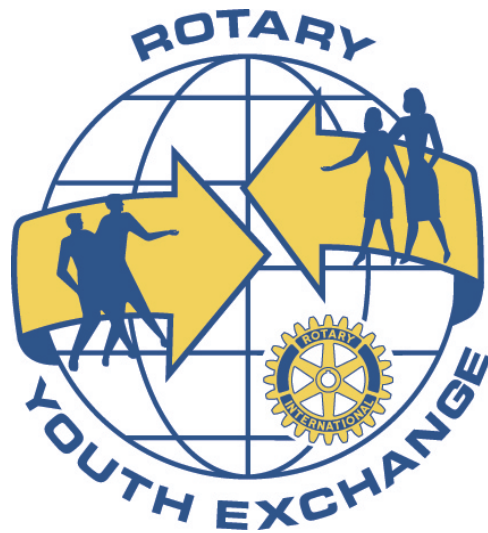


Rotex Round-Up Winter

2004 - 2005



Submissions by:

District 5060 Outbound Students

Prepared by:

Rotex Editor, Janis Hogarth

Alex Fitch

Sponsor: Yakima Sunrise

Host: Argentina

Just a little report from below the equator in sunny Argentina! The past three months couldn't have flown by any faster, and I have to say I am having a blast in my new life. For the past months I have been extremely busy with a trip to the south of Argentina, the holidays, and finally a nice tranquil summer.

In mid November, I along with 19 other exchange students from my district embarked on a twenty day trip through the south of Argentina, also known as Patagonia. We saw many diverse forms of wildlife in their natural habitat like penguins and whales. One of the highlights of the trip was when we were able to mini trek one of the largest glaciers in the world, Perito Moreno. While walking on top of the glacier I felt totally isolated from the outside world. It was truly nature at its best. However, the best part of the trip was just being with other exchange students. The majority of the students were from the states. We were able to joke around, and talk about how our exchanges are going. The trip was some of the greatest twenty days in my life.

I returned from my trip just in time for the holiday season. I was extremely busy during this time. I even graduated from high school again. For graduation my school had a huge dance, and the whole town comes. The graduating class wears formal attire, and we were called one by one in order to be presented to the audience. I got the biggest applause and my face went with red embarrassment because I knew they cheered only due to the fact that I am the "Yanqui" of the town. During this time I also changed host families. I really have nothing to say about the change other than the fact that I liked changing families in order to learn more about the Argentine culture. Christmas was great. On Christmas Eve there is a family dinner, and then all my friends met up in the plaza, and we ended up going to the disco. On Christmas day, nothing really special happened. I just had to recuperate from going to the disco all night. New Year's was pretty much the same as Christmas, a family dinner, and going out again to just be seen. I thought that I would get homesick, but just the opposite happened. I ended up having one of the best holiday seasons ever. It was impossible to think of home when it is 90 degrees outside and no snow. But for those of you that have snow and who hate it, it is weird to say, but I actually miss the snow!

Right now, after the holiday season I am just enjoying a nice summer. Every day is easier than next. My family has a pool, and I spend most of the time either sleeping or laying in the sun. Sometimes, I go to the pools of friends, and of course we go out every weekend. One of my most memorable memories was when the local disco had a foam party. I never knew that dancing in soapy foam up to ones neck could be so much fun! I never believed that after six months here in Argentina, I could say that I feel like part of a new culture. I can easily carry conversations, and my friends know me for the person that I am, not just by the country I come from. I have new clothes in the style of Argentina, and I could almost be a gaucho or cowboy. There is just the part of being a little afraid of horses that is holding me back. I hope that everyone is having a great time in all the other countries, and if you want to drop an email my new address is alexfitch@hotmail.com. Entonces, chau from the southern part of the hemisphere!

Allison Leslie Sponsor: Revelstoke

Host: Germany District 1890

Wow, already time to update again. I've been in Germany for over five months already and the time is constantly speeding up. I find it interesting that I haven't been homesick once, even at Christmas which I thought would be terrible. It's strange how you get used to things, like hearing German all the time. Now whenever I hear English it sounds strange to me and I always have to stop and think about which language I should reply in.

Since the last update, I've done some neat stuff. I joined a soccer team for the month of November and traveled to play in villages for which the word "quaint" was invented. The inbounds in my district had another meeting which was filled with lots of sightseeing and some wicked go-kart racing (they were the fastest go-karts I've ever driven). I also went to see an opera in Hamburg that was hideously boring and didn't even sound good (modern art don't ya know).

At the beginning of December, I switched host families and schools. While my new family has taken some getting used to, switching schools was a wonderful thing to do. My first school was completely disinterested in me outside of a few friends but in my new school people are helpful and actually show an interest in me. It's amazing what a difference something like that can make. For anyone out there who's struggling at their school (and I know some of you are) try switching schools or even classes if you can and see if it makes a difference. It really did for me.

Another interesting thing I got to do was visit some family I have in Southern Germany. It was cool to note how different people live in the south compared to the north. I spent New Year's there and experienced the most massive fire works display of my life. We stood on top of a hill at midnight and watched the whole valley light up.

Unfortunately the holidays are now over and it's time to get back into the grind of school. That's not actually a bad thing though. School is almost enjoyable when you don't have to worry about how well you're doing.

I hope everyone else is having a great time where they are, only half our time is left. Tshcūβi

Amanda Porcheron

Sponsor: Penticton

Host: Plutaluang (Sattahip, Thailand)

Well, hello again to everyone! I can't believe it's time for another update already. Time is really flying by and the thought of coming home soon is so weird. I have really settled into life here in Thailand in really feel like "Kun Thai" (a Thai person). My language has improved a lot and has really enabled me to become part of the culture. The highlights in my day now are always talking with people. My friends at school are great. The school year is wrapping up very soon here and they will all be going off to university in a few months. I will miss them so much. We have so much fun together now that we can communicate easily and the odd things that we can't explain to each other we just laugh about. My host family is amazing and I love spending time with them. My two host brothers always make me laugh and my maid is teaching my Thai cooking which is always fun to do together. I have been doing a lot of traveling lately. I was in the north area near Chang Mai and Chang Rai for Christmas when the tsunami hit. I can honestly say that everyone in Thailand was affected by that single event. Thai people have

large families and lots of friends so everyone knows someone that was in the area, injured and in some cases even died. The aid from all the people overseas has helped the people a lot so far. I am very proud of the donations and help that Canadians have given as are all the Thai people. The area I am living in was not affected at all as I am on a different coastline than the one which was hit. I was then home for about 2 days which was just enough time to wash my clothes and pack again to go to the northeastern province of Maha Sarahkham for New years. Almost all New Years celebrations were cancelled throughout the country in light of the tsunami. It just wasn't a time to party and have fun? I was in bed by about 10pm on New Years Eve. Then I was home for about a week and was delighted to get to go to school again and see all my friends before my dad came over for a visit. I really enjoyed showing him around my area and traveling to Koh Samui. I really got to put my language skills to good use because we didn't plan much of our trip in advance. It was a blast! Now I am back at school and am treasuring the last few weeks of school before the holidays begin. It's always nice to travel but it's always nice to come home to. The city of Sattahip truly feels like home for me now. Anyway, I hope everyone is well and chok dee (good luck) in the year 2005/๒๕๔๘ (2548 in Thai numbers as their years are different). Bye for now....

Andrea LeComte

Sponsor: Penticton

Host: Peru

My name is Andrea LeComte and I am an exchange student in Camaná, Peru. My first family was amazing I had three sisters that were all younger than me. I found this probably the best gift I could have gotten on my exchange because they were extremely patient with me in the beginning, seeming how I only knew about 5 words in Spanish. There are so many differences that sometimes it's hard to know where to start. First of all the food. They are very conscientious about using every part of the animal they eat. Yesterday I had cow tongue for lunch, the day before I ate anticuchos which are cow hearts on a skewer... and very delicious I might add. Also Peruvians enjoy eating fried guinea pig which is considered a pet in Canada but in Peru is a delicacy. The traffic system is a bit more unorganized to say the least. There are no stop lights or stop signs, they just use their horn ALOT!!!!!! Also there is a kiss on the cheek to say hello. This country I am living in now I consider my home but also realize and am frustrated with the poverty and corruption of it. For example, you can more or less get away with anything here if you wanted to pay the cops an extra 10 soles (3 dollars). Because the people make soooo little here crime and robbery is extremely proficient. For example my Rotarian parents in Camaná who own an ice factory make 90 dollars a day, and I asked how much their workers get paid, he responded 10 dollars per day. Also there are many differences culturally here. If you burp for example is considered more rude than farting or anything really... for example you see men and women with large skirts peeing in the streets but if you burp... oh my god your in trouble, pretty weird hey??? Oh I mean not weird just different! I am sorry I haven't really talked about school because in Perú we have our summer break from December 15th until April 1st. So right now I am on summer holidays. I really hope that this is sufficient all the best to all the exchange students. cuidate... besitos por todos Chua

Ashlee Parnell

Sponsor: Wenatchee Sunrise

Host: France

Wow, I cannot believe its January already. Living here in Lyon, France has been quite the roller coaster. A fun one though!

I love Lyon. I love it. I love taking the metro and the bus (even though I do miss driving!). I've never used public transportation before and it's so handy! You can go anywhere in the city without having to search for a parking spot. It seems like I know this huge city like the back of my hand. I can hop on a bus without even having to think of where it will take me. I love knowing I can do this all on my own. It doesn't seem that hard but Lyon is huge. 1,800,000 inhabitants! My hometown of Wenatchee has about 48,000 people. Talk about change. The hardest part is communicating.

The language is coming along. It's still difficult but I try extremely hard! My first host family spoke to me in English. That certainly did not help me; in fact I know it hindered my learning process. Advice to the next out bounds: DON'T SPEAK ENGLISH!! I have this fear of not being completely fluent by the time I return home so I am really working at it. Learn the language before you come! Or at least attempt.

School. Oh man. It's so different. I start at a different time each morning and my schedule is different everyday. Sometimes I have to stay until five or six pm! The teachers here are not like the United States. It is strictly a teacher/student relationship, no friends. I miss this a lot. My teachers in the U.S. would talk about their lives and tell jokes. And I still email most of them! It is also a little boring, but that is expected from someone who is not completely fluent in the language.

I leave in July and it seems so soon. I am scared to go home. I miss my Mom and some of my friends but I have changed so much. I feel so much more mature. I've had freedom and independence that they have not. Every senior lives for graduation - I won't be there for mine and I don't mind at all. I am not pessimistic; I will just really miss my life here. I feel so incredibly fortunate to be living here. Thank you so much!!!

Ashley Ekelund

Sponsor: Kamloops Daybreak

Host: Austria

Well here we are writing our 6 month letters, can you believe it guys? Half of our exchange year is quickly gone by and the other half will only go faster. Do I feel as if I've come a long way in the last few months? One could say, yes. I now feel as if I have the strength and independence to handle the many curve balls that a year abroad can throw at me. I now am more comfortable with the language, have friends and family who mean a lot to me, and have the courage and motivation to plan and do things on my own, including navigate oneself around huge cities like Vienna.

