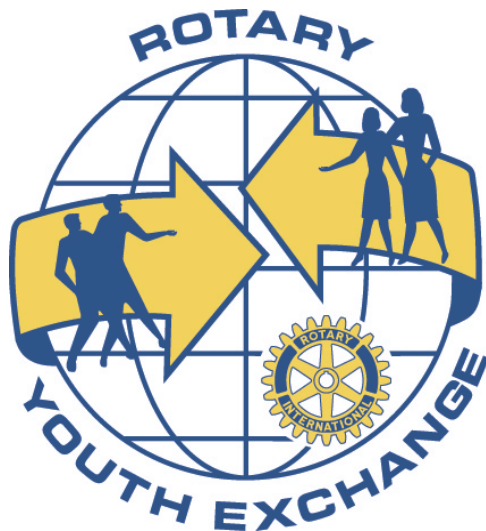


Rotex Round-Up

Winter Issue 2006 - 2007



Submissions by:

District 5060 Outbound Students

Prepared by:

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Alexandra Sibson

Sponsor: Kelowna Sunrise Host: Germany-Multi

It's been close to 6 months now since I've been in Germany and I feel my English is getting a bit more scrambled than it was before. Ha.

My experience has been amazing so far. I was on a ski trip in the south of Germany with my WHOLE grade from school, and this really help with my language learning. I got closer to my friends here and the people in my school. I'm finally being to feel just like the rest of them....not just an "exchange student" (which is great being an exchange student, but at one point in your exchange you want to be called "one of them")

Life is still busy and I've switched to my second host family. They are nice and quite different than my first. I have older siblings (a sister 19, and a brother 21) and this is interesting for me because it's kind of like my situation at home in Canada. I have a sister and a brother those exact ages. Anyways....I like in my new house and I've found myself changing again to fit into their family too. That's what you find every time you move. You find yourself changing in really positive ways everyday.

Some advice...keep a positive attitude and even in bad situations can turn out not so bad in the end. Good luck! Tschuss!

Allison Black

Sponsor: Penticton-Okanagan Host: Switzerland-Multi

Greuzi mitenand!! Oh man, could we really be on the downhill stretch of the exchange year. Time has flown by like I never knew it could. 3 months seemed like such a landmark...like wow...I am a quarter through this amazing experience. And then it was suddenly my 6 month day, and I didn't even realize it till like 8 at night. So as always, a seemingly endless stream of incredible experiences just keep coming and coming. Surprisingly, Christmas away from the family really wasn't that bad. The Swiss have a very traditional Christmas with real candles in the tree and stuff. That was pretty cool. Also interesting was that Santa comes on the 6th of December, and you have to recite a poem and if you were bad then he kidnaps you in the sack and leaves you in the forest. Such a sweet story no?

So I can't really believe how much has happened since the last article. Definitely was a bit scared about changing the host families, having had such a lovely family the first time. But my second family is fantastic. I now live in Lenzburg (which is 8 minutes to Aarau, where I go to school, by train) and about 25 minutes from Zurich. Lenzburg is a lovely old town (went to the 700 year anniversary!) with a castle on a hill that I can see from my house. Lenzburg has some crazy old traditions, and is really fun despite its small size.

On a different note...global warming sucks. It has barely snowed in Switzerland, and has sat at a pretty springish 10-15 degrees for the "winter months." Now while I ride my bike to the train station that is good, however it also means not enough snow in the mountains...which means crap skiing. Have just gotten back from my 2 week sportferien (ski vacation). Despite the snow problem, had an absolute blast. Got to ski the course of the world's longest downhill world cup ski race...so cool to see the race on TV and then ski the same course.

Other than that, have been incredibly lucky to have seen a ton of Switzerland. Geneva, Bern, Basel, Zurich, Luzerne, various places in the alps. And thanks to Switzerland's central location, have gotten to go into Italy and Germany and Liechtenstein. Loving the exchange year! Hope (and am betting) that everyone else is too!

Ben Neitsch

Sponsor: Kelowna Capri

Host: Germany-Multi

Well, things haven't changed much for me since my last update. I'm still with the same host family and will probably be with them for the entire year (well, ten months to be exact, now knowing that I will be coming home on June 26th). Everything here has become fairly normal to me and I no longer really feel foreign. I guess that my German's been getting better, but truth be told, I haven't noticed anything.

I've still been trying to do quite a bit of traveling, but it's slowed down lately. Since Christmas I've only been to Südtirol, Northern Italy. I actually just got back today. I went snowboarding with my host family and some of their friends. Who would have thought that you can go snowboarding in Italy?? Actually,

the area used to belong to Austria, so everyone there can speak German as well, which was helpful, considering that the extent of my Italian is *grazie* and *preggo*. I really enjoyed my time there and the scenery reminded me of Canada. In the coming months I will hopefully be going to Italy again, but more central (Rome), but all of that is in the planning stages. However, I know that I will be going to Prague around Easter.

Well, that's about it. I know the German national anthem by heart now, ha-ha.

Claire Mackinlay

Sponsor: Kamloops West

Host: Japan 2770

As I sit at the back of one of my many English classes I finally have a minute to catch my breath and reflect on my latest adventures here in beautiful Japan. This is the fifth and final day I will be attending school this month...no, I'm not skipping for the fun of it, that's just how busy we exchanges are. This month started with my districts final exchange student trip (over already?) to Nagano where we enjoyed watching the South Americans tackle snow sports for the first time. Escaping to the pristine Japanese mountains was a wonderful change of pace from the busy Tokyo life. And the chance to spend time with the other students all together is always a highlight.

After returning from our ski trip, my new host mother and I jumped on a plane and headed up to the northern island of Japan. There in Sapporo we saw the world famous snow festival and more snow falling than I've ever seen in my life...being from B.C. that's saying something!

The really great thing about traveling around to different distinct places in Japan is that I realized how diverse the culture is and began to recognize the common threads that hold it all together.

The way of life here is rapidly changing with Japan leading the world in some of the latest cutting edge technology. However, the customs and mindset of the people have roots reaching far before hybrid cars and plasma televisions. The Japanese people are extremely polite (although exactly what is polite is really different from back home) and wonderful hosts, portraying the grace and hospitality taught generation after generation. That means I've likely broken more social rules than I'd care to count. Keeps things interesting.

Tokyo is a wild city but its incredible how by taking a side-street instead of staying on the main drag, how easy it is to find quiet temples and old shrines, even in the middle of this bustling capital.

That's all for now! Kiotsukete! Take care!

Colleen Moran

Sponsor: Yakima

Host: India 3060

I've just completed my seventh month in India, and I can honestly say I'm enjoying it more than ever. Last month, Rotary took the exchange students from my district on a tour of North India, including the state of Rajasthan (known as the "Land of Kings" for all of its palaces and forts), India's capital New Delhi, and of course the Taj Mahal. Words don't do the Taj Mahal justice. It doesn't even seem real until you are right there touching the cool white marble. Looking back at my pictures of it, it still doesn't seem real. Later, we visited the India-Pakistan border, which was a surreal experience. As the only border I've ever visited is the friendly Canada-USA border, it came as quite a shock to see people on both sides of the gates shouting nationalist slogans at each other, barely concealing their animosity. It was almost a relief to return to Surat.

