intense of poverty right next door to such absolute wealth. It was literally indescribable and the four days that I spent there I will never forget! I learned how to shower with out getting any water at all in my mouth or nose, to barter, to be patient, not to smile, not to look rich, and most importantly, how lucky and spoilt I really am. We spent the weekend in St. Petersburg, the culture capital of Russia. It is beautiful and most of the historical sites are still standing and well preserved. We visited the Hermitage museum where we got to see original Da Vinci and Picasso paintings, and went to the Russian Circus! We watched Russian folk dancing, were surrounded and detained by the Russian soldiers for 2 hours, and stopped by the Russian police where the bus driver had to bribe them with 1000 roubles even though we hadn't done anything wrong! It is a very different country.

Now I am "home" again and trying to get the most out of this month as possible! The snow has finally melted this past few weeks, and the sun is shining. I actually got a little sun burnt on my legs yesterday! Next month is Euro tour, then home on July 10th. It is going to be very weird to go home, and I am going to be very sad. As nice as it will be to see my family and friends, I don't know when I will be back here, or how many of my Finnish friends I will be able to get in touch with when I do! I have become so close with so many new people it will be difficult to say goodbyes. But nevertheless, it will be great to see everyone again, so see you in July! Nähdään!

Stephanie Ellis-Philippines

It's been amazing. I swam with the biggest fish in the world, and I've eaten the smallest one. I've swam with sharks. (whale sharks). I've held the smallest monkey in the world. I've eaten EVERY part of an animal, including, heart, brain, testicles, tongue, intestines..... and a whole baby bird still inside the egg, (called balute). I've learned how to plant rice, have ridden a water buffalo and have climbed a coconut tree. I have laughed and I have cried, I have made friends and I also have people who I don't

get along with. It's been an incredible year, and what I have learned during it are things that I will take with me for the rest of my life.

Trevor Gilmore Host: Çankaya Rotary Kulübü, Ankara, Turkey, Dist. 2430, Sponsored by Yakima Southwest Rotary Club.

Every time I sit down to write anything about this year I ask myself "What words do you use for the most incredible experience of your life?" I must have started and restarted this Rotex Round up 6 times by now, getting a few paragraphs in and realizing the words on the page didn't feel right, didn't have that energy or impact I have felt everyday while waking up.

Turkey changed a lot for me after Christmas. It started feeling like a home. Sometimes, thinking back upon things like my childhood or, say, last year, I am surprised to find they took place in the USA. After Christmas is when I realized that the words "exchange student" really mean "living life in a way that seems normal to everybody else but since you are in a foreign country it turns you upside down makes you examine who you are and come out a totally different but better person all while you have the very best time of your life so stop trying to quote unquote live life like an exchange and don't worry you don't have to do anything special for the magic to happen," If you understood that massive attack of a sentence I congratulate you on either being a fellow exchange or some kind of incredibly smart world renowned philosopher.

One of the biggest turning points of my year was when school ended. Up until it's end, school was eight long, boring hours in the library of card games, reading books in English I didn't know existed, perfecting my Spanish, and learning Portuguese with my other exchange friends (I now have almost fluent Spanish!) as the school didn't want us. But as exit exams approached we realized that a) the school did not mind if we never came back and b) Rotary knows this fact (one of the few things they seem to know here) and only puts us there so we don't die in our first few months. So we left, and the year got better. Instead of sitting around reading in English my days were spent in Turkish (and some English, Spanish, and Portuguese). I finally had time to spend seeing Turkey, not just hearing about it from past exchanges, travel guides, and host moms. Rotary started letting us travel and the things I have seen... the capitol of the Hittites (they are in the Bible); ancient Efes, one of the largest cities of the ancient world; the tour of the east of Turkey that two friends and I will be going on this summer; but most importantly Turkey, Turks, and how they live.

I wish I could summarize every day and experience I have had: coach companies not waking me up for my bus stop, nearly getting hit *every* time I cross the street, language barriers making trips to the police stations hours longer than they ever should be, squat toilets, making friends with the Saudi

Arabian Ambassador's daughter (she's now one of my best friends), but the emotions and humor that I love to give would be lost in translation and this paper would be about the size of "Pride and Prejudice." What you really need to hear are the emotions that I felt everyday, those of someone who is consciously changing in a way they never thought possible. I would never go back and redo anything I have done because from even the worst of the worst nights I have learned something about myself that I will carry with me and use for the rest of my life. Of course I must thank Rotary, for they have given me some of the best times of my life, but I also need to thank other exchanges for making this year as good as it has been. Late night cell phone calls to Rachel and Kerry, my Live Journal girls DeRock and Paula, MSN with Jeremy, and everybody who has sent me and email (I'd probably have to list all of you there) have made me smile, worry, miss you, and helped me through the occasional rough patch. So thank you exchanges as well!

As much as I love to delude myself that I'll live here forever, one day I will board a plane and land back in the far away, distant land that I once called home. When that time comes I will be sad, but I will also be a better person, returning to people that love me and that I love. So after they pry my fingers of the boarding gate at the airport, most likely with a crowbar, I better see all of my fellow exchanges at the Rebound weekend. But enough writing. My time here limited and I need to get back to living and enjoying it to the last drop.

Tyler Rogers

Sponsor: Kalamalka Rotary

Host: Austria

Writing this report means that my time in Austria is coming to an end and reminds me of how wonderful the last nine months have been. When I sit outside and take a moment for myself to look around, I know that I am going to miss this place. I have been living with my current host family since January and they have made me feel so at home here and such a part of the family that it will be extremely difficult to leave. I am glad to be able to say, that because they helped me out so much, I have been able to really enjoy Austria and that I will be ready to come home when the time comes. I have made so many friends and seen so many things that it is almost overwhelming to think of them all. Everyday that I look at the calendar I am reminded how little time I have left to enjoy everything. It seems sad because not only do I have to return home but also all of my exchange student friends and many of my Austrian friends will be moving on to different scenery. Some of these people have become best friends of mine and I don't know if I will ever get the chance to see them again. Change is in the air and I am stuck right in the middle of it. However, this year has made me ready for this change and after I ride the storm out, I will be prepared for what is next to come. Change is something that I will have to deal with

my entire life. One of the most important things that I have learned this year is how to deal with change. No matter what happens, I will be ready to deal with it.

I look forward to seeing all of you again. I hope that until that time comes, every one of us has the chance to enjoy the last bit of this exchange year.

Liebe Grüße,