Christmas abroad was definitely one to learn from. The moment that I was experiencing it, I couldn't help but think about Christmas back home and how this just didn't seem to be measuring up. I wanted it to be done and over with as soon as possible to be honest with you. But now looking back, I can appreciate how much that Christmas will mean to me in the future. I earned that not everybody has a Santa Claus, not everybody hangs stockings over the stairs,

and not everybody receives a living room full of gifts in the morning. My Christmas in Austria was humble. On the 24th my host family and I opened our few gifts quickly and thankfully then had a peaceful almost normal meal together. After which I went with my host mother to the Roman Catholic Church in our village for the Christmas mass. Although Christmas day may be the only day of the year that the church is actually full, the people were still full of the real Christmas spirit and joy. The 25th was a day simply reserved for visiting family. Lunch was held in my Host grandmother's tiny little house with probably only 6 people or so there. Then dinner was at my other Grandmother's house in which the entire extended family was there. One thing that I was very grateful to have experienced this Christmas was having grandparents there to celebrate it with. It's incredible to me how much the family has just opened up and accepted me with open arms.

As for Culture in Austria there is always something new to learn! From family-run wine companies or restaurants, to massive formal balls where everyone knows how to Waltz, or to opera and ballet in the great playhouses of Vienna, I've experienced it all. Hunting is a favorite past time of the men here, cooking for the women, and skiing for simply everyone. Every family takes a week long skiing vacation every year, they learn it in the school at the age of 10, and it's basically the only sport played on television (which is always played might I add). I am now more familiar with the network of tiny villages in my area and have come to realize and accept that the simple village life is exactly what these people love and all they could ever need. Often families will stay in one village for generations and most likely the same house as well. I've already seen more of Austria and Europe than a lot of the kids in my area and they are always amazed at the amount of time I spend traveling and the places that I go. As this next half year unfolds I have incredible experiences awaiting me. Next week I'm flying to Russia to spend 4 days in Moscow and 4 days in St. Petersburg with the Russian class in my school. Next month I'll spend a week skiing in the Alps with exchange students from all over the world. And the month after that I'll spend 3 weeks touring all of Eastern Europe! One things for sure, I never thought I would be able to say something like that before... ohh you now next week I'll be in Russia. No biggie!

The opportunities here are endless and I won't let a single one pass by without making the best of it. The amount of growth and learning can never be truly understood until experienced. But always remember... that time flies! So take the moment and make the best of it, after all we'll be home before you know it!

A big huge Thank-you goes out to everyone back home and All the Best for those still on exchange or just preparing for one!

Caralie Olson Sponsor: Kelowna Morningside Host: Philippines 3820
7 months into my exchange and this is the winter submission, not at all the winter I'm used to. Although the Filipino's call these the "burr" months I still laugh at them because the only time we need socks or long sleeves of any kind is when we are in a building that is overusing the air-conditioning. And through these burr months I have gone places and done things. Starting with my 4 day Bangkok adventure in Dec. I was so lucky to be given this opportunity to spend a bunch of my parent's money, it was so worth it! Best shopping and tourist sites such as the Grand Palace and the crazy food. Plus I got to meet up with an ol' buddy, Natalya, from our home district. Then came Christmas which wasn't anything I thought it would be but wonderful

in its own way. I think it was like one of those cheesy Disney movies where the kid learns the "true meaning of Christmas" all on her own. That's what I did, with help of my Filipino family. We even spent the afternoon of the 25th going to downtown Manila and giving out bags of food to the homeless families. Definitely an eye-opener. We had a fake tree, no snow and no turkey either but I must say I enjoyed wearing my fuzzy little Xmas socks with shorts and a tank top! Then new years I was allowed to spend at my friend's house and it was CRAZY. Fireworks are legal here so every family spends half their Xmas money on these dangerous things and starts exploding them in the streets during the countdown and throughout the night! It sounds like WW3 but I have never seen a light show like it in my life. And most excitingly, the end of Jan brought me a gift. My biological parents came for a 3 week visit. It was probably the best 3 weeks they have ever had and I have to say it was absolutely wonderful having them here to share all of my glories with. It brought me closer to my real parents and also my hosts too! They hit it off so well, my mom and dad ended up staying here at my host's house in between our travels. Now because of Rotary I can say that I and my 2 parents have become Philippine ambassadors and I think brought both of our countries that much closer. Because now the Olson family and Deveza family have this unforgettable bond. I totally recommend having parents come for a short visit half way through the exchange. So anyways it's been a very eventful "winter" and as summer rolls in I just can't wait for my school semester to end in March so I can have my last months to travel and uh... have FUN. Pangalan! Mahal ka kayo!

Chelsey Curry

Sponsor: Kamloops West

Host: Argentina

Argentina is wonderful, but so different in so many ways that it is almost like living on a different planet, or at least in a different decade. The people are very friendly, and you are expected to greet even people that you are meeting for the first time with a kiss on the cheek. This was one thing that took a little getting used to. I have made great friends, some of which I count among the best that I have. The architecture here is very different, very European, and everything is one storey high, even in big cities. Also, absolutely everything is made of brick!! People here lead much more relaxed lives, and never seem to be a hurry to do anything. The food here is good, but I do miss the variety of food back home. Here it is mostly meat and cheese and bread, although they have a very tasty dish that is similar to a BBQ. It is called Asado, which is many different cuts of meats slowly roasted over top of coals and flavored with garlic and salt. People live life at a much more relaxed pace down here, which for me was very difficult to get used to, but I now love the siestas and hours lazing around drinking mate!

Christmas and New Years Christmas here was good, and was an experience to remember. My grandma, aunt and two cousins as well as all my family (four of my five brothers and my parents) came over for dinner. We ate at around 10 pm then played music and chatted until 12 midnight when Santa comes out and gives everyone their gifts. Then at 2:30 I left with my brothers to go meet up with my friends in the center for the big Christmas party. It did not feel like Christmas at all, what with the different cultures and the tropical weather, so I had no trouble with missing home. New Years was spent with the other side of the family (mother) in Concordia, Entre Rios (a northern province in Argentina). Again, everyone came over to the uncle's home, we ate late, chatted, danced, and at 12 all the neighbors started setting off fireworks. Now these fireworks were not like home, where you peacefully watch them from Riverside Park, some of them exploded directly overhead, and you had to watch out that nothing fell on you. It was great getting to know the other side of the family, and I found a good friend in my cousin.

South Tour On November 18th I and 27 other students from around the world, who are all currently living in Argentina and Paraguay, left on a 19 day trip to the south of Argentina. The areas that we visited (the southern four provinces of Argentina) are collectively referred to as Patagonia. Patagonia has a varied landscape, from rolling flatlands, to snowy mountains and glaciers, to deep blue lakes and endless forests. It is home to a variety of animals, such as penguins, elephant seals, the endangered Wright whales, foxes, llamas, el pacas and many others (we had the chance to see all these animals). In the country of Argentina there are roughly 40 million people, but Patagonia, where the population is mostly concentrated to large cities, is only called home by a mere 2 million. In the south, the wind is constantly blowing, and varies between 70-200 km/hr. Patagonia is also home to the very famous Perito Moreno Glacier, one of the only stable glaciers left in the world. This means that the glacier is neither growing nor shrinking (the amount that is lost during the hot months, is regained during the cold ones). This glacier is over 300 km long and is shared by Argentina and Chile. In the south, we visited several major cities and stopped at many attractions along the way including: Puerto Madryn, where we saw the whales and sea elephants and had a chance to swim in the Atlantic Ocean; Comodoro Rivadavia, where we saw the penguins and a petrified forest; El Chalten where we hiked up to our first glacier and glacial lake, and experienced gale force winds. We also visited El Calafate where we climbed the Perito Moreno Glacier, and drank a scotch on the rocks at the end of the hike (with glacial ice). We dipped down to the southernmost city of the world, Ushuai, known as "el Fin del mundo" (the end of the world). We experienced over 30 hrs aboard the bus on our leg back up to Esquel, which was a pretty but boring stop, but we had the chance to visit the national park of "Alerces" (a rare tree). En route to Bariloche, we stopped in El Bolsón, at a brewery and jam making place. Bariloche itself is a hugely touristy place, known by the youth for its clubs, and by the adults for its chocolates and serene lakes. Here we visited another national park, known for its many lakes. Our final stop was San Martín de los Andes, a tiny little city that also thrives on tourism, where we learnt about the Mapuches (a first nation's tribe) and visited some beautiful beaches. It was a wonderful trip and I really miss the people that I experienced it with, but we will see each other soon in April, on our trip to the north.

January In January, I had the chance to spend a month long vacation with my family on the beaches of Brazil. I spent 19 beautiful days (and two rainy ones) on a beach called Jurere, on the island of Florianópolis. I had the chance to meet other exchange students living there and join them on a hike to a remote beach in another area of the island. I also went to a huge Brazilian music concert, which is anticipated all year by the locals. As well, I had the chance to try many of the delicious seafood dishes and shop right on the beach from vendors who carry their wares along the waterline.

School I attend a Catholic private school called Maristas, which is an international school. It's an entirely new experience for me, what with brothers living on the third floor, catechism classes, and prayers every morning. I love the uniform, which includes the knee socks, skirt and tie etc. I arrived in the middle of the school year, so I attended half of grade 11, and will begin grade 12 once summer vacation is over. School here ended without event, I actually missed my last days of school, as I was on tour, but have been promoted to "tercero" the final year of school here, and will be returning to school with my classmates in either March or April. Every Wednesday for two hours (during the school year) I attend Spanish classes, I am the only student so it's a bit interesting, but very helpful. During the first few months I learnt mostly verbs and basic vocabulary, but will start the literature part of the course when I return to school.

Family I spent my first 15 days living with my councilors, an older couple with two children in their late 20s, Cuquie and Josephina Mullol. Then moved to my current family, the Murphy's (they have Irish roots), where I have five brothers ranging from 22 to 9 years old, and two working parents. They are a great family and I get along really well with everyone, and will be very sad when I switch families the 12th or 13th of February to my third and final family, where I will have one sister living at home, and a brother studying in Buenos Aires.

I am having a great time, and miss you all, but hope that everyone is having a great time wherever they are, be it at home or off in another country. Suerte

Chris Wagner

Sponsor: Wenatchee North

Host: Spain

Chris here reporting from an internet cafe in El Barrio de Gracia en Barcelona, sadly reporting that my internet in my normal home has been down for more than a month now. It makes you realize, sometimes, that you really rely on the Internet for getting stuff done, like for example, keeping in touch with everyone, looking up information, and doing college stuff with super close deadlines!! I suppose it is not so bad paying outrageous fees just to use the net, but nothing in the big city comes free, except for really rather lame discos where they almost will pay you just to fill up the room! Ha ha... which, by the way, actually are kind of cool if you are up for a random adventure.

Anyway, that is all beside the point. How have I been here in Catalonia, well it's hard to say! As always: highs, lows, and a lot of normal life in-between. Time has really begun to pass rather fast I would first off like to say, but still there remains more than half the year! I have been rather busy with everything, between working out at my club, playing Futbol Sala, and going to school. Other than that, I fill up the weekends with shopping chores, exploration, and site seeing, traveling, discos, movies, and whatever else might come up! To be honest, winter is really not my favorite time of the year, although the climate is not so extreme here. We almost always have clear blue skies, but yet the temperatures dip very low, and rarely will I go out without a coat on! Personally, I cannot wait until Spring rolls around, starting the beach season once more, and allowing much more hours of sunlight. I can relate sometimes to what the Rotary Survival Guide calls Cabin Fever...