I switched host families a couple of months ago, and I just love my new family. My host father Paresh is a very positive, supportive host dad, and my host mom Beena has been gracious enough to share her kitchen with me and teach me how to cook her delicious Gujarati food. My 13-year-old host sister Kanika is great - she's a tomboy, which is very rare among Indian girls, and therefore very refreshing. My only complaint is that during the night, she tends to kick, punch and roll over me (we share a bed) in her sleep.

Making friends with Indians my age was difficult at first. I was placed in 11th grade at my school, meaning that I was with students two years younger than me. There is a huge amount of pressure on Indian high school students. Their classes are very difficult, and on top of that they have tutoring classes after school, sometimes from 2 to 8 at night. With all that studying, they don't have much time for friends, but I've met some college-age students through my host cousins that I get along with really well.

I've also started yoga and henna classes, which are a lot of fun, and frankly more educational than my classes at school. Getting to and from them is always an adventure, as I take rickshaws both ways. At first I was really nervous and unsure of myself, but my Hindi and Gujarati have improved enough that I'm more confident and an expert at bargaining down the prices, which is always fun. As far as languages go, I've decided to focus on Gujarati rather than Hindi, because my host family speaks Gujarati at home, as do most of the Rotarians here. It's been coming along rather slowly though, since almost everyone here speaks excellent English here (they learn it from the age of 5 at school, and all colleges and most high schools are taught in English only), and they are eager to practice on a native speaker. Lately I've been trying to persuade my host family to speak to me in Gujarati, and as a result I've improved a lot in the last two months.

I was surprised to realize I only have four months left here in India. Four months seems so little, and I know I'll be really sad to leave. I'll miss so many things from here, from eating pani puri at roadside food stalls to bargaining from 15 rupees to 10 for my rickshaw ride to watching Bollywood movies in the HUGE movie theatres here, and so much more. I feel so lucky to have had this opportunity

Elizabeth Wierenga-Lee Sponsor: Prosser Host: Ecuador 4400

Well, six months have flown by; I can't believe I haven't seen my mom, dog, family, or Prosser in more than six months! But my time here has been great.

We just celebrated my favourite holiday, Carnival, here in Ecuador. This holiday is all about getting other people wet. For a week before I had to put all my notebooks and school books in plastic bags because I would arrive home drenched. People stand on their balconies to throw water balloons at innocent bystanders and throw buckets of water from passing cars. My house is in the middle of town, so I had the joy of throwing water balloons at everyone on the main street.

At first, I found myself with tons of spare time because my school doesn't have the school activities in which I had been used to in the US, but now I am getting involved in the activities of Ecuador, including running for queens/beauty pageants and modelling of fashion shows. This is great because I would never

have dreamed of doing these kinds of things in the US, but in foreign countries one's self image changes and here I am, Queen of the Food Industry (my specialization).

Geoff Ingram

Sponsor: Kelowna OK Mission

Host: Turkey 2430

As I listen to the keys clicking for another update, I realize that yes, I am still human, and yes, no matter how much I don't want it to, my time here in Turkey keeps flying by, and I'll be home before I know it. So, upon reflection of my last few months here, I realize that I could bore you with details about how I feel I've grown and changed as an individual, however, I feel that telling you one story in particular about a 15 day trip I went on can describe most of what I've been through to this point with perfect accuracy.

The trip, our Rotary Big Trip around Turkey. We started in Ankara, went to the white calcium warm water pools of Pamukale, to see the ruins of many Heiropolis's, to Efes and the house of the Virgin Mary as well as the 3rd most important library of the ancient world. After picking up more friends we went to Bergamon to see the ancient psychiatric ward, to Troy to see King Priams troy and the Trojan horse, and to Galipoli, a sobering visit for all of the guys in the group who were as old or older than the average age of death for the soldiers there of 18. Then we were off for 5 days in Istanbul, and 5 days in Istanbul is like trying to master a new language in a week, and as most Exchange students can attest to, that is almost impossible to truly take it all in.

Although throughout the trip, I could tell you many stories about what went on, a normal day on the trip went as follows:

6 am: Wake up and Eat Breakfast

8 am to 7 pm: along with food, have your head constantly being filled with historical information, stories and sights that you never want to forget.

7-10 pm: plot how to stay up past curfew and fool the chaperones into thinking we were all asleep.

10- whenever we fell asleep around 2 or 3 am: talk about anything and everything to in an attempt to not sleep and keep the party going

6 am the next day: up and repeat...

On one such occasion, around day 8 or 9, we were in Bergamon, visiting the ancient psychiatric ward, where they used running water and positive mindsets to

improve people's health. It is also the first place in history that the snake was seen as a symbol of health, (see any ambulance in your city to see the snake wrapped around the cross). That day we visited the hospital that was more like a city. We walked up to the theater, and instantly the banter began. 'This was a Roman theater; see the semi-circle orchestra pit...' 'No, it's Greek, because the seats are right low to the ground, where as Roman seats were raised to accommodate gladiators...' 'We're in a hospital, probably NOT the place you would see gladiators... gawd...' And by the time we had finished the argument between ourselves, and settled on Roman, because of the type of pillars marking the entrance (I had thought Greek...) our guide confirmed it was Roman, then said 'and I really don't have much more to say that you haven't said already... so let's keep moving shall we???' However, when we tried to do this again, our guide showed us how much more than us he really knew, and although we were getting to know our stuff, we still had a long way to go.

That's the way I feel about turkey. I think I'm starting to know my stuff, but I have A LOT more to learn. I've been fortunate to see a major flood that my city is still suffering from, witnessed a party of 5 million people on the streets of Istanbul for New Years, where, less than a month later there was a political murder. I've had to defend my beliefs, as well as defend both Christian and Islamic religions, which I've learned a ton more about both being where they were both started. Oh I would be so lucky to continue learning as much as I've learnt so far this year, well into the rest of my life.

Thanks for helping me get here,

Janelle Zukowski

Sponsor: Wenatchee

Host: Spain 2200

Well-as I know everyone else will be saying- WOW! How the time flies! Each day just gets better and better, and it's so bitter sweet that with each day gets closer to this year ending. I have recently hit my 5 month mark here, and I just cannot believe it!

I thought Christmas was going to be gloomy and sad, and I had myself all prepared for it. But when it arrived it wasn't that at all! My host family and I went to our aunt's house and had this big Christmas Eve dinner. I had never had a Christmas with all aunts, uncles and all the little cousins before, so it was a

lot of fun. They bought me some little gifts and such so I could feel apart of the group, and keeping up with Spanish style, that night finished at about 5 A.M. Santa Claus came on Christmas Eve, conveniently right after dinner he dropped of the gifts in the corridor through the front door when we were in the living room. They don't have the typical overnight Santa Claus experience we do, must be the time difference.

