

**Rotex
Roundup
Outbounds
2011-2012
Fall 2011
Edition**

ASIA JONG

Now that I think of it... even after these two months, I still haven't realized where I am yet. It was hard to comprehend that after stepping off the plane I would be stepping into a completely alternate life. It's rather funny because it almost feels like Italy is what's real but my life back in little ol' farm town Armstrong is a dream.

A lot has happened since I took my first breath of the dense and musty air of Milano. After a long and grueling travel, on a flying piece of metal in the sky, I was more than ready to sleep in a warm house. After waking up around 3:00pm the next day I was ready to get my first taste of Italian nightlife. I went to Milano for "Vogue's Fashion Night Out" with an Italian friend I had made while she was on her Rotary exchange in my town. There were men with suits and slick backed hair, shiny models doing odd poses in shop windows like Versace and Chanel and a just a ton of people in general. The hustle and bustle of Milano is quite different from the hustle and bustle (of cows, chickens and tractors) in Armstrong.



Here, I live in a groovy, colourful house with my host mom, dad, sister and Toby- their dog. I play the flute in a local concert band and I am about to start figure skating as well as painting and piano lessons. My pocket-sized town is called Cernusco Lombardone, which is smack dab in between Milano and Lecco. It's quite a nice spot seeing as I am able to see Milano with its beautiful art, architecture and fashion while I am also able to go to Lecco with its jagged green mountains, lake and fresh air.

Six days a week I take the train to a scruffy Linguistics school in Lecco with seven other exchangers. I had no idea that the Italian schooling system was so different from that in Canada. An average Italian student probably will know more information and history than you will ever know in your life. However the practicality of this knowledge is another thing. In Italian schools they lack in teaching you how to form your own opinion and apply skills to real life. So if you ask an Italian to change a light bulb, they might just stand there unknowingly and talk about the origins of electricity. Okay, that's an exaggeration but sometimes there's a depletion of common sense.

Or perhaps I'm the one without common sense because since I've been here I can guiltily say that my appetite has expanded about three times the size it came here with. It was inevitable though, with all the fresh mozzarella cheese, pasta,

gelato and pizza. Which is relieving after a little language mix up making me think I was going to be served mice for dinner (the Italian word for “corn” is “mais”). Fortunately, the food here has certainly out done it self. Especially the to-die-for homemade four course dinners my host grandma cooks on weekends. I suppose I can bear without the comforts of North American cheddar cheese, bagels or peanut butter for a while.

However, art is even more plentiful than food. After seeing the cathedrals and churches in Italy it’s hard to believe that a human person could have actually crafted it with their hands. The art that is everywhere in the old towns, tiny streets and busy plazas are so abundant that I could just stand in one place for a while and be content. Da Vinci’s depiction of the Last Supper isn’t too bad either.

These past two months have whizzed past me without me even noticing. There has been so much to do and so much to learn about in this welcoming little boot. It makes me wish time would go just a little bit slower. Because when I took a trip to Cinque Terre and looked past the trees on the coast of Monterosso, I couldn’t quite tell where the pale blue sky melted into the bright blue sea... That’s where I realized I would be talking about these days for the rest of my life.

Blake Ledger

Time flies when you are having fun. Yeah, that is basically the best phrase that can describe how this last year has been for me. Those of you who think that the exchange starts when you arrive in your country, you are wrong. For me it started 1 year ago, when I had interviews and applications. It was December when I found out that I was going to Brasil, and since then my life has been... amazing. Waiting to leave took a while, with the wait for the VISA taking longer than I had hoped and wanting so much to begin my



exchange. I ended up leaving on August 11, and the day that I wanted to come so bad, came, and I didn't know if I was ready. Saying goodbye to your friends is one thing... to your family is another. Doing it in the airport knowing that you won't see them for a full YEAR, now if you haven't done that you will never understand. But the day came, and like all the others, it past, although with a few more tears. I love my family so much, and I am grateful every day for the opportunity that they have given me here in Brasil. Anyways, the next day, August 12, I arrived. In the airport I was with some other exchange kids, but really you still feel all alone. I left the airport, without any difficulties, and walked out into Sao Paulo Guarualhos airport. The nervous panicky feeling was just starting when I saw the sign, and the face of my host dad. BLAKE LEDGER. I couldn't help but smile. My family was there and waiting for me, and I was greeted with hugs and kisses from my dad, mom, brother, and aunt. The first day from then on was a whirlwind. We had a two hour drive from Sao Paulo to my city, MOGI GUACU. Along the way we stopped for breakfast, and I had my first awkward language moment. To begin with, I was having a lot of trouble remembering all of the Portuguese that I had taught myself, and my host brother, who speaks a little English, was translating some things for me. When we stopped for breakfast my family asked me what I wanted, and showed me a few things. I had already eaten on the plane, and just wanted some juice. They should me a display of food and drinks and I point to the orange juice and said I wanted some of that please. I sat down and my host dad brought me orange juice, an espresso, a mamao papaii, chess bread and a piece of toast with butter. Whoops. Being polite I ate... all of it. So from then on I was determined to get my language fast, and I found out that I did know quite a bit, but I just couldn't speak. Everything that I knew was through reading and writing, so we spent the first 2 weeks writing everything that I didn't understand down, and I learned really fast. Now, 3 months, I would say that I am almost fluent. I am at the stage where I can understand almost everything that people say, and when I don't understand something they just need to explain it a different way and then continue talking. I haven't used my dictionary or written something down when talking to someone for almost 1 month. School is better now too, because I can understand more. I was lucky to meet a lot of my friends the first day I arrived when my parents had a welcome party for me, so the first day I already knew a bunch of people. Also, I have one friend who is almost fluent in English, so he translated a lot for the first month for me. School in Brasil is really different, and I am just getting used to it now, doing tests and mid-terms, and best of all playing

soccer (futebol) every day at our 20 minute break. I already feel, and hope, that I am a lot better at soccer already, because playing it every day with Brazilians who are a lot better than you, you learn fast. I have done so many things I can barely count them. Some of the highlights I would say are going to the beach with my family, or to different Rotary events and orientations and meeting up with all of the other exchange students. The highlight of one of the trips to the beach was when we were coming back home. We stopped at the same place we had stopped the very first day I was in Brasil, the Frango Assado. I had a bunch of feelings rush back, but this time was a lot different for sure. I was able to talk and joke with my family now. When we arrived we ate, and were just about to leave when my parents said that they were going to buy some bread. BUT, they wanted me to do it, and ask in English. So I walked up to the lady and said in English, "I would like some bread, thick but not very thick, brown but not really brown, more brown than white, so not really white. Also, please a knife and some butter." The lady didn't understand anything until my dad said "He wants bread," in Portuguese. I couldn't help but laugh so I went away and caught up with my family while my dad picked up the bread. When we were all there I translated what I had said to the lady, and my family almost died of laughter. We were standing in the checkout line and everyone was laughing so hard, that someone, I won't say who, peed themselves a little bit. This made everyone laugh even harder, and we spent the rest of the night replaying the story, and retelling it over and over with different additions and jokes. This was definitely one of the times that I laughed my hardest here. I already love my host family, and for some of you who will have more than one, I am different. I will only have one family, unless I ask for another one, but that thought hasn't crossed my mind once. My family is really cool, and always laughing and joking. They let me go out with friends and my brother, and take me all over the place with them. The life of an exchange student isn't so bad. The most recent thing that I have done is a 10 day bus trip with Rotary here in Brasil. Exchange students from all over Brasil paid to go to a city called Bonito, in the state Mato Grosso do Sul. I went with people from my district and other districts from the northeast of Brasil, the south of Brasil, and every other corner you can think of. We did so many things, and if you are friends with me you can see my photos, and I have a lot of them. We saw animals and went rafting and tubing and snorkelling, and best of all everything that we did I had never done in my life. So I was able to say that each new day was a new experience. Which pretty much sums up the life of an exchange student anyway. Exchange is awesome. Really awesome. I never could have thought how much fun I would be having here, or the things I would do and the experiences I would have. On November 12 it will be 3 months since I arrived, and I can definitely say that these three months have been the best of my life. It makes me sad to think that I only have 8 left, and I know that I am going to try to make the best of them. Which brings me to the end, because I could stay here writing all day, but that would bore you and I would lose exchange time. If you would like to see photos you can add me on facebook, Blake Ledger, or you can read some more of my stories on my blog, blakeinbrazil.wordpress.com. Thank you for reading, but I have to go since it is Brasil, and there is probably a party or something that I have to go get ready for ;D. Good luck to all of my fellow outbounds, to the inbounds enjoying their time in District 5060 in Canada/USA, and for all of you future outbounds, who are just about to start the greatest year of you

Breezy Beaudry

The Land of Cheese, Bread and French Accents

Dear mes amies,

Today, 3 months ago, I was boarding a plane, at the Kelowna Airport, ready to begin my year abroad in France. I would like to once again thank my loyal family who braved the 5am airport goodbye. It's hard to explain what was going through my mind as I made my way through customs alone. It was just me, my Rotary blazer, neon backpack and zebra print blanket from there on in. I've often questioned the use of the word "surreal"; however, that morning, as I glanced back at my encouraging family, I experienced what surreal really means. I realized for the first time that I would be leaving everyone I had ever known behind. I was truly starting over. I was going to a part of the world I had only ever read about, to live with people I had never met, to attend school in a foreign language in a city I had never even heard of until a few weeks prior. Every single doubt I could have had at that moment was quickly replaced by my own excitement! As I boarded the plane, every lecture my mom had given me over the past few months starting running through my mind like wildfire. Help out; don't make a mess and so on and so forth. But the one bit of advice that rang above the rest was, "make yourself a great day." I can't begin to count the number of times I saw that very message scribbled across napkins in my school lunches or written on pieces of paper left on the breakfast table in the mornings. That's when I became determined that I would make myself a great year and truly enjoy every aspect of my exchange.