And what about the Christmas, New Years, and The Reyes (we have like three big celebrations here in Catalonia)? Well, Christmas wasn't as bad as I had expected. I was expecting the worst on this one, all the exchangers and books warn this is a hard time of the year. Well, I ended up going back to my beach house and spending two days in our house and a relative's house, just eating and talking and watching DVDS. It was hard not having any history with any of the people there, so conversation wasn't really coming so easy, but they all made the effort to make me feel like I was part of the big extended family, and I will say I loved all the food we were allowed to eat. I did miss my family a bit, and more so after calling them that night, but I survived... And then the cool part, after Christmas, I was allowed to travel to Germany to visit a good friend of mine, and to stay in her house over a week and News Years. Well, I will say I had probably my best time yet in Germany, just doing a lot of sightseeing, meeting friends, and eating super good food. Not to sound ungrateful, but the German's are just killing Spain when it comes to the food factor. I was in food heaven so to speak, and it reminded me a lot of my home back in America. (I live in a Bavarian Themed Tourist Town, and I went to

Bavaria of all places! Uh huh... just like HOME). Anyway, it was exciting getting to travel and I got there and back for fewer than 150 Euros, and with the current and fatal decrease of the dollar, that is a life saving deal! Unfortunately, when I came back my family was in France skiing, so I had to spend the Reyes by myself in the house (it was the same day I got back). All in all, I made it throw the holiday season with some great highs, and the expected low now and then!

Whats more, well the only two difficulties I can still think of deal and with the language and the friend situation. All the time here, I have been working so hard on Spanish, always studying it in school, finding books at the library, always interested in improving. But just lately, I have seemed to drop back down to like 3 months ago, just back to being nervous and making simple mistakes. Everyone says I have improved SO MUCH; I am just the only one still lacking that confidence. Really, I must be honest, I think confidence in your speaking far outweighs whether or not you know what you are saying. I unfortunately, worry more about correctness than just talking, something I am determined to change. By now, I practically can do anything with reading, and writing and hearing are close behind. My weakness, as before, is always with speaking. Also, at the same time, I spend probably 70% of my time in the Catalan environment, another language I am not quite so familiar with, but can understand a bit of, so that doesn't help learning Spanish. I am deciding, that perhaps with another 2 or 3 months of Spanish, I will switch over to Catalan and make the last few months a dedication to learning the supposedly TRUE language spoken here (politics, politics!). And just of the friends, I mean I fit in well with all the people and school, always have someone to talk to, or hang out with at lunch, the problem is I just can't seem to make anything happen outside of school. What I am trying to say is, I can't further all these potential friendships. This is something the Rotary Book also mentions, and so I am not surprised by this challenge, more so, just frustrated. Always, at the beginning, they are quite excited that you are there, but as time passes, you become a normal kid, and you lose that advantage. Thus, you must make quite the effort. But hey, I keep taking risks and throwing out ideas, sooner or later things will get past the hump. I, unfortunately, just still miss that one "best friend" which I was so used to in the past.

All in all, upon review, this email comes off perhaps a bit negative, well I am just not sure. I don't intend it to be this way, more so I want to be honest about some of the things that have challenged me, opposed to the last email, filled with all the fun. And honestly, I am living a dream, and a good one at that. But for the sake of those who want to see the other side as well, this is how it is... My conclusion after about 4 months and a half is this, that at first I came with many unrealistic expectations (I was warned), and at this point, I have reevaluated everything, thus that my life is happier and more successful based upon what I expect of myself, and that is better said, the reasonable amount one can accomplish. So, here continues the ever consistent adventure, learning, and challenges, all of which, although may be hard, frustrating, and trying, will ultimately find me where I wanted to be at the end of this year. I think what matters to have success now (for me personally) is to never lose heart, learn from the failures I encounter, and to smile in all my good moments--what more can one do? I hope all the other exchangers are doing well too, but that at the same time they are experiencing the challenges that will ultimately make them better people--many thanks for this opportunity, once again, Rotary--we will hear from each other again in a few months. Afectuosamente, (de Barcelona)

David Sorokovsky

Sponsor: Kalamalka Vernon

Host: Denmark

Hej from the land of the Vikings!! Everything here is going fine and dandy!! I just came back from one of the most exhilarating trips yet!! Every true blue snowboarders dream... THE ALPS!!! The host family that I am living with right now took me on an almost fully expense paid trip to Flaine in the French Alps for 10 days. My life here in Denmark just gets better and better! I am enrolled in a school called Hasseris Gymnasium and am in the 2nd of 3 years offered at this school. My class which is comprised mainly of girls is very fond of me and we get along just fine. Before the girls even have the chance to make a move on me I, (being the PERFECT exchange student that I am) recite the 4 D's with great enthusiasm and send them on their way. Apart from my studies I am basically free as a bird and usually hang out with my Danish friends or now that it's finally spring here attend soccer practice as well as rugby. I take every chance I get to play in intramural sports at our school as a way of making more friends and acquaintances. The Danish people on a whole are not very social so it takes a lot to get them talking but once u have "broken through the outer shell" they are very caring and trusting people. Presently I am living with a host family called the Krestensens and they have a son who is my age that has been on exchange to Vancouver Island through rotary a couple years back. With this in common it did not take long for me to become really good friends with him things are going smoothly. In my next host family which I will be moving to sometime in March I actually met my host brother in Canada at the Naramatta get together. His name is Troels Andersen and everybody back in Canada just called him Anders. Jack Sabey u probably remember him!!! At least Anders remembers U!! On March 4th there is a huge rotary get together that will be my last official one here in Denmark. This whole experience is so amazing that I have no desire to come back to Canada. I have started from scratch here, made friends, am learning the language very quickly and am reliving a dream that I have had as a youngster and that was to see Europe. What more could one ask for? I owe it all to u my dear Kal Rotary Club! I don't even know where to start in thanking u. Also thanks mom for everything!!! LUV YA!!! Have a great week all of you and you'll hear from me again in the next couple of months! Farvel!!

Emily Mac Arthur

Sponsor: Kalamalka

Host: France

My last couple of months here in France have been very good. I think the first three were definitely the hardest (as I had heard so many times before I left), and after that, everything just started clicking. I don't mean that everything is perfect, but I feel much more in control of my emotions, and consequently, I am enjoying the exchange even more. I changed host families in the middle of December, and the switch has been nice. My new host family has two daughters: Aurore, who is fifteen and attends the local "collège," and Julie-Annie, who is nineteen and currently in Finland. The pets are also considered part of the family, which makes for rather chaotic meals. With the two rabbits scampering around on the table, the dog barking, and the cat looking supremely unconcerned, everything just seems a little more interesting. My host mother and father are very kind and attentive, and I know that I am lucky to have them.

As far as school goes, I am having a much more interesting time now. When I first started, I considered myself lucky to understand which subject I was in. Now, not only do I know which subject I am studying, I am also able to do most of the work and receive decent grades! Of course, French Literature remains on the difficult side, but I am doing my best. I think the most interesting course I am taking is history. I could never have imagined how different it would be—although we study basically the same historic events as Canadian

students, it is from a completely foreign perspective. The English classes are also interesting, as I do the work in French.

Outside of school, I am still involved in three choirs, and I take singing lessons at the lycée, and the local music school. I am really enjoying this part of my experience, even though everyone still gets after me for my ugly English vowels (apparently there is a very large difference between "ou" and "u"). There was recently a concert held at the lycée, and I was very excited to take part in it! I am also running four times a week, and feeling lucky that it isn't colder than it is. The winter here is much milder than in Canada.

For Christmas, I went with my third host family up to Alsace. Everything was beautiful, with such an intense holiday atmosphere. As usual, the food was delicious, and I tasted many interesting things. Unfortunately, I was very sick for Christmas, and spent Christmas Eve with a bucket and a box of Kleenexes. Other than that though, it was a lot of fun! I returned to Mende for New Years, which I spent with my host family. I know I keep talking about the food, but it is such a huge part of life here... so the meal was enormous, and took about four hours to finish (we stopped in the middle of it to wish each other a happy new year at midnight).

I am definitely getting used to French life by now. I am no longer surprised when friends come and kiss me on the cheek, or when I am offered huge platters of cheese (which I never refuse). It doesn't seem strange any more to spend my days speaking entirely in French, watching French movies, and reading French novels. I am even accustomed (resigned?) to spending ten hours a day at school; although I'm not sure if I will ever enjoy that. I have made many friends here, and I know I will miss them all when I leave. It seems strange to think I have already been here for five months! Last weekend was our first Rotex weekend, where I got a chance to meet all the other exchange students. It was interesting to compare our impressions of France, and their inevitable developments over the past months.

I am happy to be in France. Of course I encounter problems, get frustrated, and experience boredom—but I have never learned so much or attempted so many new things. Everyone I meet has something to teach me, whether it is a teacher, a host parent, or just a "copine" at school. I hope everyone else is doing well in the various countries around the world... bonne chance et gros bisous à tous! Love Emily MacArthur

Kai Francis

Sponsor: Oliver

Host: Japan

Hey everyone. Greetings from the land of the rising sun. Here is my second report covering the 04-05 year. Well there's not too much really to report on for the 04 year. It got colder way colder than I'd like it with no insulation in the house and no heating in the school and with having thin school uniforms to wear, one appreciates that summer is on its way. It's not all bad though I managed to get onto the school year trip which took us to Okinawa Island. It was awesome so nice and warm averaging 25 -30 degrees C and that was for November. During our stay there we toured most of southern Okinawa including some of the U.S. air force base, visited some castle ruins and of course Okinawa Castle the last two days followed with lots of shopping, and scuba diving (tons of fun, salt water stings the eyes though). But all fun must end at some point, and so I found my self back in Tokyo freezing my butt off. The rest of November and December went quietly with nothing much to report on except for a few shopping trips to Tokyo with some of my friends. Christmas to my disappointment didn't get celebrated at all here so I took it on my self to find a Christmas tree and to decorate my room. It was a success and even got the attention of my host family their friends and some people passing by in the street outside my window. New Years was quite interesting and special, not as wild and party filled as what I'm used to (no party). My host father took me to this local temple where I watched as people prepared for ringing this big new years bell. And while observing I