New Years Eve my host dad (being that he is an amazing cook) made this extravagant 5 course meal and we had more family over. We ate our hearts out, and then at midnight we all took our cups of grapes, and at each chime of the clock at midnight, you pop in a grape. It's actually rather tricky. And then after that you congratulate everyone and saying Feliz Año Nuevo - and then go out for fiesta. Everyone in Spain eats the grapes, and luckily I didn't choke (Like my other exchange student friends I spoke to who said they had problems.) Then again, keeping with the Spanish spirit, my night ended at 9 A.M. with my sister and I getting home around 10 A.M. and my host dad still not home yet. It's so funny that it's normal for people of all ages to go out at such hours, I can't help but think that the time I leave my house here to go out, is the time I'm expected to be home in America. Wonder how that will go when I get back!

Then on the first Saturday after New Years Day is 3 Kings, or Los Reyes Magos. Which is basically - a second Christmas! We got up and the 3 kings came through our window and left little presents in and around our shoes that we left out. And then later that day we ate the typical Roscón de Reyes. It's not tasty to be honest, and I don't think anyone necessarily likes it, but it's tradition. There are little type of plastic action figures in the Roscón that if you get the bad one, you have to pay everyone who's there like 5€, and if you get the good one, you will have good luck all year. The Roscón is a type of bread that's shaped like a doughnut that is about 1 ½ feet in length and 1 foot wide, you can get it with whipped cream in the middle or plain. And you dip it in chocolate to make it taste better.

I was walking down a beautiful street trying to catch up to my friend next to the famous Retiro Park (now that we changed apartments it's only 10 minutes away from my house) and it's not too far away from the Ritz Hotel. I saw this woman, and I was like wow, that's a really great coat. And I looked at her, then kind of

symbolically shook my head and looked at her again and sure enough, it was Julia Stiles the actress from Save the Last Dance. I kind of bumped into her as we walked by because the sidewalk was rather crowded, and later when I talked to my friend she had seen her too. We looked it up online and it turns out she and Matt Damon were filming in Madrid!

I found an amazing Dutch Rotary Euro trip to go on because the Spain Rotary club does not offer a Euro trip. It is from the end of May and last almost 3 weeks. We go from Amsterdam, make some stops through Germany to Prague, and go to Austria and Vienna. We spend a whole week in Italy, which includes Venice, Rome, Florence, and a day on the beach. Then we take a ferry from there to Barcelona. Go up through France; spend a few days here and there in Paris and then back to Utrecht and Amsterdam. I am so excited and counting down the days!

Katie Blair

Sponsor: Wenatchee

Host: France-Multi

Unfortunately, I have taken off my rose colored glasses for France, crushed them, and buried them. This country was once a place I idolized for its beauty and romance. I have spent more time convincing myself that I really loved everything about it here than actually enjoying the ride. Don't get me wrong, I am happy. I have the other exchange students and host family to thank for my glee. I am however, leaving one month early (in June). My emotions are showing nothing like the chart they showed us at Revelstoke. All the rebounds said that after Christmas, I wouldn't want to leave. I cannot say I agree.

School is crazy. I have been trying to make the best of it, but the system itself makes that very difficult. I really appreciate the school structure in the United States more than ever. I sit in class from 8am to 5pm while the teacher lectures, non stop. The students take the notes and then after, go home and study. This is how it is 6 days a week. I try to take the notes, but the language barrier restricts me from understanding a lot.

French is still my number one enemy. After six months, one would think I'd be able to speak- nope. I am taking French lessons and studying as often as possible. I suppose my brain just wasn't made for this. I will not let it win. I will master this language before I leave.

I am still with my first host family, which makes me very happy. I love them dearly. I change the 2nd week in March. Between Christmas and New Years, we went back to their house in the south of France. It was a wonderful way to get through the holidays away from home. For Christmas, the entire family of the Chef's came to celebrate. I had a great time. I am very close with my host grandma and love every opportunity I have to see her. For New Years, people from my village came to celebrate with expensive wine and traditional French songs.

I just got back from my bus trip around France and Barcelona. It was incredible. It was lovely t-shirt and short weather. Spain is cheaper than France, so I enjoyed the shopping. Everything is brighter and warm in Spain. I really appreciated the change. In fact, when we crossed over the boarder to return to my "home" the entire bus booded. I found this a bit ironic.

I still attend my Rotary meetings once a month. I join in whenever I am invited, although, being a girl my opportunities are limited. They are always very friendly, and I enjoy the occasions I have with them.

I have started a new "club" here with other exchange students. We go village to village, town to town giving "Free Hugs." It is a campaign that was started in Australia and now is going strong around the globe. A group of us hold up signs that say "Free Hugs" in a couple of languages and stand on a street corner giving out hugs. The only problem: the French don't have a clue how to hug. We are teaching them one person at a time.

When I read the last Rotex I enjoyed hearing about everyone's experiences. It did however; seem that we were all trying to out do each other. I decided this time around I was going to be really honest and not make it sound all fluffy with rainbows and smiles. I am extremely grateful for this opportunity to live abroad. It has always been my dream. I can see that it is changing me to be a stronger, happier person and for that, I wouldn't trade a single moment.

Katie Staudinger

Sponsor: Yakima Southwest

Host: Brazil 4590

What can I say! The past months have flown by and I am still trying to catch my breath! Since our last Round Up I'm thankful to say I survived my first Christmas away from home. Christmas in Brazil is a lot less commercialized--- but I missed

that! It's not really as big of a deal as in the states and I had the hardest time convincing Brazilians that Santa (Papai Noel) should be wearing his Speedo (just like the Brazilian males) because I'm positive that delivering presents in the 90 degree weather we had for the holidays about killed him!

After a different but nice Christmas and a big party New Years I had the extreme pleasure of joining 90 exchange students from my host district as well as other areas in Brazil for a month long tour of the Northeastern Coast. It was the most amazing month of my life. For 28 days we drove and drove (we went by bus and returned by airplane) and we went to the most amazing secluded beaches as well as beautiful cities such as Rio de Janeiro-- never let anyone tell you its too violent to visit! I loved it and was so jealous of all the exchangers that live there! We also saw historical Salvador and made it extremely close to the equator where I received my first sunburn of the trip in the second to last city! Bad luck! The month still leaves me speechless -- I now have best friends all over the world, especially Scandinavia for some reason, and am already plotting ways to make money to not only get back to Brazil soon, but to get over to Europe!

After coming home from my month in paradise, I went back to school and discovered that I understand the teachers! Yay! I really am making progress! :) Well we were only back in school for a short time before Carnival arrived. For those of you not familiar with Carnival--- it's difficult to describe but it's full of dancing, singing, happiness, and people just going crazy on all levels. I had the most amazing time!!! Although, I have to say that I am thankful the 4 crazy nights are over--- so much lack of sleep almost killed me!