The great thing was, once I landed in Vancouver, I quickly met up with other Rotary Students who were also travelling to France. It was at this moment I truly appreciated the Rotary badge I wore on my blazer that my Grandpa had meticulously sewn on a few days prior. It was this small logo that allowed others to identify who I was, allowing me to quickly make friends with other Rotary Students. I was lucky enough to travel with two Rotary girls from Vancouver to Montreal and then from Montreal to Paris. Once in Paris, we said our goodbyes as we each took off to catch different connecting flights to different French cities. The Paris airport was huge! It was quite a trek through the airport and shuttle systems but I finally found my terminal. Although I had a very long ten-hour layover in the Paris airport, my excitement and mere curiosity kept me awake. Once again, I met dozens upon dozens of other students as they too caught different flights to their new lives. I left Kelowna at 5am August the 23rd and arrived in the city of Toulouse at 5pm August the 24th.

I got off the plane somewhat groggy, wearing my now wrinkled Rotary Blazer, and zebra blanket in hand as my backpack had somehow shrunk throughout my journey. I saw my host family's smiling faces at once, as I had been able to skype with them numerous times before my departure. I learnt very quickly what "Bisous" meant as I was greeted by a kiss on each cheek. The head of Rotary for the district 1700 also greeted me and we took a group picture with all of the other students who had just arrived. I spent my first night with the Faria's (my first host family) before going to stay with my second host family for the rest of the week! I was really thankful to get to be with my second family for a bit as it allowed me to bond with them. They were extremely nice and like everyone else in France, masters in cuisine. Food is very important here. You would never really grab a meal to go (I have yet to see a drive-thru) as meals are meant to be eaten sitting down with family and

friends. As well, there are always three parts to every meal. First, we have an entrée, which can range from salad to “foie gras.” Then, there is your main course, which is usually a form of meat. Occasionally, your main course is followed by cheese and bread before dessert but even the French watch their waste line so cheese is mostly reserved for guests and cravings. I don't even know where to start when explaining dessert! During the week, I usually eat either a fruit or yogurt for dessert but celebrations and even weekends are another story. My favourites so far have been the crème brûlée, chocolate mousse (This chocolate mousse definitely gives the Sharko's a run for their money.) , French toast (almost as good as yours mom) and chocolate chip cookies (not quite as good as Jacquie's). Some of my favourite food items so far include; chocolate croissants, fresh bread, fresh meat, homemade quiches, duck and the fresh fruit and veggies taken from the garden.

I am currently attending le Lycee Pierre d'Aragon in the city of Muret. My mornings are quite early, as I have to travel two cities over for school. My school day begins at 8:00am and finishes at 5:30pm. Sometimes I start an hour later or end an hour sooner but all in all, the days are very long! The good thing is, is that I am truly enjoying most of my classes. My favourites include, Biology, Spanish, Geography, History and Gym. I love Biology because I am learning tons, as I am able to understand almost everything we are being taught. I love Spanish because my teacher spends extra time making me personalized worksheets so that I have something to do while the others write fluently and analyze different texts. The first week I was in school, my Spanish teacher actually informed me that she had spoken with administration and I no longer had to attend her class. (I had never spoken Spanish so she assumed I would not want to learn.) She was literally offering me three more hours of free time a week!! (In France, when you are offered time off, you generally don't question it but say thank-you very much and run.) Well, I surprised her. I told her that as long as she didn't mind, I would like to continue attending her class in order to hopefully grasp some Spanish by the end of the year. At first, I think she was taken aback but by the next class, she had worksheets for me and would even take time out of class to speak with me one on one, in Spanish, trying to teach me proper pronunciation and articulation. I also love geography and history because my teacher always asks me my opinion on international affairs and is excited by the idea of having a Canadian student in his class. Gym is also great because apparently, very few girls in France play sports; therefore, every class, I get put on the boy's teams and we play five on five basketball. I enjoy being able to play sports because it is the one time there is very little language barrier. I have also recently joined a French basketball team in a nearby town. I practice twice a week and have a game every weekend. Since my arrival in France, I have had to attain a player license and student license. I find it quite exciting because all of these licenses will make for great souvenirs later on!! All my classes and extra curricular activities have helped my French improve so much already I'm thrilled! I've also made lots of friends and am truly enjoying French lifestyle. I'm still known as the Canadian with the accent by some but slowly people are learning how to pronounce my name.

Also, I attend Rotary meetings every 15 days and presented a PowerPoint on Canada last month. One thing you have to love about Rotary is that they are always friendly and always surrounded by 5 star dining. Each week, we meet at a five star restaurant where we hear from different presenters. Last week was my favourite presentation to date. A woman who works as a nurse in Haiti presented on living conditions in rural Haiti. It was very interesting and eye opening.

Another great thing about Rotary Exchanges is the ability to travel! So far I have had the opportunity to travel to Cahors for a Rotary weekend where I met all of the other Rotary students in my district. Once again, we enjoyed a wonderful feast, went canoeing, toured Cahors by train and visited a local castle. I also just got back from a weekend trip with my family to the Atlantic Ocean! The drive was beautiful as we travelled along side the Pyrenes mountains and through French countryside to the city of Biarritz. The weather was beautiful so my host brother and I rented a surfboard and went surfing in the ocean for the afternoon. We then travelled a couple of hours inland to Elizabeth's (my host Mom) Dad's farm. His farm is more like a small town as he has over 100 acres of land! He harvests mostly corn and grapes but also has a few hundred cows, tauruses and chickens. We spent the night on the farm and picked grapes in the morning. (I have been eating grapes for days now and have yet to grow tired of them. I have also gone to Toulouse, a nearby city that is similar to Vancouver, and I love the churches, market and the shopping! I recently also travelled to Paris, Bourges and a few other smaller cities with great attractions 😊

Tchao,

Breezy Beaudry

Corey Antoniuk

I was originally assigned to go to Switzerland but someone there didn't like that I'm 19 so I got kicked out. After that I was in limbo; one day it was Austria, then Thailand, Taiwan, Brazil, back to Austria, then finally I was in for Belgium. It was nice to finally know where I would be spending the next year of my life.

I only knew my destination 3 months before I'd be leaving, so that combined with school and work, meant that I didn't really have a chance to study french. Fortunately, I'd taken it in middle school, so I had a basis, but my vocabulary was almost completely gone.

I had talked with my host sister a lot before arriving, so I felt very welcome and it wasn't all that awkward at the airport. When we got home, I was allowed to sleep for 3 hours and then was dragged to a party for my host-aunt's birthday. I thought it would be dinner, and maybe a drink afterwards but it ended up going until 1am.

For the next week I basically slept 24/7, I was severely jet-lagged and I don't sleep too well normally, so I was a wreck. I also wasn't prepared for a cheese and bread based diet, so my digestive system was in chaos.

French is a really complicated language, there are tons of exceptions and the tense system is pretty crazy, but I'm getting the hang of it. It took a few weeks of listening and speaking a little bit before I felt fairly comfortable with it.

Life as an exchange student is fast paced, I travel within Belgium a lot, and will be traveling with my host family and a good friend soon.

My YEO is taking me to Paris 4 times and to his house in the South of France for a week. I'm going to Italy with my friend whom I met when she was on exchange to Canada last year. I'm not doing any of the Rotary trips because I don't really want to pay what they're charging for a tour-guided bus trip with a tight schedule, that isn't really what I like when I travel.

During the first week of school I had to recite a poem in french class... It was "Les Roses de Saadi" and it was a complete gong show. I knew I couldn't do it well, so I just tried to give the class a laugh, and it worked. I made one kid start crying he was laughing so hard. Basically, I tried to pronounce everything with the least amount of accent possible while ignoring all the silent letters. It was a good time. It's a good thing my french teacher is really nice so she was laughing too.

The culture is definitely different here, people are much more social and less reclusive than in Canada. I've noticed that North Americans have a huge personal bubble and are generally just more boring than people here.