was approached by the temple priest and asked if I wanted to help out with the nights proceedings. I spent the rest of the new years in a cool temple kimono running errands for the priest. Then there was January... allot happened here for once...hummm lets see. Oh Yeah... I went SNOWBOARDING for three days with my host family and some of their friends to this place called Nichiuchi Mariama, so much fun. We did karaoke, went to a nice Japanese style restaurant got locked out of our Cabin, stuff like that, and of course Snowboarding. The rest of the Christmas holidays after that were spent sleeping in, watching movies, and meeting friends. Close to the end of January though, things kind of went bad. The first exchange student was sent home for having some kind of relation ship with a former exchange student a month earlier. Was kind of sad because she was an essential part to all the fun get together that she and I organized, but that wasn't all because as soon as the decision was made to send her home the rotary district here decided to add a few more rules to our big list of Don'ts. Now if we want to go outside our towns we need to get expressed permission and signatures from our host parents then our counselor, and then the rotary district and once if everything is ok with everybody then we can head out most of the time only with Rotex as our baby sitters. Naturally all of us exchange students were not happy with this but for now that's how things are, luckily for us most of the Rotex are really cool people so it tend to turn out quite fun. February started nicely with a few days of from school followed by some half days and finally our long awaited Rotary Ski trip to Nagano. It was awesome like crazy cool and intense. Pretty much all exchange students and the coolest of Rotex went along with really slack rotary supervisors. The snow was great, and the weather was beautiful, so we skied and snowboarded all day long and then partied all night long with Rotex, singing, dancing, and stuff ;). Ill never forget Fabio who's never seen snow until then run like a mad man yelling with excitement out of the bus only to slip a dive head first into a pile fresh powder only wearing a t shirt and emerging with the realization that snow was too cold for his liking. So all in all the trip was complete success. Oh and I changed host family's as well now. I love my new family, their so nice and always try to make things fun for me or cheer me up when I'm bored, we have a movie night every couple of days where my host mom buys me my fav popcorn and snacks and we just chill while watching Japanese and English movies together. The rest of this month should be fun to with two birthday Parties and a concert I'm going to, and what ever else pops up. Along with everyday boating practice and gym I should be quite busy. Well for now this has been my life in a nut shell here in Japan I hope you enjoyed reading my update. There has been allot going on around here and some things I haven't mentioned but I cant think right now since I just caught a nice cold that's been going around here. So if you have any questions just mail me and Ill let you know what's going on. I also have a site with the latest pics of my adventures here so if you're interested talk to me and ill send you the link. Well that's it for now from me, take care.

Lauryn Baranowski Sponsor: Yakima Southwest

Host: Denmark

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For this Rotex Roundup, rather than trying to condense all the amazing experiences that I've had here down into 400 words, I've elected to explain a small part of the Danish language. One word, actually: hyggelig (pronounced hoog – a- lee). This word can't really be translated into English, the best translation is "cozy", but Danes are quick to tell you that "cozy" just doesn't cut it. The only other people who may know what I'm talking about are those who are in Sweden. But now that I've been here for five months, I think I'm sufficiently equipped to explain this uniquely Danish custom.

A "hyggelig nat" (cozy night) usually begins with a text message invitation saying, "Hey, we're going to so-and-so's house, come with us." We show up, take our shoes off, and are welcomed into the host's bedroom (where you entertain guests in Denmark). You light some candles, pop open a couple of beers, put on some music, and chat about school, friends, etc. And there you go, things are hyggelig.

This all sounds pretty simple, but it's actually not. In truth, Danes are not the friendliest people in the world. They're not as outgoing as, say, Brazilians. So, when they invite you over to one of these "cozy nights", it really means something. Hyggelig is just about feeling comfortable, taking a break, and hanging out.

But hyggelig can be about other things than just hanging out with friends. I've heard it used as an adjective to describe everything from a new pair of boots to sightseeing in Tivoli, the famous Danish amusement park. I would use it more, if it wasn't such an unwieldy word (as is much of the Danish language).

Danes are quick to expand on the meaning of the word hyggelig. They insist that it is different from the American custom of "hanging out", that it has something special to it. According to one friend, there are even different types of hyggelig, depending on who are you with, what you're doing (or not doing), what you're eating, what type of beer you're drinking, etc.

Even though I am a bit sceptical of its difference from just "hanging out", I really like the idea of "hyggelig". It gives me a chance to just relax with friends after being in school all day. And it gives me yet another chance to practice my growing Danish skills. Which is good, because, given the Danes' like of the word, I'm going to have to learn to pronounce "hyggelig" sometime soon?

Leslie Kincaid

I've never experienced a quicker six months in my entire life. It's already February - unbelievable! Knowing my exchange year is over half finished leaves me with some mixed emotions. Part of is me is anxiously looking forward to my sunny summer at home. The other part is dreading having to leave this place and make the end of my exchange year. The few months since the last Rotex have been quite interesting and fun filled. I've been travelling quite a bit, which is always great. At the end of October I accompanied my host father on a business trip to France. Then in December my best friend came to visit me and we travelled together to a big city Hamburg in the north of Germany. My most recent trip was to Italy in January. I travelled with 30, 12th grade students from my school to Süd Tirol, Italy for a ski trip. This trip was one of my best experiences so far in Germany. Not only was it amazing skiing in the Italian Alps but I also made some good friends on my trip.

In the beginning of December I changed host families for the first time. I had a hard time leaving my first host family because I truly felt at home there and got along with them really well. In general it is difficult to switch host families. You go from knowing your place in a family, and being very comfortable, to starting back again at zero. Moving families was a big transition for me and it took quite a few weeks to get adjusted to my new family. For the first month or so in my second host family I felt like a guest and not really a part of the family. However, now, after almost three months with this family things are much better. I now feel like part of the family and have developed relationships with the family members. I will make my third and final

switch in a few weeks. I am already familiar with the family and am very optimistic about my final months in Germany.

In the last few months my German has really started to come along. My current host family has really helped this because I haven't spoken a word of English with them since I moved in here. Of course my German is NOT perfect, no where near it! I think it's nearly impossible to have perfect German unless you are a native. German grammar makes my head hurt! At this point in exchange language learning is a bit frustrating. I can basically say what I want in German, for the most part. However, at certain times when I don't know how to say what I want in German, I feel like I might as well not say it at all. I feel after 6 months here it is too long to be speaking any English. Also, because I am not very confident with my German I find myself a bit shy and not talking nearly as much as I did in English. However, this is just more motivation to practice and study German therefore becoming better and better.

I am definitely looking forward to my last months in Germany. My last months here will be a chance to deepen my relationships with the people I already know as well as a chance to meet even more people. In these last six months I have had some of the best times of my life and made some incredible memories. I cannot wait to make even more! I know already this year has been life changing and probably one of the best years of my life. Thank you Rotary!

Malia Smith

Sponsor: Wenatchee

Host: Spain

This is Malia in Madrid here. Life is good here and just trying to live it one day at a time and try not to take too many things for granted. I am struggling everyday...but then I just remind myself that I will never have this opportunity again and I need to live it up. (Ok, excuse this email because I just got home from vacation and I am running on little sleep right now and it is due today! Go figure!).

Hmm...ok probably the biggest thing was that my host brother came home for the month of December until January 5th. He went on a Rotary exchange to the US when he was younger and then is there for his freshman year in college playing soccer. I was really excited to meet him because I know the parents so well now and I was interested to see how they interact with their real son! This was an experience! I kind of felt like the only child who suddenly has a new brother...having a lot of attention taken from me!! Haha, he was nice enough, but definitely in his own world of partying and friends. I was sadly not included in his world! He basically greeted me and didn't speak to me for the first week. Hmm...but then his friend from the US came to visit and this poor guy clung to me like glue. He didn't speak any Spanish and enjoyed speaking English with me...I was definitely not complaining! That is one thing I have learned...I LOVE ENGLISH!! My Spanish is coming along alright. I can carry on a conversation with no problem and usually understand what is happening...usually! There are plenty of times where I space out or just have no clue what they are talking about!

December was the month for visitors. Since all the Rotary kids in Spain who are in great touristy places for the summer are now in dead towns that are cold...guess where they all want to come!?? MADRID!! I don't mind because usually we return the favor-I just got back tonight from the Canary Islands and am going to Valencia in a few weeks. It was really good to have Americans around...especially boys! We are a group of girls only in Madrid (which I like most of the time), but I really forgot how funny American guys are! The Spanish guys are so serious all the time (probably because they are trying to convince girls to kiss them!). I just didn't realize

how much I missed good old fashioned "your mama" jokes and just the craziness that boys bring to the group.

Christmas was interesting. The big holiday here is El Dia de los Reyes Magos (it is basically the Three king's day). The children put out shoes for the three kings bringing presents. They leave out wine for the kings and water for the camels. We didn't do much for the Reyes because I don't have little kids in my family. We did get together with the extended family though. I knew it would be difficult without my family and friends, but it still hit me hard. My Christmas was very different than normal, yet I find that each culture has similar things..as I am sure you all learned. We had dinner at my host aunt's house on Christmas Eve and then went to a restaurant on Christmas and then Ocean's Twelve. It was good to be with the whole extended family...good food, loud people, salsa dancing, and lots of champagne! I luckily got to call home on Christmas and talk to my family, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins who were in Yakima for the holidays. I was put on speaker phone and loved it!

New Year's Eve is insane here. Everyone goes out in Prom dresses and tuxes for the guys. I went with my friends and my host brother to an old movie theater that was converted into a club. Each room was different with different types of music. We had a big family dinner at my house and then left for the club around 2 am. We ended up getting home pretty late...about 9 am...just another night here...welcome to Spain with the nightlife that never ends!

Now my host brother is back in the States and I am back in school...life is settling down a bit. I am off to practice guitar and read a few more pages in my Harry Potter y la Piedra Filosofal. I hope all of you are doing great and don't hesitate to send me an email sometime...mimagine24@hotmail.com. Have an awesome next few months and am looking forward to seeing all of you. Remember to pay attention to all that is happening around you and take some chances!! If not now, when?!!! "To be alive becomes the fundamental luck each ordinary, compromising day manages to bury."

Marie Vance

Sponsor: Vernon

Host: Czech Republic

Cau! So, Christmas: we ate fried carp (fish) and potato salad (the traditional Czech meal) and I realized (it's hard to believe but, yes, for the first time ever) that the whole world does not believe in Santa Clause. I almost cried when the girls in my class gave me a necklace with matching earrings, but that was mostly caused by surprise, and it was truly the most emotionally upsetting moment of my holidays... so not bad.

New Years was funny. I was with the kids from my class and we climbed a dark hill, up to a haunted chapel, and watched the fireworks over the town. No ghosts, but the castle was all lit up and it was beautiful.

Language is coming along, but Czech is difficult; mostly because they have sounds that I've never heard before. Like the 'r' with the accent, which you pronounce as a sort of 'r/z' combination. Try it (saying both letters at the same time), and I think you'll pretty much get the point. There's also this weird 'case' thing, where nouns have seven variations for possible endings (a different seven, depending on whether or not the noun is fem/masc/neuter, animate/inanimate, hard/soft)... sometimes I get very, very confused.

However, I *can* say I've achieved fluency, and I find myself having the most random conversations in the most random places – the *most* random being a half an hour discussion about Toronto with a masseuse from Plzen (think Pilsner beer), at the end of which we both agreed we'd like to visit there. This took place during the course of two chair-lift rides in the Austrian Alps. It was very odd.

Family is another strange thing. I have just switched host families and I'm not really sure how I feel about it yet. I don't know if staying with the first family for so long was a good idea. I mean, five months half my exchange, and I think I got rather attached. So now I have a new family and it's kind of like being back in square one. I see my new host mother eyeing me up, assessing potential volumes of food that can be forced into my belly (this is a strange part of Czech hospitality – feed the guest until they can no longer move – but, unlike the python, who has essentially the same eating habits, guests here are not given a month to digest). I mean, with my last host mother, we had actually gotten to the point where she trusted me to heat up my own food (not actually cook, but I was allowed to serve left-overs and use the microwave), so it's a bit frustrating to be blocked from the kitchen again. I have had to start taking long rambling walks, so I continue to fit my jeans.