I'm currently in my third and final host family and fearfully noticing the calendar and how short of time we have left. The year has been amazing so far and I can only imagine the best times are yet to come! Beijos (kisses) from Brazil!

Katey Hoffman

Sponsor: Vernon

Host: Ipatinga, MG, Brazil

I can't believe it's time for me to write my second Rotex Round-up!! Last April when all the rebounds were telling us to get ready for the fastest year of our lives, I never had any idea it would fly past like this. It's all very scary and I can't think about it without getting a little teary.

So much has happened since I last wrote... I don't even know where to begin and words (in English!) just aren't coming easy to me so please excuse my awful vocabulary/grammar. I guess I'll start where I left off in November...November was an AMAZING month!! I went on a month long trip to the Northeast of Brazil with 70 other exchange students. I don't even have words to describe how awesome that was. We visited about 18 different cities and a countless number of breathtaking beaches. The Northeast of Brazil is famous for the most beautiful beaches in the country and a

rich culture- this trip gave us all a chance to see the true "face" of Brazil meaning that yes, we were able to experience the magnificent natural beauties of this country, but nothing was sugar-coated. The city that stuck with me the most was Salvador, the *Alma da Africa* or the "African Soul" of Brazil where the African slaves have preserved their culture more than anywhere else in the world. Everything from the *capoeira* (a ritual dance created by slaves as a means of self defense against their masters) to the *acarajé* (brown bean cakes fried in oil) is thanks to an amazing African influence. Everyday in Salvador, I discovered something new and beautiful... and everyday I saw something that broke my heart- whether it was a child, no more than 7 years old, juggling coconuts for pocket change or the huge, watering eyes of a poor woman desperately begging me for food. I don't even know how to explain it; even though I cried everyday in Salvador, it was by far my favorite city. It is powerfully enchanting. Magic.

I came home from the trip the week before Christmas and it was the hardest thing in the world to say good-bye to everyone. It's incredible- I became closer to these 70 "strangers" in one month than I have ever been to some people in Canada. We had the time of our lives! Christmas in Brazil was very different, mainly because it didn't *feel* like Christmas at all, I mean, I was wearing my bikini on Christmas day! It was so cool! But Christmas dinner was pretty much the same as in Canada, lots of family, friends, laughter, and food. For New Years my next host family took me to Alcobaca, a small beach town in the south of Bahia (Brazil's most beautiful state) which gave us a perfect opportunity to bond under the Brazilian sun. I had an unbelievably great time with them all and I will be moving into their house the first week of March. I'm still with my first host family and I think I'll only be having 2 host families during my exchange which is okay with me because they are both fantastic!!

I came home from Alcobaca in the middle of January and, since I was still on summer vacations, I spent my days swimming at the club, going out with friends, reading, and playing the guitar. What a hard life©! It was all very relaxing but during these couple weeks, I found myself feeling my first signs of homesickness. I don't really know why, I guess I just was missing the hustle and bustle of my busy life in Canada. Rest assured, next year, when I'm up to my eyeballs in college homework, I'll be missing my lazy days hanging out with my friends in Brazil! The summer holidays went by insanely fast and last week I started school again which, I'm not going to lie, is boring. Since I am now in the third and final year of high school, everyone is studying like crazy which leaves me with no one to talk to or pass notes with during class! But of course the break times are fun; I just wish we had more of them©. I manage to keep myself busy during the classes by reading (in Portuguese, of course!) and distracting any classmate that I can.

The most exciting time of year in Brazil is quickly approaching: Carnival. Carnival, the biggest celebration in the country (and probably in South America!), starts the Friday until the Tuesday preceding Lent. My sister is coming to visit me this Saturday and we're off to Salvador to enjoy Carnival there!! I'll be sure to tell you all about it in the third edition of the Rotex Round-up... I'm sure I'll have lots of crazy stories to tell- I can't wait!

Right now, I'm feeling the best I have yet- I have made tons of great friends, the language is coming easily, my families are perfect... I just feel like there is so much to look forward to.

VIVA BRASIL!

Kaydin Crane

Sponsor: Revelstoke

Host: India 3060

Namaste!

So here I am writing to you for the 1st time since I've been here, I must admit I should have written sooner but I've been super busy. I would love to share all of my experiences with you but it's impossible as I have done so much and I hardly no where to start. I guess the best place is the beginning. Ok so first thought hitting India. "Oh my god what have I done? I've just left friends, family, and my nice little safety bubble in Revelstoke to journey, quite literally, half way around the world. I'm in a country I've never been before and where I know absolutely no one. Am I crazy?" But all that soon went away and was replaced with excitement as I cleared customs and walked outside to take my first breath of Indian air. I was greeted by my host dad and a wall of Indian heat. I settled into the car for the 4 hour drive to Surat, my new home. It was nice to see the countryside and it was much greener than I was expecting. However the drive home was also unsettling because there is no traffic control! I mean none; you can go anywhere and place at any time! Even down the opposite lane! But that's providing there is a lane distinction! As soon as I reached my new house, the rest of my family greeted me. After that came my first Indian meal, not as spicy as I thought, and first Indian sleep. I started school late due to a huge natural disaster. The first day was rocky because I knew no one and had no idea what to say or expect. Everyone stared at me because not only am I white, but now the tallest girl in school. But soon I had lots of friends and we go out lots. I even got to have a birthday party at MacDonald's with all my new friends! My first festival was Raksha Bandhan. It's the festival between brother and sister, which the sister ties a bracelet or Raki around her brother's wrist to ask for his protection and guidance. He then gives her a present. Unfortunately I didn't get to see the full festival because at this time Surat was experiencing the worst flood in hundreds of years. Me and 12 other people were stuck on the 2nd floor of a house with out proper food, water or electricity for 4 days. However rest assured that we always had enough water for the proper cup of chai (tea). We passed the time watching the water rise from centimeters to 15 feet, 4 of which were in our house. So, understandably this festival was overlooked due to the devastation everywhere. I wasn't upset though because there was so much more to come; like Navratri. This is a nine-day dancing festival where women and men dress in traditional dresses and play garba (garba is the name of the dance, and you say play garba instead of dance garba) in a circle to celebrate the women goddesses. Mother Durga is worshiped in the first three days, Lakshmi in the next three and finally [Sarawati](#) in the last 3. I played garba almost

