

Hej Allihopa! = Hello Everyone

My exchange year is nearly halfway over. I have been here in Gothenburg, Sweden for 6 months!  
I have really enjoyed these 6 months very much. Since my last letter I am now with my 2nd host family I moved on January 6, 08. I am really glad that I moved to a new host family I wanted to see how other families were. My 2nd host family is wonderful and treat me so kind.

In November 07 I went to Denmark with my first host family. It was great to travel to Denmark I went with 2 other exchange students. I spent Christmas break with my second host family because my first host family left to Canada to see their daughter. Usually people say that you get sad during Christmas time but I never did! New Years I spent it with my 3rd host family and 3 of my Exchange friends. It was really nice there were fireworks lite from every block! It was amazing!

School has been going really well. Now I can figure out what the teachers are saying in Swedish. My Swedish classmates are wonderful. I have many friends from Rotary exchange students, people from school and girls in my dance class. They are all so nice and I'm glad that I have met them. My Swedish has gotten better. I can understand what people are saying, I can read, write but still have a hard time speaking Swedish. I can't say that I'm fluent in Swedish but I will can say that I'm getting better everyday!

This month I have to give a 5 minute presentation to my rotary in Swedish about how my past 6 months have been. I also have to give a 15 minute presentation sometime in June 08 about my State and how my whole year has been for me. I hope I do well on both! This March I will go skiing with my 2nd host family! I am very excited about that! I have also signed up to go on Euro Tour! On Euro Tour me and many other exchange students in Sweden will travel to Germany, Poland, Italy, Czech Republic, France and Austria this June! I am very excited and cannot wait! It is June 26 through July 13!

This is a very short letter but I'm sure you wouldn't want to know what I have been doing everyday. But I can tell you that so far my exchange has been wonderful! I have a great 2nd host family, I have made many friends and I do so much here than I would do back home. I have learned so much about myself these past 6 months and still have more to learn. Time is flying by so fast I have about 5 months left in Sweden and I will make the best out of these 5 months! I really do love it here in Sweden so much and its going to be hard to say goodbye to this great country and the wonderful people that I have met. Five more months to go in Sweden!

I hope you are all having an amazing time in your countries.  
Until next time!

Gabby Valenzuela  
\*Sweden\*

Elizabeth Yeomans Sponsor: Clearwater Host: Austria

Right, as everyone has been saying, wow time for the next update! That means almost 6 months here. Since my last update, I've been busy, and been having a great experience. It's amazing all the things I've been doing, and will get to do. Before I came here I never could have imagined all this!

One of the hobbies that I picked up is dancing! It started with just a course in my school. Then we had a dance competition on our end ball. My partner and I ended up getting first place! So we won a second dance course. So I've been in a dance course every week. I am really really enjoying the dancing. This week I've been going to balls, and parades. In semester break in February I am going to Tunisia, Africa with my first host family for a week. Woah I'm extremely excited to go there! When I get back I am going to meet my distant relatives in the other end of Austria, whom I have been writing letters to for months, but have never met in person.

The holidays were good. I celebrated St. Nikolaus day on December 6th, with the family and all the relatives. I got socks and nuts in a little bag, and we all sang songs, talked, and just enjoyed ourselves. For Christmas my host family and I went skiing for 10 days. It was so nice. New Years I went out with my host sisters and some friends to the town central, where fireworks and everything was. At the beginning of January I changed my family. I must say I was fairly scared at first. I had never even talked to my second family before, and I was so happy in my first family. There is 6 kids in my first host family. So I moved and was surprised to find how fast I was comfortable again. In February my current host family is going on a trip to visit their daughter who is on exchange, and in this time I will be back with my first host family.

There is quite a lot going on right now. Right now in Austria is Faschings so I've been going to balls, and parades. In semester break in February I am going to Tunisia, Africa with my first host family for a week. Woah I'm extremely excited to go there! When I get back I am going to meet my distant relatives in the other end of Austria, whom I have been writing letters to for months, but have never met in person.

In March I have another week of skiing with the Rotary club here, and also Easter break. In April I will be switching families again, and I already know my third family very well, and they are such nice people. Then we have Eurotour. I am very excited to see Europe, and I've so far been to Austria, Switzerland, and Germany. Oh, I am finally used to the idea that I can walk 5 minutes and be in Switzerland, and then go for a bike ride and be in Germany. I think I am very used to the lifestyle here now, and all the traditions are so great to experience. I've also been learning how to cook all the traditional Austrian specialties (nummy). Also, all winter long there is Balls in Austria. Faschings Balls. Graduation balls.

So, today I played squash with a few friends, and tomorrow I'm going to a ball, all dressed up, but Halloween dressed up, not formal. Then on the weekend I'm in a Parade! Its busy and going fast!