Parties are a big part of life, and in my city - Liege - there are at least 3 bars on every street! Although, I was told that the only reason my city exists is so that Belgians would have a place to party, it's called "the Burning City" for that reason, but it's absolutely amazing! It feels a lot more humble than Bruxelles, the capitol, which is very shiny and clean.

I don't want to sound like I have no heart, but I really haven't been homesick at all. I feel like I belong here; to me Canada is in the past. I'm planning on coming back here for university. I'll be coming home for a month and a half, then getting back on a plane with a one-way ticket. I'll be living with a friend for free, and the university is going to give me a job that will completely cover all my tuition and expenses, it's a really cool opportunity!

So, all is well; I'm loving life and everyone loves me here! I feel at home, and that's really special. I'm starting to feel Belgian, now that I'm giving strangers directions on the streets!

Emma Persad

Bonjour à tous,

I can't believe that I'll be celebrating four months in France by the time Christmas rolls around. As "cliché" as it sounds, time does fly-by when you're having a good time. Life here has never really given me a dull moment. Everyday I seem to learn something interesting, experience something different, and meet new people. I'm so lucky to live in such a great country—I love it more and more everyday!

Of course, after being here for a couple of months, there are some Canadian things that I miss. Obviously, my friends and family are number one, but thanks to Skype and Facebook, I've been able to keep in touch and stay up to date with Clearwater life. For instance, I hear we **finally** got new basketball jerseys! Gooo Raiders! :) But other than that, I mostly just miss Canadian junk food, like peanut butter, Skor bars, and all-dressed chips. But my family has been sending me amazing care packages full of fatty Canadian things, so I'll survive! I'm also not missing sports anymore, because I'm playing basketball right now and soccer in the spring with my school. My basketball team is actually in a tournament for young teams across France called the "Coupe de France," this weekend!

This time of year Strasbourg is so beautiful. The city has been named the "Capital of Christmas" for all of the beautiful decorations that are put up and the holiday spirit that fills the streets. There are numerous giant Christmas trees around the town, large decorations draped from building to building, beautiful lights illuminating every store, and lots of Christmas music coming from all over. On top of that, Strasbourg has four huge Christmas markets that have been a tradition since 1540! You can find homemade French baking like cookies, breads, and chocolates, French foods like tarte flambée, crepes, and waffles, and many different artistic creations like pottery, jewellery, and leather work. It's really great to live in the middle of all of the action and experience Christmas in a different way!

School is also still going really well. I love my classes and all of the students that I'm with. The teachers all love me and offer to translate what they can for me, but for the most part I just learn in French and write whatever tests I feel comfortable with. It's a nice change to not feel immense pressure from school and to be able to laugh at my friends as they prepare for their baccalaureate, while I don't have to worry about a thing!

My friends are all really great! They're always fighting to sit with me and trying to help me in classes, taking me out around Strasbourg to dance and shop, and always offering to take me to soccer and hockey games! (YES) They're also always helping me with my French. Right now, and for most students around the 3-4th month mark, I can understand a lot. I can speak and write way better than before too, but writing is still a bit difficult because of all of the silent endings on French words! My friends will help me by responding to my messages or texts with a better way to say something, correcting my pronunciation, and letting me copy their notes in classes. As difficult as it can be to learn, French is such a beautiful language and I'm never shy when I want to say something because I can't wait to be fluent!

I've also been getting together with Rotary students a lot as well. Normally, every Wednesday, the students in Strasbourg get together at a café or just walk around the city because we all don't have school in the afternoon! I've also had many Rotary weekends visiting chateaus, watching ice-skating shows, and just touring my region of France. On top of that, I just signed up for a France-Spain bus trip in February, so I'm pretty excited!

I know everyone in Clearwater is probably getting into the Christmas spirit by shovelling snow and putting up their Christmas decorations! I'm going to miss my usual Christmas in Clearwater, but I know this one will still be enjoyable. I hope everyone has a pleasant break and the students enjoy their rest before EXAMS!!

Joyeux Noël et Bonne Année!

Gros bisous!

Emma

Evan Hall

My three month anniversary passed a few days ago and I feel like my exchange has been pretty ordinary, as exchanges go. Which means that it has been three of the most interesting, difficult, fun and educational months of my life. It has been filled with all of the usual embarrassments with the language, and the frustrations with communication as I feel that it should be, but I remember to continue to look on these experiences as learning and humorous.



When I arrived in Brasil I was greeted with the classic exchange student nightmare. I got to the gate in my home country airport full of anticipation, the surreal feeling of the exchange not actually having set in yet. As I exited the departure gate, all of the other exchange students were greeted by hugs yells and cheers as their family greeted them with open arms. I looked around for the faces that I knew only from photos, and upon finding none of those said faces, my heart sank a little. All of the others began to quickly disappear, leaving me alone in the airport, no family, and no idea what to do. But thankfully I was met by a former exchange student who came to D5060 in Canada last year and who had come to greet the three of us from D5060 when we arrived. He called my parents and talked to them and found out that they were at the airport but were just waiting at the wrong gate. Soon everything was under control and I too was on my way.

As of yet, there has not really been any great homesickness for me, perhaps because of the amazingly warm welcome that I have received from my school and family here. As a foreigner arriving at a new school in Latin America you are automatically placed as one of the most interesting people around and everyone wants to talk with you. I know that being so quickly welcomed into a warm Brazilian culture has helped a great deal to ward off homesickness.

I was lucky to be going to a country with a Latin based language. Because I had taken French in school I found that Portuguese was actually quite simple. And I was lucky enough to receive a language packet from my district here in Brasil, with a CD full of language learning things, including a set of audio recordings in Portuguese, as well as like 50 pages of printouts and activities to learn the language. I am ashamed to say that I did not complete even one of these 50 pages. I did, however, go through them and make flashcards of all of the useful vocabulary, which worked amazingly well. I found that this helped immensely with getting a head start on the language. I would definitely recommend making flashcards. One thing is, that before I went on my exchange I found the Rotex roundups from that year and read all of them, and I laughed at the poor English and grammar that people used, as well as the feel that they were almost all written in a rush. At the time I swore that I would write a great Roundup, with perfect English. Well here I am now, a rushed hypocrite.

My going to Brasil was decided by a bit of a weird twist of fate. Brasil was originally number 3 on my country list, and I had originally been selected to go to the Czech Republic, which was number five on my list. However, when an exchanger could not be found in the Czech Republic to fill my space in Canada, my country had to be changed. I had gone about two months thinking that I was going to the Czech Republic, so I had doing a good amount of research and sincerely tried to learn the language (once I found out that it was ranked as one of the worlds' hardest languages to learn). And when I got the phone call when they told me that I couldn't go to the Czech Republic any more, I cried. After investing two months worth of thinking that you were going to a country and then to have it changed was a pretty hard thing to take. And on that they told me that because it was late in the country placement process there was only three countries that they could place me in, France, Taiwan, or Brasil. So, I chose Brasil. Right now I have come to realize, and I realized on some level then, that it really didn't matter which country I was going to, I was in it for the experience, not for the country. I guess my moral here is don't get your heart set on something, because that'll just make you resent any problems or changes that might occur. The rotary phrase, "blessed are the flexible for they shall not be bent out of shape," served me well then, and serves me well here in Brasil.

And so goes the first three months here in Brasil. Life has begun to settle into a rhythm and Brasil is really starting to feel like home. Cheers to the next years exchangers if you're reading this, and a big heartfelt thanks to Rotary. With only 7 more months to go, I plan to make the best of them.