all nights. The 6 IYE's in Surat even got to travel to Baroda to see, and participate in the world's biggest garba. Next was Diwali, festival of the lights, celebrating the triumph of good over evil. Diwali also celebrates the return of [Lord Rama](#), King of [Ayodhya](#), with his wife [Sita](#) and brother [Lakshmana](#) to [Ayodhya](#) from his exile. Pujas are performed and businesses settle their account books and open new ones. Little clay lamps are lit all through the house and outside too. Ranglois, designs in powder, are used to decorate the area outside of many houses. Crackers are also lit these nights. During the Diwali vacation every one goes on holidays. I was lucky enough to do the same. It took 10 hours in a bus (that's only because we were going like maximum 50 kms an hour due to horrid road condition) to reach a tiny little village called Mandu in [Madhya Pradesh](#). Mandu is amazing. It was filled with old mughal castles and so much history I was really lucky to see it. I've also been all around my state (Gujarat), put my feet in the Arabian Sea, seen Gandhiji's birthplace, seen so many castles and temples to count and been to one of the 4 holiest places in India, (Lord Krishna's city Dwaraka). Coming up next is the rotary district conference and all 8 of the exchange students will be performing a group dances and songs. We also have the north tour in January. We will be traveling to the Taj Mahal and the Golden Temple, just to name a few. Then it's home for a week or 2 and off on the south tour to Goa and Kerala. I'm having so much fun here and I have got to do so much and experience so much. I would like to thank rotary for this opportunity because without them I wouldn't be experiencing this opportunity of a lifetime. I would like to encourage more people into this program because you really don't know how valuable this year will be until you're in it. So once again thank you. I wish you all a merry Christmas and happy New Year as well as apologizing once again for my lateness in getting this out. However I am half Indian now so I am on ISD (Indian standard time) and ISD is always at least 2 hours late! ;)

Kaylan Madeira

Sponsor: Oliver

Host: Brazil 4760

Well, I just arrived back in Belo Horizonte after a 10 day vacation in Rio with my host family, and to say the least it was amazing. The beaches were phenomenal and I never wanted to leave! I had my first experience swimming in an ocean, at first it was freezing and I could just see the newspaper headlines: "Canadian Exchange Student in Brazil Suffers Frostbite While Swimming in the Ocean"....that was possibly a little bit dramatic. But truly, it was cold, and I was knocked over quite a few times by waves, I suppose there is a special technique, one that I had no idea about until a few days later. The ocean was great, although getting salt water in my eyes wasn't the best, I managed to survive. I not only

arrived back home with a tan that would make my sisters very jealous, but I was lucky enough to visit many different locations in Rio as well. I went to the Botanical Garden and when I first got there I wondered why it was an outdoor location, five seconds later I shook my head at myself saying "Right, you are in Brazil and it's warm enough all year round that flowers do manage to grow on their own in January"...it was terrible. I also took a 20 minute train ride to the top of Corcovado Mountain to see the 38 meter high monument of Christ the Redeemer which looks out over all of Rio. Unfortunately that day was a bit cloudy and didn't provide a spectacular view, but nonetheless it was breathtaking to see something that on July 7th may become part of The New 7 Wonders of the World. I also went to the Museum of National History, Fort Copacabana, Espaco Cultural da Marimha (Naval Museum), The Indian Museum which portrayed the lives of the Amazon Indians and to the Church of Sao Bento which was built in the 17th Century with an interior made out of gold, silver and wood carvings. I learned that there was so much to this city that many tourists would probably not invest their time in, with world famous beaches its not too easy. But, I enjoyed all of these things as well as the structural architecture from past centuries just as much as my time spent at the beach.

Backtracking to Christmas, although it went quite well, it was definitely different from what I am used to back home. In my Brazilian family Christmas wasn't a huge thing, On both Christmas Eve and Christmas Day we went to my host mothers sisters house and had dinner there and the opening of the presents on Christmas Eve, but it was a little strange not going to be able to spend Boxing Day shopping like crazy....we'll what I mean to say was it was a little strange not being with my family at Christmas time. Now, in all sincerity, it was such a difference not spending Christmas in Canada, not only because of the snow factor, but because for the solid two weeks of Christmas break I am surrounded by my family and eating way better food and getting unbelievably full of chocolate(this year I managed to lose weight at Christmas time!) Like they say in a Christmas Carol: "There is no place like home for the holidays". Christmas was more of a bore than anything else, and it just seemed like any old day except there were Christmas trees and presents involved. New Years, on the flipside, was incredible. I never thought that I would spend it in Brazil of all places and with people that I have met from various countries from around the world. The one thing that will probably bring about some culture shock is when I go back to

Canada for Christmas and instead sun tanning on Christmas Day while waiting to go for dinner, I will be in a winter jacket surrounded by that stuff called snow.

Overall life in Brazil has and will continue, without a doubt, to be a new adventure everyday. I had changed host families in early December and the time with this family has flown like I couldn't believe. Besides my host parents, I have a 14 year old host sister, they are all great. My host sister is fairly shy, which to all of you who know my real sisters; you would know that shy truly isn't a characteristic that either of them have. Yet, after spending a lot of time with her on our trip to Rio we have established a really good relationship and she doesn't seem to be half a shy as she was before. My host father is still having a bit of trouble speaking Portuguese to me, and even when I ask a question or answer in Portuguese he always speaks in English. My host mom doesn't speak or understand English and she has been a great stepping stone for me in developing my Portuguese, although its still not as great as I would have hoped for this time, I feel as if I have learned more in these past two months with this family than my 4 months with my previous host family. I will be entering into University in February and taking Tourism to learn more about Brazil and its history, not only that, the University offers Portuguese classes and I am eager for those classes to get started up. I want to take full advantage of my resources so I can go home and speak Portuguese with my family. Although, I will have a Brazilian Portuguese accent, the people I have encountered here have told me that they don't even hear a hint of an accent, but I know that without hearing Portuguese growing up that would definitely not be the case. So I hope I will be able to pick up Portuguese without any trouble.

I can hardly believe that I have been in Brazil for more than 5 months already and that I already know my definite departure date. Time will fly fast and soon I will be back on that plane again with another 10.5 hour stop-over in Sao Paulo before I can get to Toronto and then Vancouver to home. Just like it was worth it to come here, it will be worth it to go home. And... this is where I put in the part where I would rather sit in First Class on the way back home rather than regular Economy. "Hey Dad...how much do ya miss me?"

Well, I have now been in Austria for exactly 6 months, 3 days and a few hours or something. All I can say is that Austria just keeps getting better and better the longer I stay here. Of course everything keeps getting easier when you can speak the language better and better. It would be a lie to say that this year has been easy for me. Some parts definitely have been but I did have to go through something that I doubt anyone else on exchange this year will have to go through. One of the exchange students in my awesome group died in November and that, I think, has been and will be the hardest thing to go through this year. That experience really made the rest of us think just how fast life can change, good or bad. That was the down in the last few months but we all stuck together and made it through. I still cannot believe just how much time has past. 6 months!!! Sometimes it feels like just yesterday I arrived in Austria even though I am on my 3rd Host family already. Like people say, "Time flies when you are having fun!"