Take care everyone, and see you before we know it!

Miguel Arias Rozo District 5060 Outbound District 2000 Inbound SWITZERLAND

Grüezi Miteinandern! (Hello Everyone!),

It wasn't long ago since I realized that it was time for another Rotex Round-up report. Time has blown by! To this moment I'm still asking myself where did January go... Anyways, many things and more experiences have occurred since my last report.

Let's begin in November, things were still somewhat confusing at times, an much had changed. Just the normal routine, school, host family, friends etc.

However things began to change as I changed host families just 9 days before Christmas. I was uncertain and somewhat unhappy because I would be spending my Christmas holidays with a family that I barely would have known, instead of the one I had become so fond of for the past 4 months, and from the Outbound Sessions back in Canada. Christmas time would be the low-point of my exchange year. Those were my worries.

It turned out not to be that way.

As I first arrived to my second Host Family, I felt a different environment, a very welcoming environment. I felt very comfortable with my Host Family and Christmas Eve turned out to be one of the most delightful moments that I had had since the beginning of my Exchange year. We all spent the Christmas vacations in the Swiss Alps, in the village of Zermatt by Mt. Matterhorn. It was wonderful there. We all spent New Year's there as well and it was also special because a friend of mine came to visit me for some days.

Later came January, and as I said before, it went by quite fast! I like my class at school very much although the Swiss German Dialect seems to be the only problem that I still have and to this moment I still don't understand much unless I fully concentrate on the conversation, which doesn't really happen. However, I can understand and speak High-German with no major complications at most times although my vocabulary is still small and I'm doing the best I can to expand my vocabulary.

It is not so easy to learn German in Switzerland because you don't really hear the people speaking High-German but Swiss German instead so it takes great personal commitment and perseverance.

Not everything is bright and colourful of course, just like in normal life. The freedom that I once had in Canada is not so here and that's not so easy as well considering I'm almost 19 years of age. School days ranging from 7.20 to 17.30 are not so pleasant at all times either. It is however, become normal, and I would suppose that's a good sign of integration. Today I'm going with my Host Family to Milano for the weekend so I'm very much looking forward to that.

For now I wish all of you; my Family, Rotary, friends and colleagues the best of luck in everything and sincere thanks to all of you who helped achieve this great opportunity of a life-time.

Best Regards,

Natasha Garner  
Okanagan Mission Switzerland (Rotary Club Langenthal)  
Hallo Zamma!

I had to pick one word to describe how I'm feeling right now, I think it would have to be disbelief. It's been officially 6 months since I first arrived in Switzerland, and I am still coming to terms with all that I've done, seen and learned. The first three months were definitely a learning curve; adjusting to a new way of life, culture, a new language, school, trying to make new friendships and finding my place in this new world. Now six months into my exchange I finally feel like I've found my place and that this is home...an interesting feeling.

The last three months were definitely different than the first. Not better or worse...just different. In the beginning most of my energy was focused on learning German and trying to establish a position in this new "family". During the last three months I feel like I've finally found my place and have made friends and gained family. I no longer find myself being labelled as "the exchange student", I have a name and people know who I am; when I meet someone I know on the street or at the bahnhof (train station) they ask how I'm doing, just like they would with any other of their Swiss friends. It makes me feel Swiss.

Another big difference that I've noticed the last three months is my understanding of the High German and Swiss German languages. At the end of three months I understood fairly well most High German...but Swiss German was still challenging. Now, only six months after starting to learn the language I can't believe how much I understand! Swiss German can still sometimes be a bit tricky (especially when it's another dialect that's quite different than my own (Berndeutsch)) but for the most part I understand almost all of it...though am still working of the spoken part of it... (they use sounds that I've never heard before :)) I can now carry out long complicated conversations (in High German) without feeling tired or not sure what to say; I can express myself (the joy of being able to do that again!!!) And best of all, people DON'T try to speak English with me!!

I think that the last three months has left me feeling so disbelieved because when I look back at where I was and where I am now...it's just amazing. Only six months ago I was no more familiar with my surrounding than any of the tourists (and then probably became more) was terrified by the train system and would rehearse what I wanted ask like a million times before asking it. Now I've got my train schedule memorized for like all the major cities and could tell you what any of the abbreviations mean (ok...so maybe I spend a bit too much time around trains...honestly here life runs on their schedule), and have no problem asking someone a question in German and sometimes even in Swiss German. I officially feel Swiss.

All in all the last three months have been interesting. I've continued to learn and grow in so many ways. The more I actually think about what I'm doing the more disbelief I'm in that I actually have had the opportunity to do this. I now have started to find my place here. I have friends and family, go shopping; life feels like it's always been this way. (And sometimes thinking back to life in North America it feels strange and more foreign than what I've learned in the last six months here. All is all the first half of my exchange has been one of the best experiences in my life and I can't wait to see what the next half has to hold.