On the subject of physical activity, skiing has become a big part of my life here. I haven't downhill skied since I was 6, but apparently some things stay with you. I went on a week-long ski camp in northern CR, am currently taking a week off school to ski with my host family, and will be in Slovakia for 8 days in March.

Hmmm. What else. Well, I have taken over a twelve-year-old boy's bedroom and have inherited a bunk bed and walls of hockey decor. I spend my days at school talking, reading, and drinking pots of tea. And, you know, something sad happened. A girl from my Canadian high school died last semester. She was only 16, but she had heart problems. And then tonight, a girl here died in a car crash. She was a waitress, and I remember her serving me spaghetti, laughing, and generally slacking off behind the counter the way I used to when I worked in a restaurant. She was only twenty. Both deaths shook me, and so I guess I just have to say that I am glad to be alive and experiencing all these amazing things.

And I don't know if that was corny or profound, but I'll end now. So best wishes and lots of love to you all.

Mark Gibson

Things on my exchange have taken a turn for the worse. Problems with my first host family increased to the point where I couldn't even stand to be around either my host brother or mother. Being stuck out in a village seriously damaged my chances to make many friends. When the time came to change host families, there were some problems and I had to stay with my councilor for a week. Then around two weeks ago I moved in with my current and last host family. They have been nice and supportive, but I am not sure if it is going to be enough to help me out of my situation.

I have fallen into a deep depression that has been getting increasingly worse as time has gone on. Events like changing host families, going on a week long ski trip in Austria and the Euro Tour have been the only things giving me the strength to keep pushing on. The only problem

is that the first two of those have already past without helping and the last doesn't exist for me anymore. Due to late information from the Rotary here and problems with transferring money I am too late to get into the Euro Tour.

I have lost most of my energy and keep losing more and more every day. At this rate I don't see me being able to stay that much longer. I have never felt this depressed in my life and can only hope that it doesn't get any worse because I do not want to be this kind of person when I get back. If I get to the point of leaving early, I will try to hold my head up and remember all the things that I have learned from this experience and to thank Rotary for giving me this opportunity.

Michelle Mac Rae

Hertz lichen Grüsse von der Schweiz,

So time has flown by and it's now time to submit the second Rotex round up report, well actually, it's now passed over due and I've just started. So after six months of living in Switzerland I'm still the same old Michelle, doing everything at the last minute..... Some things just don't change (LOL) but others do. The size of my clothing for example!!! Yes, slowly but surely, I am succumbing to that infamous Swiss exchange student problem: the "Chocolate, bread, and chess" but I'm also learning/experiencing a whole lot more then just weight gain. On the 21st of Dec. I learned to change host families and then on the 24th I experienced both Christmas on the eve. (And due to the post, I also was experienced Christmas without my mother's Christmas baking or my family's gifts.) but the tree totally made up for it, Swiss Christmas trees are just gorgeous, and lit up with really candles!!! Then I spent the North American Christmas day on the train to St. Moritz, where I spent the two-week holiday getting to know my new host family. You just have to laugh at some of the fashion statements you see on the slopes!!! I'm sure I spotted some rich Italian wearing a pair of 2000 dollars Gucci ski goggles. On Jan. 13th I also had to learn how to say goodbye, because all the Australians that seem to make up a good half of the exchange student population here all got on a plain and went home. It was one of my hardest times here and more then just a little foreboding of what our goodbyes would be like only 5 months later. I would just like to point out that at least this time I have a really good excuse for being so late. You see Today is my first day back home after being away for the two week Sport holiday. The first week I spent at my schools Ski Camp in the Obersaxton region and the second week I was with my host family in St. Moritz. So you see I simply had no time!!!! But all that aside... I experienced two of what I'm sure will be ultimate Swiss moments this holiday. The first was at Sport camp: we were at the top of a run and our guide was pointing out all the surrounding mountain ranges and so, when low and behold he points out the 2998 m Kisten pass, just across the valley. Now what you all don't know is that I went on a 3 day hiking expedition in the October holidays and happened to have trekked over the Kisten Glacier on the second day. The Second moment was at the very very top, they claim it's the "top of the world", in St. Moritz where my host father, Hans-Peter, said "See that lake over there? That's in Italy and that Mountain range over there, that's the border with Austria." ONLY IN SWITZERLAND!!! So let's see what else have I learned? As my wallet was stolen, how to fill out a police report and then how to get all your Canadian identification back, which is even harder think you think (in fact I still don't have most of it and it happened in November!!!) I'm also learning quite a lot about expensive wine, as holding Wine Tasting is one of my host clubs favorite activities. OH... Can't forget this; For a Rotary conference I went skiing on the Matter horn, that's right the Matter horn!!!!!! (But just the lower half of it) At the Alpine museum in Zermatt, we learned about the man who has made it his life's work to climb it

again and again. He made his last climb at the age of 97 and he climbed it a total of 103 times!!!!!! 103 times!!!!!! And of course I've been here and there, and seen castles and museums out the ying yang. One of my personal favorites was the fieldtrip to the Monte exhibition at the Zürich Kunst Hause, with my Art history class. was completely taking by the 6-meter canvas that took him six year to paint, entitled water lilies. (I think that is the right translation) So other then that, every time I talk to my mother she tells me that my accent is getting worse and worse, and I have taken to saying that I only speak Swiss-English. Oh, plus I'm very proud to announce that I now know the names of all the 40 something members in my club!! That includes the 3 Heinz, 4 Peters, 3 Hans, 2 Hans-Peters and 1 Peter-Hans. And I have finally finished my Alabaster stone sculpture that I've been working on since my first day of school!!!! I've stopped being such an embracement to my Swiss friends by taking picture of the cobble stone street when ever we go somewhere, which was some thing I did until about 2 months ago, and its really only because they are covered in snow right now. I just can't get over the amount of history and culture that practically oozes out of every building in the country. So... Right now I'm looking forward to the Rotary 100th anniversary celebrations in Luzerne, which are two weeks from now, next Swiss adventure and just plain old tomorrow. Because there is no such thing as plain old tomorrow when you're on a rotary exchange. With that, I wish everyone all the best and all my love from Switzerland.

Natalie Lachowicz

Sponsor: Kamloops Downtown

Host: Brazil

Wow, hard to believe that I've finished more then half of my year here n Brazil. My year so far has been... memorable. I have moved host families, host clubs and host cities. Which was drama filled, but I think that it helped me to grow as a person, so that's good. I had amazing new years, getting horribly sunburn with my new host family, and two other exchange students. I didn't have time to recover from the holidays, as on Jan.3, I left with 80 other exchange student for a month long bus tour of the North east of Brazil. It was the highlight of my year. I spent a lot of Oct. on the phone begging my parent to let me come home, bust stubbornly they said to stay till the trip, as it would be worth it, and or course they where right. I met so many international friends, say stunning beaches, drank my weight in coconut water, and saw some of the most interesting cities in the world.

Now, its time for Brazil's fave... holiday- Carnival!!! I'm going to celebrate at the beach, and then come back and hopefully travel to Sao Paulo! So, as the days are slowly wearing down I'll try to fill them with as many crazy adventures as possible (without breaking the four D's of course!!). Hope everything is going great, - Beijjos!

Natalya Melnychuk

Sponsor: Shuswap

Host: Thailand

Tomorrow I will have been living in Thailand for exactly five months, it feels like just yesterday I was in Vancouver getting on a plane to start my adventure here and now I am almost half of the way through it. I can't believe how fast time is going; I've been so incredibly busy exploring this phenomenal country that Canada has faded into a distant dream. I have been emerged into

this culture in every way possible, living with a Thai family, attending school, learning the language; customs; and religion and I still feel like I am only on the tip of the iceberg. In November I traveled down south to Hua Hin, attended sport week at my school, lived in a monastery, attended the Loykratong festival, and climbed the most beautiful mountain in Thailand, Phu kadung. December was equally exciting with a trip to Bangkok and then a ten-day tour of Northern Thailand for Christmas. Devastatingly, December also brought disaster for Thailand as an earthquake off the west coast of Sumatra sent tsunamis crashing into the west coast of southern Thailand along with 10 other countries.

At the beginning of November I traveled to the top part of the peninsula of Thailand to help out at an English camp in Hua Hin. Hua Hin is a beautiful little city that draws many tourists as it has beautiful white sand beaches, as well as, the tallest Jedi (A Thai style pyramid that holds the ashes of a monk or king) in Thailand and one of the Kings many palaces. The English camp was held in the Milford Paradise which is a five star hotel located on the beach. It was by far the best English Camp as we were treated like royalty. I also got the chance to ride a horse along the beach, which felt like something out of the movies. It was an amazing experience and was definitely unforgettable.

During the middle of November my school, Loiepittayakom held its annual sport week. I was rather skeptical of this event as my experience in Canada of events like this would never truly work out as planned due to a lack of participation. Here though, all 3,000 kids turn out with tremendous school spirit for a week of no school, just a lot of sports, and cheering. The school is divided into four colours: see dang (red), see kiew (green), see mong (purple) and see lueang (yellow). Football (soccer), volleyball, badminton, and track and field events were the sports that were held throughout the week. There were different games for each age group and those that were not involved with sports were part of the cheer squad. There were approximately a hundred and fifty M.6 (the highest grade) students that were staff of each of the different colours and led the cheer squads as well as organized all the games, took care of lunch and any other organization issues. There are also cheerleaders for each colour that have a completely different outfit for each day and they go out each day and compete against the other colours for the title of best cheerleaders. They are not your typical high school cheerleaders they are both men and women who have practiced every day for six hours after school and are extremely coordinated and have the ability to make some amazing pyramids with girls flipping around on the top. Also, there is a parade that all the M.5's (approximately 500 students) participate in with marching bands, Thai dancers, and everything else imaginable (including cross-dressers). I was part of the staff for the red team and had a blast leading the cheer squad. The school budget is huge for this week as they feed everyone; buy everyone outfits for each colour, as well as, uniforms for each different sport for each person, as well as, all the costumes for the parade and cheerleaders. I was simply amazed at how much school spirit there is and by how much fun everyone had, including myself (School events are fun, go figure!). In the end my team ended up winning the most trophies and all 150 staff members went out and partied it up in celebration, but that's a whole other story in itself.

I recently spent ten days at a monastery, living the life of a Buddhist nun. Sleeping on nothing but a bamboo mat in a little grass hut, to wake at 3 am to meditate, and only eat one meal a day was the most physically, emotionally and spiritually, trying thing I have ever done. I dressed in total white, wore no make-up and had no connection to the outside world. The only connection we had with the opposite sex was when we would meet for morning prayer and breakfast with the monks of the monastery.

This is what my day consisted of while living there:

3 am - Wake up
3-5am - Walking Meditation
5-7am - Morning Prayer
7-8am - Sweeping
8-9am - Breakfast and clean up
9-5pm - Meditation (sitting or walking) -no speaking
5-6pm - Shower (personal time)
6-9pm- Evening prayer
9pm- Sleep

Living through this experience I have realized a lot about myself and about what living truly means. There is a difference between happiness and the feeling of being happy. Through meditation you can achieve eternal happiness, the "ultimate thinking," being able to rid yourself of suffering. Feeling happy is just a thought that does not last and if weighed out is equal in emotion to suffering or sorrow. Being able to find this calmness and being inside of you is the beginning to enlightenment. Live in the moment, and just appreciate being alive is what I am trying to do.