I am always out with my friends and family and exchangers. Sometimes I do become bored because my friends have homework and I don't so there are times when I miss having homework!!! Yes, that is right, I, Kira Petri, miss having homework. It keeps you busy while no one can be with you. Also, I have started reading everything I can lay my hands on. I have also realized that I can no longer speak English, even with the exchange students. My English is constantly mixed with German and even when I speak to my sister on the phone I start speaking in German. People in my school will ask me to define an English word for them and I have to sit and think for about 20 minutes and then I resort to finding the German word instead. I think I may have to take an "English for Foreigners" course when I come home. The Christmas season in Austria is one of the prettiest things I have ever seen in my life. For Christmas, Rotary brought all the exchangers to Salzburg and threw a party for us. It was great. They also made all the countries give a presentation about Christmas at home. Well, all of the Canadians decided that it should be me and my friend Nicole to do ALL the talking. That was fun with our really bad German and extremely short sentences. We made it work. It is hard to explain in German that in Canada every family does something different.

I have already had to say good bye to some of the exchange students because some leave in January. That was sad because we are like one extremely giant family. In

a week I will also have to say good bye to a really good friend of mine in Kirchdorf. She is an exchange student but her exchange is only half a year and not with rotary. We had the going away party and at the end we sat there crying for about 20 minutes. That just made me think of what it is going to be like when I have to leave in July. Actually, I don't want to think about that.

One of the coolest things about Austria is that when they celebrate something, they really celebrate it. Every holiday is huge. Valentines Day, Christmas, New Years (which in German is called Silvester, like the cat in Looney Toons), and Fasching (Austrian Holiday) are all so much fun. Fasching is a lot like Halloween. I can really feel myself changing now and becoming more independent, more Austrian. I realized last week that I know lots of Austrian dialect. Now I have told my friends that they have to speak to me in High German so I can learn that too. Adapting to the culture was not as hard as I thought it might be. I really love Austria and I think when I am older and finished University I am going to move here. I really love it. Going home is definitely going to be bittersweet. To all the Exchangers, Keep trying almost everything your country throws at you. If you don't, you might regret it.

Megan Calhoun

Sponsor: Kamloops

Host: Ecuador 4400

As I sit down to write this report once again, I find it hard to believe that I have been here in Ecuador almost six months already. I now find it hard to remember what was so scary and different when I got here, everything seems quite "normal" to me now!

At the beginning of December nearly all of the Exchange students in Ecuador gathered together for a trip to Quito and surrounding towns. We went to the middle of the world, visited indigenous markets, went to the top of a mountain, saw QuitoFest, and I actually managed to fill the memory card in my camera!! All in five days!

Christmas here, as expected, was different from back home and a little tuff. Christmas in Ecuador is a lot less dramatic and a lot less expensive than back home. The big day here is actually December 24th when the whole family gathers together for dinner and a small gift exchange, similar to our secret Santa. The actual exchange of presents is supposed to take place at midnight,

although we are in Ecuador, and things rarely happen on time. Christmas morning I opened my package from back home, and my family went to the beach for the day.

New Years in Ecuador definitely isn't subtle. On December 31, or Año Viejo (Old Year) people drive around town to say goodbye to the old year. Then the whole family gathers together to share food and memories. At midnight a muñeca, a paper mache doll is burned, taking with it anything bad or negative from the past year. After the fireworks and saying goodbye to the old year, I went with my host family to a New Years party that lasted until seven the next morning - definitely not something I would normally do with my parents back home!

In early January I changed host families. My new host dad also happens to be my chairman, and they are wonderful people, with whom I could not be happier. A definite improvement from my first family, they are generous, kind, welcoming people. I have my school vacation right now, so I am spending a lot more time in the house and with the family. I spend at least one day a week at the beach, and although Portoviejo is starting to feel small, I am still finding new things to do and see.

My Spanish is coming along well; I can carry on conversations, have had dreams, and have even talked in my sleep, all in Spanish! One challenge I have had has been asking for and accepting help. My loss of independence is definitely something I have had to come to terms with. My life here is wonderful, and I am grateful everyday for this wonderful opportunity and experience.

Morgan Cole

Sponsor: Salmon Arm

Host: Australia 9710

Australians all let us rejoice,
for we are young and free;
we've golden soil and wealth for toil,
our home is girt by sea;
our land abounds in nature's gifts,
of beauty rich and rare;
in history's page let every stage,
Advance Australia Fair!

In joyful strains then let us sing,
Advance Australia Fair!

Every Tuesday night I am proud to sing this national anthem (off by heart of course) along with the Rotarians of Yass, and almost every time I feel a smile creep across my face. Over the last three months I have immersed myself even more in the Aussie way of life, so much that I feel as though I could easily call this country home tomorrow! As rotary students do, I have kept myself extremely busy and wouldn't want it any other way. Let me start with my activities preceding the New Year. Shortly after my previous report, I moved in with my second host family who own a farm approximately half an hour out of Yass. I had just become accustomed to, and enjoyed being an only child in my previous home; now I would be in the constant presence of an extremely energetic eight year old brother, and would spend Christmas break with him as well as two host sisters who attend boarding school! Well if I thought I had experienced the "farm life" for the first three months, I was in for quite a surprise. The Wyer family own the property their house is on, plus three others where they raise sheep, goats, chickens, and a few bunnies. Kangaroos and rabbits make usual appearances around the house, and the lucky ones decide to hop away before Paul (my host father) and Ben (son) take aim and shoot them. At first this was difficult for me to handle, especially when Ben would go into detail about where he shot the animals then proudly invite me to take a look....but I realized later that these animals were nuisances and slowly began to accept the reality of farm life. A few months later I even agreed to help my host dad set out almost 20 rabbit traps, knowing we would be eating one for "tea" (dinner) the next night. I could not, however, bring myself to accompany him later that night to kill, skin, and gut the cute little creatures. As you can imagine, meat was a very dominant aspect of my diet for these three months! I spent Christmas at the coast with this family, and it was definitely a different experience compared to the traditional white Canadian Christmas I am accustomed to. We spent two weeks eating fresh seafood - including mini octopus, swimming in the surf, and relaxing. My host father is an avid scuba diver, and I was fortunate enough to visit a whole new world with him. The ability to breathe underwater is truly an amazing experience. For New Years Eve I took a bus to Sydney where I met up with my previous host parents. We watched the fireworks show from the famous harbour, which is an event many Australians take

great pride in. A few weeks later I was travelling the country again, this time on a plane with my host sister to Melbourne, Victoria. We spent a week there with her Aunt, and fit in as many tourist activities possible (with plenty of days dedicated to shopping of course), including a visit to the National Gallery of Victoria and the Melbourne Aquarium. Towards the end of my summer holidays, I participated in the annual Yass Knockout Touch Football Tournament weekend. The sport is basically rugby, but instead of tackling your opponent you simply tag them. I had agreed to be on a team with a few mates from school, unaware of the scale of the tournament, or how to even play for that matter! Touch mania swept over the little town of Yass that weekend and about 86 teams of various skill levels from all over the state came to participate. I had an absolute blast, and am determined to start up a league when I return home. Although it may sound like I have only been holidaying around the countryside, I have still made time to participate in various Rotary activities. A few weeks ago I was back down at the coast yet again attending a rebounders de-briefing weekend. It was great to meet and hear the stories of the students who had returned home only weeks before; especially the Australian girl who had spent her year in Chase whom I had met before coming here! Meagan lives in Canberra so it is easy for us to keep in close contact now. In Yass, my Rotary Club prides themselves on their BBQing skills and can be found at most events held, such as the recent Australia Day festivities. I can now say I am a very experienced bread buttering, sausage cooking member of the community! Towards the end of this month I have offered to attend the RYPEN weekend and aid in any area possible. I look forward to this opportunity, as it will allow me to see yet another side of Rotary and the work it does with younger members of the community.