Faith Stoneman

To be a Rotary Exchange Student is the experience of a lifetime. One can only say "If only you could have been there, then you would know." That is how hard it is to share an experience like this... and this is only the beginning. I can only briefly describe my thoughts and feelings because so much has passed in such a short time. I could write a book. It begins from the moment of finding out that you were accepted, to going to orientation meetings and weekends. To waiting anxiously and impatiently for the country assignment and jumping for joy when you know it. To preparing all of the paper work for a visa, to your first email with your future host family, to figuring out what to pack, to processing that you will actually be gone for an entire year. When I look back I feel like I was in a complete fog throughout it all. I never really wrapped my mind around the fact that I would be leaving to live and learn another culture. The paperwork was stressful and the wait was long, but it was totally worth it. In fact, it was worth it from the moment I got on the bus to head up to Revelstoke, Canada for our first weekend with Rotary. To meet all of the Inbounds made me so glad to know that I would be one like them in just a few short months. Then we move on to actually finishing the preparations for our journey and getting on the airplane, not to return for at least another ten months. The memory of this trip seemed to be a lifetime ago. The hours seemed so long but passed so quickly. I landed in France before I knew it, and was speaking French soon after. The meeting with my first host family was rather different than others I believe. I traveled with around 20 other outbound exchange students from Canada and the U.S. to Paris where we all split up to go in our different directions with host families. The exception was my district. Instead of each of our individual host families coming to the airport to find us, our chairman was there with a big bus waiting. We were joined in Paris by students from all over the world. The static in the air was electrifying; we were all so excited to be there! After waiting a long time for everyone to arrive we all got on the bus for a two hour drive. It was really great to meet everybody in the district before-hand, and totally brought the pressure down on all of us. My stop was the first stop and my host family was there waiting for me. We hopped in the car and headed home where they had a small welcome dinner waiting. The first week was a blast! It was also the last week of vacation. School started and let me tell you it was a hard first week of school. It's a little difficult to go to school for eight or nine hours a day while trying your best to understand everything that's going on in that time. It is very tiring! There are five rotary exchange students total in my city and I am the only one to go to a different school than the others. I found this extremely difficult in the beginning. I kept telling myself that I have it better than them because I had the best opportunity to learn French and make friends who weren't exchange students. And it worked out well! After a while people started talking to me and I was able to learn French slowly, but surely, and soon I was accustomed to the new way of life. I was able to find a basketball team who I'm allowed to practice with. I'm so glad! It's also a little embarrassing. Why must every exchange student have to get hit in the head with the ball at least once? I swear it's not a coincidence. It is a really good idea to get involved in as many things as possible. With basketball I'm learning lots of language basics and also preventing myself from gaining the exchange student 20 pounds, or however much it is. It is also super amazing to be around kids under ten years old. I was invited by a Rotarian family for a couple days during our first vacation and they had two cute little boys. Talking with them and playing with them helped me so much in my language learning. I recommend finding families who have children and offering to babysit or maybe just wishing for a host family with kids already. I was able to experience the French countryside and drink farm fresh cow's milk as well as goat's milk each morning. Every weekend is something to look forward to. In conclusion to all who read this, be you an outbound, a Rotarian or my mom I just want to let you know that you have done something right to be in the position to read this because if you are in any way associated with Rotary you are in the right place and doing something amazing for the world. I have cried a lot as well as laughed a lot and thought so much of home, but never once have I wanted to return. Not until I'm satisfied with my very own experience of a lifetime.

I hope that this finds you well.

Sincerely,
Faith in France

Jessica Sulz

Gruezi! So I've been in the wonderful land of Swiss for about 3 months now, and these 3 months have really brought me some memories. Before arriving here, I had a very frustrating time waiting for my visa. I didn't receive my visa until the day I left! I also didn't find out when I was leaving until the day before I left. It was stressful, but I think it was easier that way. The good-bye at the airport was



hard, but before I knew it, I was in Switzerland. My first meeting with my host family was really cool. I walked out of baggage claim to find a large Canadian flag saying "Welcome Jess!" on it. I hugged my host family and we quickly hurried home. The first 3 weeks after that were crazy. I had a 3 week language course in Zurich, the biggest city in Switzerland. I took the train to my course. Traveling time was about 30 minutes. My course was with all the exchange students in my District, so I was very lucky to spend all of that time with them. I now feel like we are brothers and sisters; we are so close. After three weeks of brain-exploding German, I started my school. The first day was great! I expected it to be horrible, because I know a lot of exchange students don't have a good time the first day, but I did. My class was wonderful. They were all so helpful, it was amazing.

The biggest part of anybody's exchange is language. I'm sure Vic could tell you that. You don't realize how important language is until you need to know it to survive. In Switzerland, there are 4 national languages. I live in the German part. However, they don't speak High German here; they speak Swiss German. Since Swiss German isn't a written language, there is no real possibility to learn it other than through speaking. I've been learning High German and trying my hardest to learn to speak Swiss German. It's a bit frustrating at times because people here are also foreign to High German, so there is quite a language barrier. However, I've gotten through it, and each day gets easier!

My exchange has really taught me a lot about other cultures. I am so lucky to live in Switzerland because it is in the center of Europe, very close to other countries. At the beginning of October, I took a one week trip with my class from school to Germany. It was incredible. I was able to see some things that I had always wanted to see, one of them being a concentration camp. The day we visited the concentration camp, was a very sad day. It was actually in France, so I also got to visit France! In one week, I travelled from Switzerland to Germany and then to France and back. Crazy, I know. I've also been to an Ice hockey game here, which was super exciting. My most favorite experience so far would have to be the soccer game. A couple of weeks ago, I went to a "FC Basel" game. It was incredible. The atmosphere was amazing. The entire game, the fan club sang their songs, jumped and made a lot of noise. I was so intrigued that I had wished I was with them, cheering on the team.

Switzerland has one of the most advanced public transport in the world. Now, this is very useful to an exchange student. When I arrived here, I was given a GA. This is a pass that allows me to use any public transport in ALL of Switzerland for the entire year. Of course I've taken advantage of this, and I've travelled to Geneva to see the United Nations. I've also been to many other cities, and it's incredible how easy it is!

Other than traveling, I've joined 2 volleyball teams. One practices on Tuesday and the other on Thursday. That keeps me quite busy. On Wednesday evenings I go to Zumba with one of my friends here. Its great keeping busy here!

Unfortunately, I had a very hard first 2 and a half months. I had troubles with my first host family, and that brought on a lot of homesickness. I had a very hard time, and no support. I don't want to say anything bad about my first host family, but I truly had a very bad time. I was very thankful for all of the things that they did for me, but it just didn't work out. Now, though, I live with a great family, and things are much better. I have 3 brothers, and its hilarious living with them. I haven't stopped laughing since the day I got here.

Fortunately, I haven't had any accidents or hospital trips. There's been a few embarrassing moments, but that's everyday life! I can't believe that it's already been 3 months. I'm looking forward to the 7 more to come!

Tschuss! Ich wunsche Dir einen Guten Tag! (I wish you a good day!)

Jessica Sulz

Sponsored by Rotary Club Merritt and Merritt Sunrise

Hosted by Bachtel-Zurich Switzerland

Jordann Kian

My exchange started out later than sooner, I was about three weeks late, but once I finally got here I settled in with my host family very well. I was really fortunate to have a great family that I get along with still today. School was a different story unfortunately. Since I was late I found it hard to follow the classes, and I wasn't in the grade I would have liked to be in from the start, so I wasn't adjusting very well. I tried to get into the swing of things with school but I was having a hard time getting used to the amount of hours per day, and the kids at school were not very welcoming either. After almost two months, things started to look up for me. My host mom had got a call from the principle of my school, and he suggested I try doing a university course instead, because the people were my age and the courses were more interesting as well. So I was put in a university program of marketing and business and it has been great. The people are so much nicer and a lot more welcoming, they understand my situation a lot more than the high school kids since they were all new this year too. Now I'm making friends my age, and I feel like I'm profiting a lot more from my classes. Although the classes are quite hard, I'm lucky that I could already speak french before I left, therefore I'm only getting better. I'm looking forward to my year here in France, and I'm hoping I make many great life long friends and hopefully I come back with fond memories, ad many great stories as well.

Jordan Findlay

Last weekend I was in The Hague, the political power hub of the Netherlands and a well-established UN and EU epicenter, when I had a bit of a Rotary epiphany. It was the closing celebration for all of the southern hemisphere inbounds. These inbounds arrived in January and are all beginning to head back to their respective host countries soon, so the August group (my group) and their group got together one last time in celebration of a year of culture, travel, and ultimately personal growth. As I looked back to my short, yet busy and meaningful, experience with the Rotary Youth Exchange program so far, I remembered my first great Rotary get together, February's "Weekend in the Mountains" in Revelstoke. That weekend was eight months ago and in another eight months from my writing of this article I will be back in Canada. That day in The Hague represented a metaphorical middle point in my own personal growth as an exchange student: I had gone from becoming a part of start of the program then, to being an active exchange student now, to developing into an experienced rebound student in the future. This midpoint means that I still have a lot of the journey left to go.

I started my exchange by getting off of a plane into a densely packed country filled with an all-out attack of new things for my senses. I still remember lying in bed after my first day and having the guttural gurgle of Dutch ringing through my ears. I was lucky to have a host family who denied my speaking of English at home, so I was able to catch onto the language quite quickly (admittedly with some computer lessons from home). My first host family was great, my host dad Pieter started and ran a worldwide machine building company while my host mother Marijke kept up things on the home front. I had three host siblings, Rink, Rianne, and Marlot. I was living then in the small village of Middenmeer in North Holland, the same province as Amsterdam for reference. I lived the beautiful university city of Leiden for a week as a part of the Rotary's Dutch Orientation Course. I have seen much of my home region, the Wieringermeer, a reclaimed part of the Netherlands which lies at the Northern tip of the west side of the IJsselmeer (the body of water which divides the Netherlands). It has a heavy farming economy and a nice, easy way of living. School has been very good. The Dutch have a tiered school system and I am doing the last year of their highest level which, in Dutch, has proved to be a good challenge. My classmates have been awesome and I have forged some strong friendships, strong enough to last through my constant learning and often slaughtering of their mother language. I have seen both the beauty and the well-known insanity of Amsterdam many times, which is just a short ride through the public transport system (a system I have frequented). Along with a bicycle these methods of getting around are paramount to seeing as much of the Netherlands as possible and are a huge part of daily life. The Dutch cultural respects openness and a straight forward attitude. While clogs, windmills, cheese, and the aforementioned bicycle are all typical Dutch, but so are things like a high use of technology, a mastery of engineering, and a high standard for languages (the English everybody speaks here is incredibly good). These things help to both secure traditional Dutch cultural and to move the Netherlands forward into a country which can make up for its small size with efficiency and an ability to interact with many different cultures.