November 23rd is the national festival of Loykratong a day about letting go of worries and problems from the past year. This is done by symbolically setting afloat these violet orchid boats with candles lit on them down the river. It is a spectacular sight to see the hundreds of lights floating down the river. When you set the boat afloat you say a short prayer in which you say thank you to your mother for everything she has done for you. I was in the province of Udon for this festival in the capital of the province Udon Thani. I attended a dinner with Thai dancing as entertainment at a private function with an AFS exchange student from Chile and his host family before carrying on to the streets where there was a parade, live music and tons of little carnival game booths and many different vendors selling their goods. I have never attended a festival of this capacity and was amazed by the liveliness of it all.

During the last week of November I climbed Phu kadung a mountain located in Loei (the province I am currently living in) with forty-three other exchange students from around the world that are living in other parts of Thailand. It is a ten-kilometer hike straight up the mountain on a Billy-goat type of trail. It was an exhausting hike but it was a hundred percent worth it to see the beauty we were surrounded and engulfed by. The plateau on the top is in the shape of a deer print and is the only place in the country that maple trees grow. The plateau is approximately ten kilometers wide and 20 kilometers long. Over the next three days we did a lot of hiking to visit the number of astounding waterfalls, ponds, and cliff faces that are located across the plateau. Although, we unfortunately (I suppose I should say fortunately) did not see any wild animals besides deer there are wild elephants, tigers and snakes inhabiting the area. It is also the coldest place in Thailand, and at night the temperatures plummeted to a mere ten degrees; the coldest I will ever feel while living here.

It is always a great time when all the exchange students get together, we always have a crazy, great time! It is awesome to hear stories about their lives here and about their lives in their home countries as well. Being able to do that while upon a mountaintop in Thailand was extraordinary. We youth from around the world have many similarities and of course differences

as do all families. On December 3rd we hiked back down and that was another adventure in itself. While the rocks on the way up made natural places as footholds they caused us to be very careful to climb down, as it would have been deadly to trip over them on the decent. In the middle of December I headed off on a ten-day trip around Northern Thailand with the exchange students again. We visited many different villages and cities, including Chiang Mai, Chiang Rai, Mae Hong Son, and Phitsanulok. We visited: the highest peak in Thailand; Doi Inthanon, numerous temples and palaces on top of mountains, the Chiang Mai Zoo to see panda bears, the long-neck hill tribe of Doi Mae Ho, the Golden Triangle where the three countries; Thailand, Laos and Myanmar meet, as well as, the ruins of Sukhothai the 700 year old, ancient capital of Thailand. I also got to go on an elephant trek through the jungle and also had the experience of kayaking into a herd of elephants, which was a whole other experience in itself. This northern tour was definitely the most "Thai" experience of them all and has opened my eyes to traditional Thai life as well as given me a view into the life of hill tribes.

On December 26, 2004 eleven countries were struck by huge tsunami waves as a result of an earthquake off the shores of Sumatra. One of these countries that were severally affected by this was Thailand. Five of Thailand's seventy-six provinces (including the tourist driven province of Phuket) were hit by waves of approximately 30 feet high destroying many homes and businesses. Over 4,000 people have died and the death toll is expected to rise to 7,000 in Thailand alone. New Year's Eve was spent in mourning by the entire nation including His Royal Majesty the King who lost his grandson to the tsunami. People from around the country are doing everything from giving blood donations to actually being there to help rebuild the communities lost. This has been a very trying time for everyone but the way Thailand as well as, the rest of the world, has bonded together in support for those in need has been amazing. I am personally nowhere near the effected area but have attended various meetings and given donations to help the efforts of those who are.

November was an extraordinarily busy month and December was definitely an adventure. 2005 or 2548 (as Thailand runs on a different system than us) is looking to be a year full of new experiences for myself. My heart goes out to those who have been lost and to those who have lost everything in this tragic event that has overwhelmed Southern Asia. I hope all is well back home and everyone has enjoyed his or her holidays. Until next time take care.

Raji Khurana

Sponsor: Merritt Sunrise

Host: Brazil

What can I say? Five months already! I just finished my month long Northeast Tour here in Brazil, and wow, was it ever gorgeous and unbelievably hot. I met some great life-long friends on this tour, and memories that I will never forget. I am now living with my second host family, and couldn't have asked to be with more loving people. I feel so welcome here, it's wonderful. Next week I start school again. That will definitely be something new and exciting because I will be attending a new school. Other than that, Brazil actually feels like home now. I can finally understand and talk with people; which are such a fulfilling accomplishment. I'm almost half-way through, I can't believe it. All I can say is that I am going to keep on trying my best to learn as much as possible and try to savor every moment of this once in a lifetime opportunity.

Robert Boettcher

Sponsor: Kelowna Sunrise

Host: Argentina

Wow, I cannot believe that it is almost the end of January and time for the "Winter" edition of the Rotex Round-Up! I really don't know where the time has gone. The last two months have been amazing and I have had the time of my life.

Since the 1st of December I have been on summer vacation and I have been enjoying every minute of it. The last two months have been so busy that I haven't had time to stop and catch my breath. I have little over one month left until school starts again and I still have many more things planned.

The first weekend in December I participated in my high school's graduation ceremonies, which were very different from what I experienced at my graduation in Canada. My graduation class consisted of only 70 students instead of nearly 500 and the dinner and dance lasted until the wee hours of the morning (i.e. 4 or 5 am).

For Christmas I travelled with my host family 10 hours to Villa Maria where we spent a week visiting my host mother's relatives. Here in Argentina Christmas Eve is the special day with a big family dinner, fireworks and Papa Noel (AKA Santa Claus) delivering the presents at midnight of the 25th.

New Years Eve was again a big family gathering that I spent with my host family and friends in Roca. There was lots of food, great desserts and again a tonne of fireworks at midnight. I spent the rest of the night partying with all my friends and we danced it up until the sun rose on *January 1, 2005*.

On January 3rd my host family travelled to Las Grutas to spend a great week on the Atlantic Coast. The town was full, and I mean, FULL of vacationers and I had an amazing time with my family, swimming in the Atlantic Ocean. I even managed to get a pretty good tan.

With the help of about 25 family members and friends on January 13th I celebrated my *19th* Birthday Argentinean Style. They threw me a great party with again, lots of food and a great birthday cake. I had a great time!

With all that I have seen and done in the last 5 months I am excited to see what the next 6 have in store for me. I know that sooner than a blink of an eye I will be back in Canada and that I must try and live every day to its fullest. I would like to thank Rotary for providing me with this amazing opportunity and to all my fellow Outbounds, "Good luck, have fun, and see you in July!"

Ruth D. Patten

Sponsor: Westbank

Host: BRASIL

Hey guys, sorry that it has been so long since my last email, but know that it is not because I don't want to, it is simply because of my lack of time to sit down and write. I'm pretty sure you will be happy to hear that but also sad because of not knowing what's going on with me, so here it is. Already moved into my second host family, where I have 2 sisters, Fabiana 17, and

Luciana 15, and my host parents Lucinha and Luiz Andre. My host dad is an English teacher, and he and his wife owns a local English school here which is pretty helpful at times. Moving was pretty hard for me, I got to be really quite close with my first host family, and had come to accept them as my very own family, so of course when the wakeup call came for me to leave them, I was less than wanting to go. It's just that everything that had once been so strange and obscure had finally settled down into a normal way of life, with a family to call my own, and BAM I had to go and start all over again, but I guess that's all part of the exchange student experience.

Christmas was definitely interesting; first of all with no snow I soon found out it was hard to even feel the Christmas spirit all the way down here. But it's not just no snow; it's no decorations, no Christmas music, none of the novelties of the season that I had come to accept as normal. Luckily I had my Christmas CD from Canada with me, and managed to bring smiles to peoples faces by pumping oldies but goodies such as "So this is Christmas" and the chipmunk's holiday hits. Christmas here is a celebration that starts on Christmas Eve, and runs over into Christmas day. I was at a huge family party that consisted of about 200 family members, every aunt, and uncle and of course, the cousins! They had rented out this big hall which we all went to and stayed there until about 3am on Christmas morning. The reason for this is that they only eat the turkey (yes I still got to eat turkey) at midnight on the night before Christmas. Although lacking gravy, it was still such a treat to have. The next day I woke up at around 11am to a miniature 3 foot Xmas tree that my host family had bought especially for me to enjoy, and presents that usually aren't given under it. What usually happens here on Xmas is just what we know as a "secret Santa" where everyone in the family draws a name from a hat and buys just one gift for them. But seeing how my family knew that Xmas is a very special time for me, they got presents for everyone, including me (!) and even filled up some of their socks with candies and chocolates to represent stockings. It was so special for me, just to feel so accepted and appreciated so far away from my home. Everyone here is very interested to know about Christmas there in Canada/USA just because they only see clips on TV or in movies. Some of the bigger stores in the city's center had some decorations, and even in the mini mall we have they had music of Christmas playing which made it just a little better. After opening presents we returned to the family party, but I left at around 7:00pm to go to a church play with my friend, and let me just say Brazilian kids sing so much better than Canadians do. It was just so special, I know I've been using that word quite a bit but it's really just the best way I can explain it... special! Afterwards we returned to the party; just at about the exact time where everyone was already half in the bag or was headed in the same direction... men Brazilians really do like their drinks. All in all it was such a different experience full of laughs, tears, and memories. Thank you to all of you who have just helped me get to where I am in my life right now, and who have helped me accomplish the things that have always been my dreams. Know that everything here is just going so well, and that my Portuguese is almost fluent. I still can't believe it sometimes when I think about it, like I actually understand... it's so crazy... DOIDO DEMAIS!! Much love to all of you this holiday season, and May God bless all of you in the year to come! I can honestly say that I have never felt so blessed before in my life. If this is just the beginning I have no idea but only excitement for where the rest of my life will take me. I love you all Always, Sempre

Scott Simms

Sponsor: Osoyoos

Host: Turkey

Well another 3 months have passed and we find ourselves once again rushing across the keys of our keyboards to get this 2nd edition of the Round-Up off to the press. Unfortunately I drew

a picture instead of writing this out, but apparently now my picture will now become a thousand words, or maybe just a hundred, since I cant draw very well....

The past few months have kept me quite busy, from trips on buses and trains to riding camels and making cookies. I love cookies. Well at the end of October we went to Cappadocia which among other things is famous for its Fairy Chimneys, which consist of a tall shaft and then a large head of stone on the top, carved naturally over many thousands of years. On a personal note however, I think (and most other people here agree) the statues look a lot like something else....I'll leave the imagination up to you. Also on that trip my friend Grant (from Michigan, who wants to be Canadian so we are teaching him) and I found a Turkish man who spoke seven words of English which were these: "Do you want to ride my camel?" Obviously we jumped all over that opportunity and the people of Cappadocia got to see a camel with 2 foreigners on it cloppity-cloppin' around, one sporting a cowboy hat and the other a head scarf. To sum up our first rotary tour only two words come to mind, Gong and Show.