So as you can see, I am continuing to thoroughly enjoy my exchange year. I can't believe that in less than three months I will be embarking on my 3 week trek around Australia, and a month later on a plane home!! They do say time flies when you're having fun don't they?

Nicola Mitchell Sponsor: Kamloops Daybreak Host: Philippines 3820

Hey everyone! According to Rotarian theories, this part of our exchange is one of the best. By this time we've been through some highs and lows, and of course they still won't stop, but now most of us are feeling like we're home. This new country that we've invaded has accepted us and we've accepted it too, with

everything it does and doesn't offer. Honestly, I don't feel like I've changed a lot being here, but I know I've learned so much about things I never would've learned before.

I only have 2 host families here and I love them both so much. The neat thing is they are so different from each other; I get to experience more in that way. My first family has 11 people...all related somehow and all living in the same house. My second family includes my host parents and no kids at all. I lived with my first family for the first 4 months, and then I moved to my 2nd for 4 months and now I'm back to my first family again for the remaining time. It's good to be back here, but it feels like I hadn't even left. I guess that's a good thing.

School! Well, let's just say I'm thankful I don't need grades here. Yes, I'm focusing on the language and history...but I'm on a mutual break from the math and other subjects that don't get along with me. When I first started going to school, I didn't like it. I won't lie. But now school is the place I like to go. School is where my friends are. We may not do a lot of extracurricular activities there (which I had a hard time with at first), but enjoying the simple things are just as good. Such as laughing and talking with your friends all afternoon outside because your teacher didn't show up AGAIN.

One thing I'm excited about is the language thing. I'm not fluent and I know I won't be by the end of this year considering everything is surrounded by English, but I'm happy with where I am. I can have some conversations with people, ask questions, and answer questions. I've realized it's really hard to understand stories people are telling, but if they are talking about what's going on at that moment around them, I can put 2 and 2 together and have it make sense. Don't get me wrong though, it's not all the time. Ha-ha.

Christmas was an experience and a half. I loved every minute of every day surrounding it. I was surprised I didn't feel homesick like I thought I would. Every day I was busy doing something and it felt so good. Seeing the decorations being put up, the town's Christmas activities, our dance competitions, and people always smiling was great. We opened gifts on Christmas Eve and ate our Noche Buena. Christmas Day involved a lot of relaxing and watching kids from everywhere

knock on the neighbor's doors for coins. My host grandfather's house is a favorite hot spot because he gives out a lot of money...when I say a lot I mean 10 pesos compared to the usual 3 pesos. Ha-ha.

Last weekend I traveled North again to Baguio City. Baguio is the "coldest" spot in the Philippines, hence why it is the Summer City Capital. Many people from all over the country went there to see the

"Panagbenga Festival" or what I like to call the Flower Fest. It was another different experience because this time it was just me and Filipinos. I didn't travel with the other exchange students like usual; it was with some awesome ladies from my other neighborhood. They are so much fun and are always laughing at the top of their lungs. It was a good challenge too, because they didn't speak a lot of English on the trip. We went to the famous strawberry fields, and walked around town near our hotel. Tents and people were everywhere. At night my friend and I watched a Reggae concert outside and then the following day we woke up early to find a good spot for the Flower Parade. Wow, that was a great parade. It was amazing to see what people can do when you give them a float and thousands of pesos worth of flowers. GORGEOUS. We left for our 7 hour trip home right after the

parade was done at 12:30 pm to "beat traffic." We didn't get back home until 12:30 am. That car ride was a tough one. Every time all ten of us squished into that car, I was so amazed we actually did it.

One good thing about the ride back was stopping for dinner by the beach. We ate some seafood and then walked over to the sandy beach. The sun was setting and I was awestruck. You could just see the dark silhouettes of bodies in the water against the sun and feeling the warm water on my feet was so good. It was one of those "Wow, I'm actually here" feelings. I loved it!!

Time for me to sign off! Good luck to all of you out there, I think about you lots and can't wait to hear more of the stories. Cheers for now!

Rebecca Tishenko

Sponsor: Tri-Lakes Vernon

Host: Brazil 4600

Well it's almost been 7 months here and I can say that my perspective of Brazil has definitely changed. I LOVE IT NOW! Okay I'm not going to lie Christmas time

and new years were difficult. My Christmas consisted of going to my host grandparent's house starting on the 21st and eating lots of food. Rice, beans, meat, veggies and CHOCOLATE! Then on the 24th we went to my other grandparents house and stayed there and ate some more. On Christmas day I woke up and went running on the beach. It was unreal! I just couldn't believe that it was Christmas I was running on the beach in 40 degree weather! Let's just say I nearly died because of the heat.

Well during that time I was missing home so much, as I'm sure everyone was. Remembering how Christmas is at home and talking to the family on the phone made me a little homesick... but I got over it in like 2 seconds. New years was completely crazy! My host family rented a beach house with 15 other family friends and we stayed there for 5 days. On New years night we had a huge dinner bbq with cakes and the works. Then everyone dressed up in white, lit candles and ran down to the beach to watch the most amazing fire works ever. These fireworks topped any and all fireworks that we have in Canada...I'm sorry to say that but it's true!!!! These fireworks lasted for 20 minutes straight and had the most amazing colors and patterns. Oh yes and a crazy thing occurred right before my eyes. One of the fireworks that were set off came down from the sky and landed right on a guys face. He started screaming and trying to take this spark off his face. They got it off and rushed him to hospital. So after that I stayed under cover!

Anyways three days after New Years I left on my rotary Month long trip to the Northeast of Brazil! Let me just say that 28 days with 80 exchange students traveling in 2 buses was the most amazing thing I have ever done in my life. We started off in Sao Paulo and traveled to the most popular cities in Brazil. We went to Rio de Janeiro, stayed in a hotel right on Copacabana beach, went to the world famous Christo, sat on top of the Pao de Açucar, went to the biggest soccer stadium in the world; Maracana. We danced on the streets in Salvador where Carnival happens, took capoeira and samba lessons, hiked to amazing waterfalls and went sand dunning in the desert of Brazil. As I said we started in Sao Paulo and drove to many towns and ended in Fortaleza, right at the top where Brazil starts to curve. Then we took a flight to the capital of Brazil, Brasilia. There we saw the resident Lulas house, government buildings and amazing architecture. What is amazing is that there were 80 of us rotary students from all around

the world. After the 28 days together we all were best friends and didn't want to leave each other. We were all crying at the airport, holding onto each other, not wanting to go back to our home towns.