I have been to Utrecht and stayed with Oscar Chiaradia (a rebound student from my district) in Limburg. I have seen Maastricht, been through Hoorn many times and have visited a countless number of villages, museums, and many kind families who have let me stay with them for a night or two. These amount of travelling merits many sights to talk about, but do to length a can only say that they are all beautiful and if you have time maybe try Googling a few of these lesser known Dutch cities. I went to Brussels in Belgium and will go to Luxembourg, France, Germany, and back to Belgium as a part of my goal to visit five countries in one day. I will also visit England, Italy, and possibly Norway in the near future. These countries, along with the Euro Tour, will mean that during my stay I have seen eleven countries during the year. Although these countries are all beautiful the Netherlands has so much to offer that this only seems like icing on the cake. Travelling in such a small country has actually been a blessing, allowing weekend trips to be very easy. I am now living with my second host family in the village of Wieringerwerf, the municipal center of the Wieringermeer. This second host family has also been very kind to me so far and it looks as if it will be a good stay.

The year so far has been filled with unforgettable experiences, new friends, and a new culture. It has been a tremendous exchange and to think that it is still in its infancy fills me with only excitement. This middle point has been a great way to look both back to the events of the past, and forward to what comes next here in the future, in this new country, in this new culture, and in this new life.

Kirby Hodson

These first two and a half months of my stay in Belgium have been without a doubt the most incredible of my life. I've been presented with so many amazing opportunities and have met some pretty incredible people through my exchange.

I can't believe how lucky I am to be living in Bruges. Everything from the canals throughout the city to the architecture of the buildings is completely beautiful. It is honestly one of the prettiest cities I've ever been in.



I go to school in a historical building right downtown. I'm really lucky and only have about a five-minute bike ride to get there each morning. High school is very different here than it was in Canada. The days are longer and everything is much more strict. They have these big metal gates that lock so that no one can get out...which I guess works, because from the outside it really looks like a jail haha. But everyone has been so kind and welcoming towards me...I couldn't have asked for it to have gone any better.

The biggest challenge I have faced is the language. I prepared as much as I could while still in Canada, but it didn't get me very far once I had arrived in Belgium. Each city seems to have its own distinct accent and dialect, making it pretty hard on us exchange students. In addition, everyone here speaks perfect English and love taking advantage of any opportunity they have to practice. However, they are all very helpful with my Dutch and want to see me improve that as well. I recently did a presentation for one of my classes in Dutch. I was really nervous, but it turned out all right.

My second host family is really involved with Chiro. Chiro is a type of day camp for young kids. I've been going for a while and help out as a group leader. We have so much fun organizing the games and activities. Last week we had to get dressed up all goofy and go downtown for a type of scavenger hunt. The kids are great for helping me with my Dutch too...they don't speak much English yet, so it's perfect.

I love how easy it is to travel here. All I have to do is hop on a train and I could be in another country. I've been to Lille, France with school, London with Rotex and all over Belgium with friends and my host family. I just got back from a camping trip in the Ardennes and right now we're planning a trip to Paris and another one later to Amsterdam.

I am so grateful for this experience and for all the things that Rotary has done to help us exchange students prepare. Time is going by way too fast...I can already tell that leaving will be one of the hardest things. Dank u wel voor mijn jaar in België!

Kirsten Smythe

It has been two months since I arrived here in this crazy country I now call home. To say that it has been a roller coaster of emotions and events would be an understatement but all in all it has probably been the best 2 months of my life. I have never been so confused in my life. Balancing everything from the culture shock, to a new school and friends, along with learning a new language, it really takes a toll on a person. Arriving here was an adventure all on its own, it was my first time traveling completely by myself and I am very proud to say that I did it on my own. It wasn't without difficulty though, that's for sure, I did have to encounter the confusion along with running at full speed from one end of the airport to the other in order to make my flight. Everything was going good and according to plan until my flight from Dallas to Miami was delayed by an hour, that wouldn't have been a problem if I didn't have only an hour connection time in Miami to catch my flight to Santa Cruz. After talking with the stewardess about my issue, I was the first person off the plane once we touched down in Miami and from there it was a full on sprint to my terminal on the other side of the airport where I was the last one on the plane. We flew from Miami to La Paz where I stayed on the plane and filled out all kinds of Spanish paperwork but I got through it and before I knew it I was taking my first steps off the plane onto Bolivian soil. After successfully clearing customs and gathering my bags, I was greeted by my amazing family! They got me flowers and a giant stuffed pig along with a welcome balloon and kisses all around. That was something that is still taking me some getting used to, as a greeting here you kiss everybody on the cheek, as well as when you leave, it is the same as a wave or a hand shake in Canada and forgetting to do so is considered rude. On my first day of school, there was a line of fifty or so people waiting to kiss me on the cheek to say hello. Because it was the first time everyone was meeting me, it was very important; it's taking a lot of getting used to but now it's *besos* all around, I'm growing to be a little *cambita*!

I didn't know that it was possible to be so tired all the time, it's not like I don't sleep here, I totally do, like more than my 7 year old sister. I go to bed nearly every night at 8 because I am so mentally exhausted, my brain is constantly translating and thinking and then there is all the walking and figuring things out that just keeps you on super alert mode, sleeping is like my new best friend even if it doesn't change the fact that I am so tired 24-7. Sometimes keeping my eyes open in school is the hardest thing I have ever had to do, but I actually don't think that falling asleep in class would be the worst thing, I'm not required to do anything when it comes to school, just to show up in my uniform and not be a nuisance. My school is one of the smallest in Santa Cruz, there is only 400 people and it goes from Pre-Kindergarten all the way to grade 12. While I am here, I am in the Promo Class (grade 12), I am lucky enough to be able to participate in all the graduation ceremonies in December (because that's the end of the year here before summer vacation) but then I have to return to school in February and rejoin the new Promo class then. Classes are very different, there are about 50-60 kids and the desks are strewn all over the room with no organization whatsoever, people talk and scream and throw things on a constant basis, the teachers don't even seem to mind though, as long as we write what is on the board, they are content.

Learning Spanish is difficult, especially when you are thrown into an area where you don't speak that language and in order to survive you must learn it as quickly as possible. I thought I had a basic grasp on Spanish before arriving here, man was I wrong, I'm just glad that I brought my trust dictionary, it was actually my saving grace until I started my Spanish classes here and met my fellow exchange students.

I never thought I would be so relieved to speak English or French for that matter. My Rotary club (District 4690) is hosting 8 exchange students, me (the only from Canada), 1 girl from Belgium, 4 girls from France, and 2 from the United States. Charlotte (from Belgium) speaks English and the girls from France all speak French. We have a good system going, I translate what the girls from France say into English and that way we can all communicate. It is getting easier now that we are all picking up the language but no matter what language we are speaking, these girls are my saving grace! When we are all together, not only do we have an absolute blast and participate in totally random things, our brains all get a rest from the immense processing and translating.

I have yet to be hit by the homesickness wave nor have I broken down crying. Yes there are times when I miss my friends and family, but it only lasts for a second. There is just so much

to see and do here that spending my time missing something that I know I am going to return home to, well it just doesn't seem like a good way to spend my limited amount of time here. Things like playing soccer at my school, or going with Rotary for a weekend in the Mountains to see wild Orchids in their natural habitat, those are things that are keeping me occupied. I hang out with my siblings and my family, we cook and clean and go to church together, this is a very catholic house, another thing that is taking some adjusting to.

Being in Bolivia, a third world country, it is difficult and there is lots to learn and try, there are high points and low points, but all of them work together to make you appreciate what you have and to grow as a person. It has only been 2 months of this 10 month journey and I have learned more about myself than I ever thought possible. Rotary Youth Exchange has probably been the best and hardest thing I have done but I wouldn't change it for the world, I am super excited to see how these next 8 months turn out on my Bolivian adventure!

Thankyou Rotary for making this possible.

Kourtnie Whitfield

These first months here in Switzerland have been so crazy. Time has gone by just so fast. But time flies by when you're having fun! Which is sad, I don't want it to go so fast because I love it here. I wouldn't trade this experience for the world.