Since those few days on the Rotary tour I have had a many a great stories, too many to tell in this letter, I'll have to tell them all back home over some sodas. One evening while strolling around the downtown section of Ankara called Kızılay (yes, where there are weekly protests and a few hundred riot police come) we found a few young lads struggling to relocate a few kegs from their shop to some local drinking holes. Well, being the nice guys we are, we decided to give them a hand (well actually a foot) as we practically played football (remember...that's soccer) with the kegs as buses flew by on either side of us on the streets. I'm sure when the kegs were actually tapped they would be so shaken up they would be undrinkable but hey, who am I to be judgmental. Since then, life has gone everywhere but downhill. One day on the way from school to downtown our driver abruptly stopped the bus in the middle of the Eskişehir highway (connecting Istanbul and Ankara) because there was too much smoke in the bus he was having problems seeing, apparently the students "didn't know" smoking wasn't allowed on school buses. When December came around I found myself on an all expenses paid road trip 5 hours east to Izmit with my hockey team, a city located on the Marmaras Sea. We explored the city, went to the sea, went to some nice restaurants, and I think we played hockey somewhere in-between as well. The following weekend was a real gem as I was back on the bus, this time with my school for a Model United Nations conference in Istanbul. The conference was actually more interesting than I thought it would be, mainly due to the fact that it was all in English. On the trip we crossed over to Europe via Ferry Boat and brought some great stories home such as how a cab driver was insulted by my friend putting on his seat belt and then attempted to fight him while still driving the car. As Christmas approached we got into full spirit for the season, even though it is not a celebrated holiday in this country. My family even thought it would be nice to make a special meal for me so we dined on sheep intestine soup and even boiled sheep brain one evening...man, I was as pleased as a squirrel run over by a truck. Anyway, I survived that and we (4 exchange students) got to work on our Christmas traditions. We sang a half translated version of Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer for 2 of our Rotary Clubs and even made cookies for our host-families, only breaking 2 plates in the progress. And believe me; explaining the plates without telling about the secret cookies was a good one. For New Years Tim (yes Timmy Naka from Kelowna) and I planned to go to Istanbul with some of the students in my district. So the night before the trip Tim took a 9 hour overnight bus to come and take a train with me from Ankara to Istanbul, a 9.5 hour train ride. However, the day of the trip plans rapidly fell through and we were the only 2 students to escape via train to the great city of Constantinople (AKA Istanbul). We made it to the train station and paid our 8.5 million Lira for 1st class train tickets on the Güney Express.

Oh and for those of you who are not aware, that is about 7 dollars Canadian. The train took 9.5 hours to go 400 km (like Osoyoos to Vancouver) but what can you expect when you take the cheapest train in the country. We learned train to be the ultimate form of transportation, but also the most dangerous for if you are not careful, you may get on a train that will take you to the border of Georgia instead of Istanbul (not that WE did that or anything...). None the less we made it to Istanbul eventually and I got the great phone call from my friend saying I had gotten off at the wrong station. Anyway, 30 minutes later in a cold Istanbul train station my ride rolled up and I was whisked away for a week I could never forget. Anyway, I accomplished so much that week I can't even begin to start telling so we will save that story for a rainy day. Now being that this is getting too long, I shall say my goodbyes; Görüsürüz, güle güle, ve hoş çakal. Scottie. Oh ya one last thing, for my brother's 15th birthday I bought him a happy meal, just thought I would throw that in. Bye.

Steve Mathews

Sponsor: Summerland

Host: Austria Dist. 1920

Well here we go again! I can't believe it's already time to start writing my Rotex for the half-year mark. Austria is quite the place and I'm really beginning to get into the lifestyle over here. I'm now onto my second family, and both of my families have been great. I'm feeling pretty lucky that I've had two really good ones, especially after hearing a few of the stories from other exchanges, I can really appreciate where I'm at right now.

I was in Salzburg in early December for another one of our awesome Rotary weekends. We met the exchanges from Croatia, so that was pretty cool. The weekend was spent doing a lot of walking and touring the city. We saw an amazing castle that was 1000 years old, and was used to protect the city in times of war. Mozart was born in Salzburg so we went to the home where he was born. We saw things like: the first piano he ever played on, love letters written to his wife, and the actual kitchen he cooked in. Salzburg is, in my opinion, the most beautiful city in all of Austria.

Christmas time was incredible here in Austria. We had two feet of snow, seventy pounds of Christmas cake, and enough Schnitzel to sink a ship. The traditions here are a little different, like how they open presents on the night of the 24th rather than morning of the 25th, but I slept a lot better that night than I ever have before. Over our Christmas break I went up to a friend's 'villa' in the mountains, another amazing couple days spent in the Alps. Twelve friends and I went up to this cabin and spent the week snowboarding and skiing at a ski area called the Montafon. We spent the days jumping from ski resort to ski resort and backcountry skiing. That week I skied the best powder of my entire life. It was really beautiful and something I'll never forget. We, also, had our big Matura Ball, a couple weeks ago, which is basically a huge Ball where everyone gets dressed up, drinks 'sparkling apple juice', and parties all night until the next morning. It really was a ton of fun. There was a show that the graduating class created and preformed, which was amazing! The show included everything from dancing, to singing, to the 'Call on Me' music video preformed by the Matura class in spandex. Pretty much the whole school goes so it was a great time to see everyone.

Alright now to finish up I'll give you a good story from over here in Austria. I GOT HIT BY A CAR! It was quite the 'Rotary' experience. I was out jogging and the car hit me from behind. I rolled up over the front hood, and took the passenger side mirror off as I tumbled to the ground. When I got up, and after the shock had passed, I thought to myself, 'Hey, ya know,

that was something James Bond would do in a movie taking place in Europe.' Well in the movies they forget to show the cast he has to wear for two months, and the lovely magenta red bottom he couldn't sit on for a week. Luckily there was a doctor at the intersection, next to where the 'movie shoot' took place, and he helped me to the hospital. Anyways the arm is pretty much better now, and my bum is back to its natural colour.

Well I guess that's all for me at the moment. I hope all is well back in 5060, to my parents I miss you a ton, to the Rotarians I wish you all the best for 2005, and to the new Outbounds I hope you guys had an awesome time in Revelstoke. Ciao, Stephen

Susan Cairnie

I've been living in Belo Horizonte, Brazil for over five months now. In November I thought I was doing pretty good, I'd gotten over the homesickness and really liked my first host family. I had a big extended family that I saw every week and I was becoming close to all of them and really enjoying my time with them. Then Christmas rolled around and I was busy buying my presents and looking forward to celebrating my first holiday in my new family. However I ended up crying on Christmas Eve and Christmas, just from missing my family and the familiar way we always celebrated the holidays. That was pretty hard but I still had a good Christmas. On Dec.24th we visited both my mother's family and my father's family to exchange gifts and to eat a big Christmas dinner at midnight. There was sadly no turkey although I am told it's not uncommon to eat it for Christmas here. One thing they do here that I really like is called "amigocouto" and the month before Christmas everyone in the family picks a name and secretly buys a present for that person. Then, on Christmas Eve, we all gathered around and one person began the tradition by standing up with their present and describing the person who it was for. They said things like "The person I picked is very beautiful and kind" and then everyone shouts out "It's me" "It are me!" and runs up to claim what they are convinced is "their present". It's very funny and so much better than just saying "I got your name. Here is your present." Brazilians don't give as many presents as us Canadians and here it is normal for my friends to receive only two presents, one from their parents and the other from "amigocouto". Stockings are used as decorations for the season but do not come with presents on Christmas morning. The day after Christmas I switched host families and the day after that I traveled to a beach with my new family! We stayed in Búzios for over a week and I experienced New Years on the beach. For New Years here everyone wears new white clothes and something pink for good luck. At midnight we headed for the beach for the countdown, and at 12:00 everyone hugged everyone else and said all the good things they wished for each other in the New Year. Then we headed to the edge of the water to jump over 7 waves for good luck. I jumped over 8 because I figure I can use all the luck I can get this year! The beach we stayed at was beautiful and covered in umbrellas and plastic chairs and tables. People walked up and down the beach all day selling meat on sticks, ice cream, cheese bread, fruit juice, bikinis, sarongs, sunglasses, henna tattoos and a lot more. Every day we headed to the beach around 10 or 11, lay around in the sun, swam and bodysurfed. Around 3 we headed home for a late lunch and then to lie around napping in hammocks. At night I and my new cousins went into town to buy souvenirs and dance in clubs. We came home from this amazing vacation and then a few days later left for another one in Guaripari! I loved the atmosphere there, the street in front of the beach was covered in shops, cafes and bars and there were so many outdoor shows, people playing guitars or axe schools practicing in the streets. I swear my new Brazilian family is razy, they are always dancing and singing and extremely animated people. It's a lot of fun and our house is always full of relatives and friends. After our 2nd beach holiday we came home and real life began. I share a room with my 11 year old sister, which is a bit hard for me, I've had

my own room since I was 10 so I have to learn how to live with another person again. I'm starting University next week, I'll be studying Tourism, which has a lot of classes about Brazilian culture so hopefully I'll learn a lot. My classes are 3 times a week from 7:30 am to 11:30 am. I'm spending more time with Brazilian friends now than exchange student friends, which is cool. I'm almost fluent now but I still have a huge accent that follows me wherever I go and is the bane of my existence. I just can't lose it. It's interesting how much I think like a Brazilian and how so many aspects of their way of life or thinking are natural to me now and now longer surprise me. It's amazing to be here and I can't imagine leaving in 6 months.

Tamra Jaeger

Sponsor: Merritt Sunrise

Host: Finland

Hello from Finland! Well it has now been six months since my arrival here in Finland and I have had an amazing time. Though I definitely have not had such exotic experiences as others I have loved every minute of my stay here so far. Finnish people are honest and kind and very happy to introduce me to all of their favorite traditions. Winter swimming and sauna are two of my favorite ones. Yup, that's right we actually jump into a hole cut in the ice in the lake and sometimes the water temperature is just above 0 degrees Celsius. My host mom is a big enthusiast for this and we often go together. Sauna is also a staple of Finnish life and almost every house has one. I am one of the few exchange students who will be staying with the same family all year and I am lucky to be with them. I feel absolutely at home with them and have since the minute I met them. My family consists of my äiti (mom), my isä (dad) and my sister Elina. We also have a big dog and a cat. We live in Tampere, which has about 250 000 people and are about 3 km from the downtown area. Now that the snow has come I spend tons of time skiing and skating outdoors since you can find trails everywhere. My Christmas here was amazing as we spent 7 days at a ski resort in northern Finland. I was introduced to reindeer and got to ride on a dogsled. Finnish food is quite good; lots of fish and potatoes. I have also eaten reindeer meat and musta makkara (black sausage). We drink tons of coffee and I think I might come home addicted to caffeine. I made friends quickly at school and there are 8 other exchange students at my school with me. These last six months have flown by and I imagine the next will go even more quickly. I look forward to a trip to Russia in May as well as Eurotour in June. This experience has been amazing so far and I would not trade it for anything! Lots of love!