Liebe Grüsse,

Robyn Schwarz Sponsor Club: Downtown Kelowna  
Host Club: Pamiers District 1700 France

I cannot believe that in just four months I will be heading back home to Canada! Time here seems to go by so slowly sometimes, but then a month later I wonder where it all went! Life in France has not changed much since my last Rotex, but I have settled in to a routine here and started to make more observations about the culture and daily lives of the people here. I also made it through the holidays and visited many new places in this beautiful country.

Christmas here was interesting to say the least. I changed families the week before for the first time, and they informed me that we would be traveling for a week and a half, visiting Marseilles, Saint Tropez, and Lyon while visiting their cousins. I was excited about this but there was one catch: no phone at the house where we were staying for Christmas, no internet. I was able to call my parents for a few minutes on Christmas but that didn't make things any easier, and because of this I had a strong resentment of my new family. But I went to spend a wonderful new year with exchange friends from North America in Toulouse and after returning home things were much better, now I adore my new family. It just shows how quickly things can change over here.

Culturally I enjoyed Christmas a lot. We stayed in a house near Saint Tropez with a bunch of cousins near my age. I was able to go to midnight mass on Christmas Eve with my host family, and even though I am in no way religious I was able to participate because I knew all the hymns in English. We had two amazing meals, one of raw oysters, salmon, and cheese after mass that finished at 4 am, and one the next afternoon on Christmas of duck apple pie and foie gras. Both included champagne, which is a key part of any of my family's celebrations. Much like in Canada we played games, but being on the Cote D'Azur made it warm enough that all the boys could take a quick dip in the Mediterranean.

As I've said, changing families was probably the biggest challenge I've faced so far this year. Just circumstantially, it wasn't the best time for me to change so close to the holidays. I am fortunate from a family where I had very little rules or expectations, to a family who is very protective of me with many rules for me to adjust to. It's not better or worst it's just different, and it took an adjustment on my part to feel comfortable again. I have been very lucky and had 2 wonderful families. I change again in a month and even though I know my third family I'm sure that changing will still be difficult because of how much I love my current family, but also because it will take another change on my part to feel comfortable again.

Another challenge I've faced this year is my daily life at school. I'm in the French equivalent of grade 12 here, Terminale, and every one in my class is what I like to call "bac crazy." Their final exam is coming up and all they do is focus on studying. As positive as it is that I have such focused friends, I am alone in my school as a foreigner so this makes school difficult. I am also in the hardest branch of classes, sciences, so that does not make things any easier. On top of that, I'm not a fan of the French education system. In fact after talking with my host mom I don't think many people are. There aren't many choices in regards to classes that the students get to make, in my grade you chose between sciences, literature, and economics, and then other than the two required second languages all your classes are picked for you. There are long hours (10 hour days), teachers can choose to not work and still be paid whenever they want, and because the system is nationalized many students can look up the test answers before hand and feel no remorse because apparently it isn't cheating. Nothing changes however

because whenever government officials try to institute a reform the teachers just strike. I've experienced French striking first hand here when everything from trains to the cafeteria at school come to a standstill. I find it hard being in an education system which doesn't necessarily have all students' interests in mind, but I know there is nothing I can do about it. I'm just thankful I graduated from a high school that does everything to help you learn. Other than school things have been really great most of the time. My French is always improving; I understand most of everything that is said to me now. I went to Paris and Disneyland with my first host mom in December which was just beautiful, Je t'aime Paris. New Years involved a French dinner party hosted by one of my American friends, lots of chocolate, and Disney movies the next afternoon. Last weekend I went on a hike with all the other exchange students in my district in the Pyrénées, it was six hours and we went all the way up to the top, so I conquered a mountain! The next 4 months I am looking forward to lots of things. After this Friday I will be traveling for two weeks, going back to Paris, Lyon, and to Switzerland for a week! My 19th birthday is in March, and then in April I will be touring Europe with other students from around the world for 10 days on a bus tour. After that in May my parents are coming to visit and I will finally get to see my life long idol Celine Dion in concert for the first time. Life will be very busy, and despite my dislike of school, very enjoyable. I'm sure it won't be long before I am getting back on that plane in Toulouse to go back home. Thank you so much to everyone who helped to get me here! It's been a life changing experience so far, and I'm sure I'll be seeing you all soon!

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Editor's Note: Due to numerous challenges with my system and email server over a period of two months many student submissions are not included here as they are victims of the "space" between "Send" and "Receive". My sincere apologies to the students and to their clubs for this unfortunate situation. I have every confidence in the students that they will make their submission to the Spring Issue of Rotex Round Up.