The first few weeks here, it was brain overload with all the German, jet lag, trying to figure out bus and train schedules. But now that part is over with, and I can appreciate Switzerland even more. Switzerland is so gorgeous, with tons of breathtaking views. Once in a while you can see the Alps from where I live, and to me this is just so amazing. I have a hard time believing that I am actually looking at the Swiss Alps, because it was something that I used to be able to only see on TV. In a way it looks a lot like where I live in Washington with the mountains. So right away I felt at home. The cities are all so stunning, with such old buildings, churches, and cobbled stone streets. At first it's like walking in a dream land because it doesn't look at all like cities in America, and now it's just a part of my everyday life.

I also absolutely love the public transportation here. (Although at first I was really frustrated with buses, having managed to get lost more than once.) I've probably learned so much German just asking for directions to get home. But now it's so easy to get where I want to go, (now that everything makes so much more sense) and Switzerland is small so I have time to see everything! I feel so lucky that I have GA so buses and trains are free. I don't know what I'd do without it.

The food here is also so good! Everywhere you go there are bakeries with yummy fresh bread. Although, I think that the Swiss are very particular about table manners. I never knew that eating could be so complicated. Not that I don't have table manners, it's just different remembering all these little things. Also, I guess it's rude if you have your hand below the table, it means you don't like the food. And now I know why everyone always used to ask me if I liked the food, but I had no clue that with my hand below the table everyone thought I hated their food. Oops. Ofcourse, now I never forget to have both hands on the table. But it's been interesting getting to know the Swiss culture. There are so many little differences, things that we don't even think about. But nothing is better or worse just different!

My German definitely has gotten better. But it's such a challenge. In Switzerland, they speak a Swiss dialect that is so different from German that it might as well be another language. Riding home from the airport, listening to my host parents speaking Swiss German was like listening to aliens speak. I used to just totally stop listening when people would speak Swiss German and I thought that I would never understand any of it. But now, I understand so much more which for me is such an accomplishment! Sometimes now I feel like my English is slipping away. The other day, I took an English test with the rest of my class and one of my Swiss friends had a better grade than I did. That was slightly embarrassing. I like to think it's because my mind is just caught up in two different languages.

School here is so difficult, my friends are constantly studying. And even though my German has improved, I still have no idea what the teacher is saying most of the time. But I'm really lucky my class is so great and I've already made such good friends. I find it better how I am with only one class the whole year. They always want to take me places. This is perfect so I get to see so much of Switzerland because they want to show

me their country. My host family is also like this, so by now I feel like I've seen so much of Switzerland. (Not that I have to go too far to see everything.) My family also took me to Rome, which was so beautiful!

I feel so lucky to be here and I absolutely love it. I still can't believe that I am going to be here only a year, but I'm just savoring every moment! It's difficult summing up all my experiences with everything that's happened in the past three months. But I know I'm learning so much about the world here with the different culture and meeting all these new people. And I think this is the best decision I've ever made to come here. Thank you Rotary!

Lara Beardsell

I remember reading these resumes last year and I can't believe it's my turn to write one! I'm three months into my Exchange here in Los Toldos, Argentina. Never heard of Los Toldos? Don't worry about it, you aren't alone. In fact the only reason I had ever heard of Los Toldos when I received my city placement was because I had just finished a project on Eva Peron, whose birthplace happened to be Los Toldos. That's about the town's only claim to fame, apart from that it's a quiet, agricultural pueblita of 17000 people, surrounded by farmland and dirt roads. I know that by that description it may not sound like fun central but so far I have come to think it is a great place to do an exchange. Maybe I don't want to move here forever, but being in a small town has a lot of benefits. I am basically free to do anything and go anywhere on my own, as long as I am complying with Rotary rules. There are no issues with safety here, so no one was worried when I rode my bike home from the gym alone last night. That's another awesome thing about Los Toldos; I can ride my bike EVERYWHERE. It's really flat here, sort of like the prairies of Argentina, and as much as I miss seeing mountains every day, it make from really easy transit. The size of the town also means that there are very few English speakers on my radar which forces me to speak Spanish 24/7. At times Skype is my salvation, because I just need to have a conversation that I understand perfectly without trying, but I know that the lack of English here is making my Spanish improve muy rápido.

I arrived in Buenos Aires on September 2nd after traveling from Vancouver to Minneapolis to Atlanta to Buenos Aires; I was pretty tired to say the least. My whole first host family was at the airport waiting for me- Graciela my host mother, Norberto my host father, Franco my 15 year old host brother and Josefina my 17 year old host sister. We then had a four hour car ride to Los Toldos for most of which I slept. When I woke up we were bumping down a dirt road and for a moment I thought I'd been kidnapped and was being taken to some abandoned farm to be held hostage. That was almost 3 months ago, and I am now very used to cruising down pot holed dirt roads. The first two weeks here were the toughest; I had very few language skills and I just felt overwhelmed and tired all the time. Establishing a routine was the most important thing for me. Once I had a routine, everything normalized and I began to feel less like a visitor and more like a resident. I go to school for 2 to 5 hours every afternoon Monday to Friday. I try to run every morning, I joined a field hockey team which practices Wednesdays and Fridays and I go to the gym every evening. You really need to take your life in your own hands when you're on exchange. If you wait around for stuff to happen for you it just won't. My 3 months here has also given me enough time to adapt to the Argentinean lifestyle. For example, siesta time is from 1pm to 4pm. This means everything (stores, bakeries, kiosks, ect.) shuts down until 4 or 5pm and most people go to sleep. I have also acquired a taste for mate, which is a type of tea drink that everyone drinks here. I hated it when I arrived, but I forced myself to keep trying it and now I crave mate after school. Going out was another aspect of Argentinean life I had to get used to. Last Saturday, for example, I met up with friends at 12:15am, we headed to the boliche (club) at 3:30am and I walked home in nearly full daylight at 7:30am. I will now spend this whole week recovering from the lack of sleep, and do it all again next weekend.

Adapting to my new life here hasn't been a walk in the park, but it's been fun and interesting and gets easier with every day that goes by. Although I know I am never going to look Argentinean (I'm too tall, too pale and sometimes get called blond even though I definitely have brown hair), I am confident that by the time I am saying my goodbyes next year I will have fully adapted to and integrated into Argentinean society.
Chau, besitos!
Lara Beardsell, Los Toldos, Argentina



Luke Grigg

Flexible. Appreciate. Laugh. All words that took on a whole new meaning in a span of my first 3 months in a foreign country. And by foreign country, I am talking about Peru-but I'm sure the feeling is the same almost anywhere you go. Anyways, hello, my name is Luke Grigg, I am from a town of 6,000 people, Quincy, WA, and am now living in a town of 9 million, Lima, Peru. My whole life has changed in the length of an American summer. Such a short time, but memories that will last forever. Patience. Flexibility. Independence. Another language. Freedom. Humor. And a jar of peanut butter. This is my exchange.



It began almost exactly a year ago. On my birthday actually. From the first anxious meeting looking at what seemed like the biggest decision of my life (choosing my top three countries), to the four monstrous packets of paperwork, to spending two weekends in Canada meeting exchange students from all over the world, the wait up to my exchange was filled with exciting memories, but entirely difficult at the same time. Patience.

Considering I was told in February that Peru would be my country, I started preparing right from the start. Then, when I heard 2 weeks before "supposedly" leaving to Peru that I wouldn't be going to Peru anymore, flexibility began to happen even before I boarded an airplane. Along with that, learning to take my exchange into my own hands-which is why I am currently writing to you from Peru. I couldn't just let my number one choice of Peru slip away so rapidly; so a little writing to the Peruvian Rotary president, along with help of my own president of my Rotary Club... my dream became a reality. I was "re-admitted" to Peru 1 week before I had to leave. Flexibility.

But the experience definitely was only beginning there. From barely receiving my passport, to crying with my parents in the security line saying goodbye, to crying harder when they left and 6 seconds later having a security guard tell me my passport was out of date (2019 definitely isn't 2009?), emotions ran wild. I think really the only way you can truly express that first day on your own, is a roller coaster. Happy then sad. Angry then Patient. Relaxed and then FREAKING OUT. Independence.

Then I arrived, and life seemed to just fall into place. I saw my parents in the airport and everything was just really natural for me. I had studied 2 years of Spanish so I definitely wasn't fluent, but I felt like I understood a lot more than I thought I would. In the beginning, everyday was a headache, learning the language, watching the culture, finding out who I was. Some days I would wake up and just sit in my bed for an hour just so I would stop thinking for 5 seconds. I would read books in English just so I could understand something. But under almost any circumstance... I didn't speak English. Don't do it! I can proudly say that I now understand basically everything in Spanish after only 3 months. And the exchange students from Arequipa (who have been allowed to speak English freely amongst each other) are still having a hard time understanding anything. I'm serious. The more you don't speak English, the faster your mind wraps around the language. Another Language.