Tim Naka

Sponsor: Capri Kelowna

Host: Turkey 2440

Hey everybody, my name is Tim Naka, and I am the Rotary Exchange Student sent from Capri Rotary Club this year from 5060 to district 2440 in the Aegean Turkey. I apologize to the club for not writing as much as I really should. I want to send pictures, but I am using a film camera, so I need to mail them, and the post system here is as confusing as trying to explain quantum physics with toothpaste and bandages. So I am waiting for my host father to come home from America so that I can use his APO address and send a letter within a week. Once I learn that, I can guarantee an improvement on my part of communications. In this letter, please excuse me for reintroducing things that were well established about the trip. I sort of started everything over after two months here, so everything feels like I just got here.

1) Where am I? I am currently living in Izmir, Turkey. It is about 600-700 kilometers south of Istanbul, Turkey, but only 220 kilometers from Athens Greece. I am slightly northeast of Athens, Greece.

2) How big is the city, and what is it like? The metropolitan area of the city is roughly 2.5 million people, so it's not so different from Vancouver. The city is a very large harbor and is the Southern European NATO base, as well as US army Mediterranean Command Center. The city has an atmosphere that's more like Europe than the Middle East, although I quite often see a woman wearing only black, and there are literally hundreds of mosques. I was surprised by it, but I have come to really like the city. I couldn't live in Istanbul with 15 million people.

3) Weather here is typically Mediterranean. When I arrived, it was a scorching 35-38 degrees Celsius. Mediterranean climates don't really have a transitional period between summer and winter, and the winter is more rainy and dreary than cold. It might dip below freezing half a dozen times in winter, and very rarely snows. This year, the weather was really favorable. My friend Adam and I went hiking in the mountains in January at 20 degrees Celsius.

4) What is my new Favorite Food? That is the single hardest question I can answer. Turkish cuisine is world famous and is classed with French and Chinese as being the staple for many other dishes in other cultures, and is hardly outclassed in cooking style, and food variety. It's pretty easy to say what I hate the most though, and that's dried olives for breakfast, it's completely disgusting. The strangest thing I've eaten here is probably Ayran, which is a salted, sometimes fermented, yoghurt drink that Turkish people drink in place of milk. For exchange students, staple food consists of Donair, Patlican (Aubergine), Lahmacun, and Melon fruit juice. I personally like Lamb Shish Kebabs (yes, it's Turkish) and Turkish Dondurma (Ice Cream). I don't know how ice cream is made, but when you eat it, you need to chew it, and the flavors are very different for example = Tiramisu, Karpuz (Watermelon), Kayisi Antep Fistik (Apricot Pistachio), and Nar (Pomegranate). Two words, twelve letter o's - soooooo goooooo

5) What's the strangest, coolest, scariest, most interesting thing I've seen? I have seen so much here in 4 months, and I stopped writing in my journal so I can barely remember. The strangest thing I've seen was when I ate dinner with the other exchange students, and we were sitting on the patio, and we heard an animal bleating, and we looked out to the back of the restaurant next to us, and the men were killing a goat, which was REALLY strange. Another strange thing was when I was in Ankara, I saw two men about 30 years old having a stick fight and they were pretending to fence, but they were just pounding each other. The coolest things I've seen have been some old abandoned castles, the Old City of Constantinople and the underground sewers, the Fairy Chimneys in Cappadocia, the Ruins of the city of Ephesus, and the Greek coastline, all have equally been a highlight of my trip. The scariest things were actually in my first week, when I saw a small bus get into a car accident, and also almost getting robbed by these guys near Sevinch, that was pretty scary. The single most interesting thing I've seen so far was a circumcision procession. There is a small boy about to be circumcised, and he is dressed up in a fine coat, with a white turban and a sash that says Mash Allah, and he is paraded on a donkey or a horse, then he is taken to his party, where everyone gives him some money, then they take him to the hospital where he gets the procedure done.

6) What do I miss about Canada? There are a few things I desperately miss, besides my friends and my family of course. I really miss cold weather, I walk around in shorts and I get the strangest looks from people. I really miss cold, clean water, and fast internet. I miss electricity that doesn't shut down for half the day, and not having extremely poor people trying to sell me stolen gum and serviettes. There are a few foods that I really miss, and Turkish television takes ridiculous to previously unachieved levels, so I also miss Canadian television a little bit. All in all, it's really difficult to not miss your home, no matter how you prepare or how much you think you want to leave. It's always a part of you, because it's part of what makes you. But for me,

Turkey is part of what will make me too, so I already know what I'm really going to miss here as well.

7) What is the hardest part about being away for so long? The hardest part about being away for so long is that everything will be different when I go home, and it will take as much time readjusting to home as much as it took to adjust here. I know that my friends will all have been continuing their lives the way they had been when I left, but it will be so different. Also, I know that I am changing a lot as well, even though I don't see it. The internet can bring me information about what's happening, but it only goes so far, people change so much, and we hardly ever notice it, but the change happens nonetheless and sometimes it's difficult, but other times it makes everything easier. For me, it will be trying to find a way to change for the better, and getting the most out of this experience as possible.

8) What are the similarities between Canadian teenagers and Turkish teenagers? Well I suppose it's always easier to concentrate on differences, but sometimes other than oxygen, sleep, and food, I wonder if there are any similarities. The culture here couldn't be more different from our own. One of the biggest differences is that there are rigid social classes, and people don't move between them, you're either very poor, middle class, or extremely rich. So for poor teenagers, they either have to find a way to beg or work and that consumes all their time. For the middle class, they spend all their time studying for the big university exam. They take Dershanesi, which is professional tutoring, but some students are in Dershanesi for more time than real school. Some students will pay over 4000\$US on a top Dersane in a year, because the university entrance exam is so competitive. The upper class teenagers couldn't care less about anything, so after school they usually go clubbing or partying, or just watching movies or something like that. The students take mandatory English language classes, so they are rather good at speaking English. Similarities are that the Simpson's is madly popular to the point that some will pay an obscene amount of money on Simpson's merchandise, and students will quote lines in English essays. For whatever reason, some western musicians have immense popularity here, especially 1980's rock bands. However I think that's really where the similarities end. The teenagers are more immature here, for boys it is because parents believe that they should enjoy all the time they have before they do their 2 years of compulsory military service. The grades only go to Grade 11 here, and the Grade 12 year is the first year for your military service, if you don't make it to university. Turkey produces almost no domestic films, so they are very familiar with the cinemas, and girls spend a good portion of their day catching up on the latest gossip (you may think this similar to our culture, but oh how it is not). A major difference in Turkey is smoking, where almost all the young people our age are smokers, at least 75% if not 90%. So people just smoke wherever they please, and that isn't too pleasant. Often in school I get caught in the middle of a newspaper fight, or someone is throwing some cabbage in the cafeteria or other miscellaneous carnage. Males tend to obsess about two things, the latest about supermodels, and soccer. Girls tend to spend time propagating gossip. In my opinion the social life resembles what I remember in middle school, so sometimes I find it to be pure comedy, and other times it really jars at my nerves.

9) Was learning the language difficult, how is communicating? Turkish is extremely difficult, and communication is a problem for many exchange students here in Turkey. Turkish is not at all related to western languages and so there are very few words that are similar (unlike learning French or Spanish). Turkish also uses something called "vowel harmony" meaning that depending on vowels in a particular word, depends on the vowels you use in words after it, and that is very difficult. Turkish is agglutinative like German, so a you add suffixes to a word stem, to make longer words. I learned a word in Turkish that started with 3 letters, and after suffixes were added it was over 40. Fortunately, there are no male or female nouns, and they don't even use a pronoun for he/she, they simply say 'it'. Communication isn't too hard at school,

where all the students are fluent in English, but on the street it can get really tough. It's really difficult to learn the slang in any language, and it's no exception here. It can be really hard to barter with some people who start talking really fast with prices and things like that. I've been burned a few times, but my Turkish is enough now that I get by without a problem now. One of the most frustrating things however, is trying to correct Turkish teachers in English class. "No, you don't say 'My cars was blue.'" "Yes, you do."

10) What is the most important thing I've learned this year? There are so many things to be learned, it's hard to point at one single lesson and say, "That's the one, that's more important than all the other lessons." I think the lesson that I learned, that is probably the most useful overall, is how much society depends on people giving to each other and caring about the welfare of not just themselves, but of everyone. This doesn't just mean 'don't be selfish' but also don't be apathetic toward other peoples' plights. I think now, all societies suffer from the same syndrome of not taking care of ourselves, because we fail to care of each other. The second most important thing that I realized, more than that I actually learned it, is how great my life was before. I started to appreciate the smallest things that I never thought about before in Canada. Just the fact that we have garbage cans is something I never thought about (there are no garbage cans in major cities in Turkey, because terrorists put bombs in them). I knew Rutland was a good school, but it wasn't until I came to a big pink concrete box with a 3 meter fence with barbed wire, and armed guards that I realized how great my education was before. Another huge lesson for me is that you can be a block from your house, and be a million miles from home. I learned that you bring all the important things in your life with you, which endings only exist when we create them, and distances you make with your feet aren't the same as distances you make in your mind.

So I hope everyone is having a good year, and hope that you take time to enjoy yourself. I am off for a 2 week vacation and I am going to tour western Turkey with my friend Scott from Osoyoos. My first stop is Camel Wrestling in Bayindir. Yes, you read that right, two camels are put in a ring and they attack each other, I've been waiting all year for this. So the year has major ups and downs like anything else in life, and right now, things are just cruising, and everything's fantastic. But I have moments when I just want to deck someone with a rolled up newspaper and jump in the sea. It isn't a vacation, but something a lot deeper and more meaningful, but it isn't really going to school either, it's just a really unique experience that I am very fortunate to undertake. It has its unique challenges, I can only think about tomorrow, and not fretting about yesterday, I find that although it's a bit over said, it's actually a great philosophy to live by. So really, my adventure isn't all that different that anyone else's, setting is just relative 8000 km away for me is home for 80,000,000 Turks. Everybody is really just on the same journey down different roads. So Inshallah, fortune favors your travels as they have mine.

Wynne Auld

Sponsor: Prosser

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In a time of 6 months I've changed more than I ever thought possible... my opinion on social issues, who should be the President, tastes in food- I even wear those pointy shoes that I used to find so strange... not to mention high heels that have been taught to be so unhealthy for my feet. A notorious morning person, now I can often be found online at 4:00 a.m. on a Sunday morning after a night "out".

Coming from a small town that was almost as quiet at 9 p.m. as midnight, I have really enjoyed the lights and spice of Amsterdam in the evenings that begins at around 11:00 and ends with the break of dawn, though I have yet to see that. It's such a spirit of excitement that

I didn't know that I was on the stage juggling for everyone; I thought I was sort of a light dinner entertainment and would wander around the tables, but that's not how it worked out. The head organizer for the night told me about an hour before I was supposed to start that I would be on the stage; I had no idea what I would say. Another exchange student gave me the idea to compare a Youth Exchange with juggling, and then I ran away and thought the idea out. I juggled really well on the stage, but I couldn't quite convey everything I wanted to say; I was nervous and I wanted to do it in German. I wanted to get the full idea down, and then I thought I'd share it with all of you! Anyways, that's about all I want to say. You'll hear from me again in a few months!