Well now I'm back in my city, resting up after 28 days of not sleeping. I have moved onto my second and last family and they are amazing. I actually have a host sister now and my host parents are very cool. Last week was CARNAVAL here in Brazil. It was super fun. I stayed in my town and had an exchange student who lives near my town come and spend carnival with me. My town is right on the ocean so there were SOOOOO many people here. There were so many concerts and dancing on the streets. There was a huge parade on the official day of carnival with flashy costumes and very naked women! I have never seen anything like this before. It was definitely once in a life time!

So now I've been here for 7 months and I can definitely say that after my month long trip around Brazil I have learnt to appreciate Brazilian music, the culture and the language. I'm loving being able to talk to anybody and everybody and love showing off my new language! In school all the professors (I am going to university here) ask me about Canada and I am so proud to tell them EVERYTHING! I can't believe how fast this time has past by and I know its only going to go faster! Love you all and I miss Canada like NONE other!! Tchou from Brazil!!!

Spencer Couers

Sponsor: Armstrong

Host: Switzerland-Multi

Well, well, well it's that time of the year again to tell everyone back home how great my exchange year is going. I am glad to do it. Switzerland is getting better and better everyday. I am sad my year is already half over and in just five months I will be back home in Canada missing the Swiss life. School is going good. I am starting a new semester in two weeks, with all new subjects and teachers, I will almost be like back at the beginning, except now I know what to expect and have all my class friends to help me along the way. The winter season has started and I have done my fair share of skiing and sledding so far. As well as playing a whole bunch of hockey, it's been great. I am staying with a super host family, which is good. I had a little trouble with my last one, but talked to my counselor about it and he fixed the problem in a flash. My Rotary club is awesome, they are so nice and my counselor is the best. After a slow start my

year is really picking up and turning into a real blast. My German is really good now and I can understand pretty much everything, and the Swiss German is not so much a problem anymore. The first half of my year went great, and I hope the second half goes even better!

Stacy Wormell Sponsor: Merritt/Merritt Sunrise Host: Sweden

Send us some of the warm weather!!! I know that my last report I was asking for the cold weather to be sent Europe's way, but it has been so cold and snowy and grey here for the last couple of weeks!! Well, these couples of months have been eventful! I enjoyed Christmas very much even though it was harder then I thought it would be to be away from my Family. Sweden celebrates "St.Lucia" who is the goddess of light, because for those of you who have not been in Scandinavia during December, we get very little light!!! It's really strange going to school in the pitch dark and coming home from school in the pitch dark...so we celebrated Lucia to bring us some light! I got very close with my first host family and they spoiled me absolutely rotten for Christmas. Here in Sweden the dinner is called "Jul bord" which translated into English means, "Christmas Table" and it ranges everything from Fermented Herring that has been rotting for 3 months to day old salmon and EVERY fish in the middle, very different from the traditional Canadian Christmas but awesome all the same. It was my 19th birthday on the 20th of January. So I got woken up very early in the morning by my host parents singing me the Swedish version of happy birthday, a birthday cake and lots of really nice gifts. My host family let me have all the exchange students and some of my school mates over to my house for a movie and junk food night, and it was so much fun. Before my birthday, my Rotary took me on an amazing adventure up to the very north of Sweden to a place called Jukkasjarvi. It's a small village around 200 km north of the Arctic Circle. It was absolutely amazing up there. We landed in a place called Kiruna where we then got on snow mobiles and made our way on a 2 hour ride to the famous ICEHOTEL. It was so amazing, by far the coolest thing I have seen since I have been here (literally, cool!! it was around -15 up there upon our arrival.) We stayed the night in the ICEHOTEL which was freezing cold but totally worth it because everything is made up of ice and snow, even the beds!! The next day we woke up to warm juice and warm clothes to get ready to go on a dog sled adventure into the Swedish forests. It was so cold out side but I was so taken by the dog sled right that I didn't notice exactly how cold I was until we returned back to the ICEHOTEL where

I was then diagnosed with a very mild case of frost bite!! This trip was so cool; I loved every minute of it. My Dad came to Sweden on the 27th Of January and he took me and another exchange student, Rachel from Kansas USA, to Paris for the week. It was so amazing to see the Eiffel tower, and Notre Dame and all the government buildings, as well as Disneyland of course!! This has been a very busy month for me. One of the Rotarians in my Rotary club has recently passed away so I will attend a service for him next week. This month has a sad ending for me as I have left my host family that I have spent 6 months with for a new host family. I became very attached to my first host family and will miss them very much, but my new host family is very kind. I have two host brothers, Gustav who is 15 and Jakob who is 10. At the beginning of the Month I said goodbye to all of our oldie exchange students here in Sweden as they all headed home to Australia, New Zealand and Brazil. I was especially sad to say goodbye to a good friend of mine Kathryn who was from South Africa. I have been very privileged exchange student as my Rotary Club is very active with my Rotary so I am always off on amazing adventures and I love it so much. I'm always away on crazy adventures but here is a quick shout to all my 5060 buds!! Thanks for all the mass emails about y'all; I promise to get one out there to you guys ASAP!!! Hope everyone is doing well all over the world and I'll see you in 5 months!!! Now we will meet al the new exchange students who are new here in Sweden this coming Thursday at their language camp, I am very excited That is all for now, Happy New Year everyone; and keep on truckin' 'er!! All the best!!

Wesley Maples

Sponsor: Yakima

Host: France-Multi 1640

I thought to myself the other day, while drinking a coffee after finishing my meal in a very tiny, very classic restaurant in Paris, after eating the duck and the berry tart - "Wow, I'm going to miss France." After the realisation that I've already spent 6 months here, and looking ahead to everything I am going/want to do in the next 4, I feel that little time rests. From now on, about every 2 weeks, I have a big trip planned - with my host family, school or with Rotary, and often outside the country. With my family and school, I feel extremely well integrated. At school, the directors want to make sure I can profit as much as possible during my year. At home, I'm really considered as one of the family. This feeling continues to grow as I get to know more families personally. Lately,

I've been starting to get opportunities to sit in and play in concerts with professional jazz musicians in Rouen. This has provided some excellent opportunities to meet many people and continue to make connections. It's also an amazing cross-cultural experience for me. I may not perfectly speak their language, but we can still get up on stage together and play down a standard. I've played twice now, but I've already gotten to play with the 2 of the best rhythm sections in Normandy. The most trouble I've been having is developing close friendships with kids my age... pretty much the same old song as most other exchange students. It's something easily taken for granted when I have spent most of my life surrounded by many of the same people, and I find myself missing it now.

While this exchange year was an alternative for me to starting my university studies, I feel like it's here that I've started my education for the rest of my life. I've learned so many things across such a broad spectrum, which could never be replaced by a year at college. While it's not always easy, I'm extremely grateful that I've had the opportunity to spend my year abroad, and I'll spend what time is left just trying to make the most out of every day.