From there, besides the occasional freak-out moment of realizing I would be here for a year, life became rather normal. I started school. Finding out that America has a very different school system than almost the entire world. But I did quickly learn that an exchange allows you to be whoever you want to be. If you are a straight-A student in the U.S. you might be a slacker on an exchange. I'm not quite to that extreme, but in the first month I definitely took advantage of the statement, "Sorry, I don't understand," when homework was assigned. Yah, let's just say NO ONE down here believes that I was Valedictorian in the United States. It's amazing. Freedom.

From there I followed up by basically doing almost everything I've never done in the U.S. I joined a dance group and learned Salsa. And now, "This gringo can Dance!" I am taking art classes. I am doing gymnastics with a group of pole-vaulters. I am eating... and eating... and eating-not only that, I eat things I used to hate in the U.S. (raw fish!!!!). I went to a Justin Bieber concert. I sing for almost every rotary reunion. I've been to one of the 7 world wonders! I've practiced making videos. I've written handwritten letters to many people in my community. Joy.

And as time went on I made friends. But in the beginning it definitely wasn't easy. Not only do you not know the language... but also, you don't know the culture. I've learned that usually the first girl that walks up to you the first day isn't the one you want to be friends with. (An invite to drink vodka in her house alone when no one else is going might not be such a good thing.) But nevertheless, after a few weeks, if you stick it out, people like you will show up. I have friends now that don't speak a word of my language. That grew up hearing of The United States. Friends that want to know everything about my life in my country. Confidence.

A few other funny notes/notes in general would be like: 1) Telling my host mom I was going to punch (pegar) her when I meant pay (pagar). 2) Eating a Ricotta pepper (extremely hot) thinking it was a red bell pepper, and having to not only wash my mouth but my hands too until the burning went away. 3) A great family friend died while I was down here and I felt so homesick afterwards. 4) Eating Guinea Pig/Cow stomach/llama and liking it. 5) Making chocolate for my host sister at 5 o'clock in the morning so she can eat some before she goes to take her finals. 6) Eating ¼ of a jar of Jif Peanut Butter on my bed at 12 o'clock at night because all my friends were busy and I had nothing better to do. 6) Running into a tree while running and having to get 6 stitches put in my head. 7) Gaining 5 kilos in less than two months. Humor.

An exchange will change your life. It will change who you are as a person whether you want it to or not. It will take walls down in your mind about other cultures that you never thought were there. It will take you from the heights of mountains where you see children working like their fathers, to places filled with tourists from speaking every language of the world. But the best part is when you are able to look back at all you have learned. To translate for people from your country when you didn't even realize you knew that much. To not be considered a visitor, but a part of the family. An exchange will show you who you really are. I've only been here for three months, and already I can't even understand how I lived without the life I have now. I love Peru. It is a part of my heart now. And nothing but an exchange will do that for you. So grab your jar of peanut butter... and get going.

Maggie Smits

Oi Gente!

Wow! Well that was the quickest three months of my life! Exchange has been one of the most interesting, emotional, and most of all, best experiences ever; and since day one, I willingly dived into the warm embrace of the Brazilian culture and haven't looked back since. Everything from the sound of samba music, to the freshly made savoury pastries, or the natural lucid beauty of Portuguese as it rolls off people's tongues, I continue to fall more in love with Brazil each day.

My first moments in Brazil were moments that I will always remember. After two full days of traveling, by the time I arrived in Brazil I was running solely on excitement and Coca Cola. But I will never forget meeting my host family for the first time. Coming down the escalator, my heart began to race and adrenaline pumped through my body as thoughts ran through my mind. "What will they think of me?...Did I brush my teeth on the plane?...What if I can't find them?...OH MY GOSH!! I'M IN BRAZIL! What am I doing here?" But quickly, all these thoughts left me as I saw my family for the first time, holding a sign with my name on it, and big smiles on their faces; ready to give me a hug. The biggest sigh of relief came over me, and I knew that this is exactly where I needed to be; and thus began this amazing journey.

My city, Belo Horizonte, is wonderful! It means "beautiful horizon", and boy does it live up to its name. One of my favorite parts of my day is watching the sunset. Watching the sky turn a vibrant orange color as the sun sinks down, I always have to pinch myself to remember that I'm not dreaming. It's quite a big city too. It has about 3 million people, so there is always something to do or see. It feels as if I am always finding a new clothing store or bakery on each corner.

Speaking of bakery...the food here is delicious!! You have no idea how hard it is to walk past a bakery as they pull out fresh bread or empadas (little savory pastries). And I can't even begin to describe how much I love acai. I'm already trying to think of ways to sneak some of these things back into the U.S.!

Of course, no exchange is ever easy. There are moments when all I want a hug from my parents, or I wish a genie would make me fluent in Portuguese. But through these hard moments I've learned to accept what is in front of me, and run with it. Helen Keller once said that, "Life is either a daring adventure, or nothing." And this has definitely been an adventure. I've learned to embrace a beautiful new culture, that I have an absolutely amazing loving family here, and most importantly, I've learned to savor every moment and to never forget how incredibly lucky I am to be here.

I want to thank everyone who has helped get me here! I have loved these past three months, and I only look forward to the next eight! ☺

Abraços e beijos!
Maggie

Mikael Hernandez

1) Before coming to Italy, I started -but never finished- an online Italian language course. I got maybe halfway done with the entire curriculum before I had to leave. I did enjoy the course because it was well organized and not too boring. It's called Mango Languages. I would recommend it to a friend.

2) Truthfully, I didn't want to prepare too much because I wanted the challenge of struggling with the language. But, in my opinion, you can never be too prepared. In a repeat performance, I would have practiced much more Italian, and tried to learn from a person not a program.

3) What is this *LiveMocha* you speak of?... Whatever it is, I didn't even touch it.

4) My advice to other outbounds would be to prepare as much beforehand as you can... however, make it fun, so don't start preparing until maybe 2 months before you leave. (The Rotary people probably hate me for saying that...) Then, when you are there, write a lot of stuff down right away. I have a little notebook full of like 30 Italian verbs that I learned to conjugate in the present tense. By getting immersed in the writing, you can see the syllables of the word and learn the rhythm of the language.

So, that's pretty much it. To wrap up, here's a link to my blog: <http://mynewhome-italy.blogspot.com/>. I'll be updating it shortly:)

Peter Davidson

So, here I am. Over 100 days in Finland. I think this might sound cliché, but have no idea how the time has gone by so quickly.

At the beginning of August, when I was flying to Finland, I was fortunate to spend my first week with all of the exchange students coming to Finland and Estonia at language camp. There were about 120 students there (and there are about 20 more who arrived in January). This week was pretty much my first encounter with the beastly Finnish language. It is not a beast because it sounds harsh, but it is beastly in that it is so difficult to understand and memorize all of the modifications to word. Finnish does not have prepositions. Instead they add different endings to nouns and adjectives. But anyways, on the last day of language camp my host family came to pick me up and drive me to Kauhava. It was on this car ride when my little host brother would not stop speaking to me in English that I realized almost everyone speaks English, or at least understands a lot. Because Finland is spoken by only 6 million people in the world (5 million of which live in Finland), the learning of foreign languages, especially English, is highly emphasized in schools. Swedish is an official language of Finland, but only about 6% of Finns speak it as their mother language; however the other 94% must study it in school.

At school I initially felt quite welcome, and quickly starting fitting in. I had been warned that Finnish people are very shy, but people warmly welcomed me. School here is divided into 6 terms, all with completely new course loads and schedules. The terms are all 5 weeks long followed by a test week. My favourite courses are the math one. After completing advance calculus in my graduating year back in Canada, I have a good understanding of the concepts and even though I may not understand the words my teachers, I understand exactly what my teachers are trying to say. The hardest part, though, was when they taught a completely new concept to me, one which I don't even know the English equivalent of. During the most recent test week I wrote 3 tests: Out of a possible 10, I received 9½ in each of the maths and 9- in Spanish (a class which I had never taken before).

My host family is wonderful. My host family has a mother currently between jobs in the food industry, a father who is a technician at the Air Force base in my town, an older brother who works as a welder, a younger brother who is in middle school, and a small dog. I am "replacing" their son who is on Rotary Exchange to Alaska for this year. For syyslooma (autumn break), my host family took me on a three day roundtrip cruise across the Baltic from Helsinki to Stockholm.

Food hasn't really been a big shock. But we eat lots and lots of potatoes, twice daily. Moose is a common item on the menu. My host family and my friends' families all spent lots of time this fall hunting moose, as a result there is lots to eat. Moose tongue is surprisingly good with a little seasoning salt. I have also had reindeer soup a few times, but I am really looking forward to when I go to Lapland in December to see and eat reindeer in the same day. Finnish people love their liquorice. Salmiaki is very strong black liquorice that is found everywhere: bubble gum, chocolate bars, and ice cream for just a few.

As I previously mentioned, the Finnish language is a very big undertaking. It was almost impossible for me to start learning beforehand as the resources are few and

far between. When people here want me to know something, or they are trying to make me feel included, they speak English; this is a very common occurrence. Although everyone knows that I am trying to conquer their very difficult language, it is easier for them if they speak to me in English because they know I will understand. This is quite frustrating; my host mother and younger host brother almost exclusively speak to me in English, even though I have asked to be addressed in English. I am excited to move to my next family because they have a young daughter who has not yet been exposed to English, so I anticipate that she will be one of my greatest teachers.

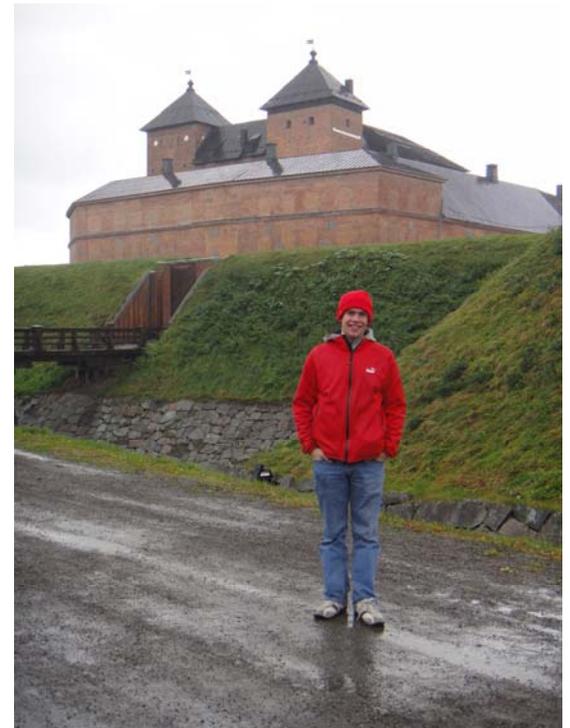
I have been trying, with some success, to diligently keep a blog with all my latest happenings. An interesting fact: more people in Finland read my blog than anywhere else in the world. Check it out at <http://AcrossTheFinnishLine.blogspot.com>. Another interesting method of communication I have had it that I was a guest to one of my sponsor club's Friday morning meetings via Skype. I had a chance to tell them what I have been up to thus far.

Becoming an exchange student is the best decision that I have ever made in my life to date. It is challenging, educational, wearisome, inspiring, and exciting. Most of all, being an exchange student has helped me grow as an individual.

Terveisin,

Peter Davidson

I've attached two pictures. One picture included is of me after an afternoon of mushroom picking, a very common activity among the Finns. The other is of me standing at Hämmenlinna, a very old castle from the era in which Finland was part of the Kingdom of Sweden.



Stephanie Waterbury

Ecuador. So many things to tell, so little time to write it all down. My adventure in here in South America has been one of THE most amazing experiences in my entire (short so far) life. I have had the opportunity to see so many things, meet some incredible people, and learn several things about life in general. I guess I'll start off by telling you guys a little bit about what I've done here in Ecuador, although I could never properly describe how incredible this experience has been.

My first semi-embarrassing exchange student moment happened about 5 minutes into my South American journey...wayyyy to go. The customs officer asked me in Spanish "Cuanto tiempo estara aqui?" which means, "How long will you be here?" and I tentatively replied "Hace calor," which means "It's hot." We almost died laughing because I knew that I had no clue what was going on and he knew that my Spanish was less than great. You see, I heard the word "tiempo" which yes, means ""time" but it also means "climate," so I thought he asked me how I like the climate here in Ecuador. It makes perfect sense right? And it WAS hot in my heavy Rotary blazer, dragging around my luggage for a year and standing in line with a whole bunch of impatient people waiting to get through customs...

After that minor mishap, my journey here has been absolutely indescribable. My first week I went to the beach, got to eat fresh seafood, watch a whale leap into the air from 30 feet away (in a teeny tiny boat in which I seriously thought was going to capsize in the huge waves), I have returned to the beach two times with the Rotary Exchange students, I've eaten guinea pig and pig (which they cook in the streets over a fire), lets see, I've gone to a mariachi concert, fallen in love with the disco, gained 30 siblings from my high school, been asked to be a model twice, gained what feels like 15 pounds, taken art lessons, taken an Ecuadorian bus, spent half of my life saving on taxis, ridden horses in the countryside, learned 500 million words in Spanish (half of which I don't remember), made a ton of mistakes, learned more than I thought there was to learn about life, and ultimately here in Ecuador (and most importantly) I have grown immensely as a person.

Being 4,000 miles away from home for an extended period of time is very odd; being 4,000 miles away from everything you've ever known for an extended period of time is absolutely NECESSARY. I had no idea how much more there was to life before coming here. There is so much more out there than just Wenatchee (my hometown which I love and crave sometimes). There are different ways of living, different ways of doing things, and different ways of thinking. This exchange has made me realize many things about life, the most important ones being:

-Life is NOT perfect and never will be. The sooner you figure it out, the better of you'll be. Appreciate the little imperfections because they are what make life colorful, otherwise it would be like a boring beige color.

-Do not say "I CAN'T..." There is never an "I can't," only an "I don't want to try." If you want to do something, go for it, and go for it today because tomorrow is unsure. I have never played guitar for anyone in my entire life, not even my family back home, but here in Ecuador I played and sang "Don't Stop Believin'" for my entire Tamariz family and their friends. My hands went numb, but I DID IT.

-Don't be afraid. What's is there to fear? If you're worried about what the people think, GET A LIFE. For the most part, the majority of people don't care what you do with your life. The people that mind don't matter and the people that matter don't mind, so live your life without the fear of being scrutinized, and don't be afraid to try something new. It's important that you're not afraid to fail. Failure is progress because you learn when you mess up.

-Love people. LOVE. Love without thinking about it too much. If your heart is telling you something, don't let your brain talk it down and tell it that it's stupid.

-Be free, don't make excuses, do what makes you happy, money is only paper and metal, be content with yourself and always remember, LIFE is meant to LIVE ("to live" is a verb, which signifies an action, which in turn signifies that you actually need to DO SOMETHING with your life).

And I think I'll end with that because this little article is getting a bit long and I only have a limited time on the internet considering I don't have internet in my house. I just want to give a HUGE shout out to all the Rotarians who have made this experience possible for me. THANKYOU so much for all you do, I appreciate every little detail of what you all do for us "youngsters" and when I return I fully expect to pay it forward in some special way. CUENCA, ECUADOR, DECEMBER OF 2011, peace out!! :)

Love,

Stephanie Renee Waterbury-Cordova-Tamariz-Malo

Tess Paul

So I've hit the three month mark. The calm has ceased and turned into highs and lows emotion. I've had a few tear filled Skypes and emotional journal entries, but all eventually goes well. I am very fortunate to be in my warm and welcoming family goes out of their way to to ensure that I get the most out of my year as possible. I have seen the beautiful, artistic, and culturally dynamic city of Vienna four



times, and can now say I feel at home when I arrive there. It's always a highlight to go to a city that I can see myself one day being as fond of as Vancouver. I love the family oriented life style here. Every holiday, or whenever possible really, they get together and eat, eat, eat! I have yet to meet someone here who hates a relative or sibling, they are all so close. At the moment I am feeling the struggle of the language. Before I came I hadn't anticipated to be learning *two* languages (yes two, and I'm not in Switzerland or Belgium). The teachers and students speak "high German" in school and my family speaks dialect. Dialect in my region is quite similar to German, but nevertheless every word is different, even "I" (or "Ich"). Since the basis of the dialect is high German that is what I'm focusing on first, (with a few sayings in dialect from my friends to help me with their conversations, and to entertain them). Just recently I have really begun to feel an improvement. The bright side is that the learning is somewhat exponential, for words are often combined to mean one thing, (for instance, mayor in German is *Bürgermeister*: *Bürger* means citizens and *Meister* means Master). My classmates are always ready and willing to help, no exception. I am very lucky to have been put in a class where I can say I have so many friends. My closest friend was an exchange student last year in America and is fluent in English, it was an added bonus we had so many things in common. She and everyone here have taken my German on as a project that they faithfully uphold daily, I can't thank them enough. Of course, being so close to Vienna, music is cherished. This year is the 200th anniversary of Franz Liszt who was indeed Austrian, and there are many celebrations of his works. Our clay skulls we made in art class will be a part of the Liszt exhibit in my town, and we have been watching a movie in music class about him. It's refreshing to be in a place where music and art are held in such a high regard. Everyone knows a famous composer: Mozart, Liszt, Strauss, or Hayden and artist: Klimt, Schiele, or Nistch. My teachers talk with such passion and reverence with the mention of their names, I feel I'm with music enthusiasts like myself all the time. Coming up I can look forward to going to Budapest with my class, Paris with my family, then Salzburg with the Rotary. I feel so lucky to be here and am loving everything about Austria.

Freundliche Grüße,

Tess Paul check out my blog for weekly updates!

www.tessinaustria.blogspot.com