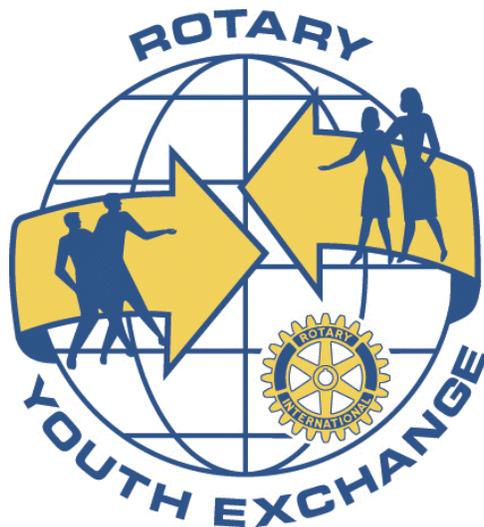


Rotex Round-Up

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Submissions by:

District 5060 Outbound Students

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Let me first start off with....WOW...it's only been 3 months for me here...and I'm loving it. I guess all exchange students say the same thing...but it's true. There has been way too many experiences I've already had...and I feel myself changing and turning into the person that is better an ever before.

Hamburg, to me, is like a new home. I've seen so much of the city that I feel like I can be a tour guide to anyone who comes... (And I have!) Ha ha

I'm living with a GREAT host family. They have younger children and I've always been the youngest in my family...so it's quite the change for me. But to be honest...it's nice. I like having people look up to me and that I can show new and exciting things to say and do with them. I've already cooked a couple things that I've known back home in Kelowna, BC, Canada...(which my mom used to make for me) and I gave it a try...and they all loved it. That's what I want people to know...try new things! (Not all things! Loll) but new. I've been around town and parties and places that I wouldn't regularly go because when I was asked if I wanted to join someone...I said yes! The more you see the better you learn and expect and grow.

I'm going to a school which is much different than mine at home. The grades go from 5 to 13...I'm definitely not used to the little kids running around and screaming! Loll I've already graduated...but have been put in grade 11. School classes are still a bit boring for me....but I'm finding more and more people to talk to and get to know. I had the chance to help my host brother's grade 6 class do an English play and I got to be the director! Loll The teacher was so impressed with my work with the kids she gave me the job with them. It was amazing! I enjoyed being with the kids and hearing them talk and enjoy what they were going to learn. Even now at school if they see me at school they say hello.

I'm still battling the language, and the people are pretty accepting but I do find the random person who is really rude and not willing to listen to me. The community is so big it's hard to say what I really think of it....so far so good. I do find myself running into a lot of creepy characters which you have to learn to put on a mean face and tell them to back off. Be a strong person and it will reflect through you.

I'm having an experience that no one else will ever encounter in the same way....for all you future exchange students....you are one of the select few that gets to have this opportunity, enjoy it!

Multi

An exchange really is the experience of the lifetime. It is hard to describe just how much it affects you, as in some ways, we don't really even understand how much it affects us. But I do know that I have never learned so much in 3 months, about myself, or life in general. When I left for Switzerland, I knew that I would change and that I would learn, but the depth of the experience was something I really couldn't understand before actually experiencing it. We talked about what it was to integrate into a culture, but there is a huge leap from talking about it in orientation, and landing in a country where you don't speak the language and heading home to a family that you now live with that you have only just met. Yet these insecurities that we experience in the first little while can open up into incredible opportunities. The family I didn't know is now one that I love, one that I am a part of. The language that I didn't know is now one that I can communicate in. And the culture that I didn't know I have now experienced in both its positive and its negative aspects. So far, this exchange year has been the richest experience of my life.

So a bit about Switzerland. Some things are intensely different, and some things are quite similar, the trains really are on time, and the chocolate really is that good. My family is incredible, and live quite similarly to the way I lived in Canada. Communicating with them was hard at first, but they are so patient and open, that there were never really any problems. A lot of time spent looking up words in the dictionary. School was one of the things that took me by the greatest surprise. I would say that it was by far the hardest thing for me to adapt to. School at home gave me a routine and a stability that I never really recognized. But school here was completely different. You go to all your classes with the same group of people, and suddenly I felt like I only knew 20 people in a school of 1500, as opposed to knowing a lot of people from all different classes at home. And although most of the people I had met until school had been open, my class tends to be the slightly more "reserved Swiss." It is hard to break through, and although I could communicate in High German, they all speak Swiss German with each other, which tend to be slightly isolating sometimes. Eventually my class opened up to me, and we all get along really well, but it took time, patience and work. Also with time I have met more people in the school, as opposed to only knowing my class. In general, the challenges that school and the learning of the language posed have made me appreciate so much more my new integration. There would be something disappointing about the exchange were it

without obstacles. In general, the exchange experience is incredible, in all its ups and downs, as there is always something to learn.

Ben Neitsch

Sponsor: Kelowna Capri

Host: Germany-Multi

I arrived in Frankfurt on August 28th, four hours late (just the sort of first impression I wanted to make) with one of my suitcases having gone missing. I thought, wow, this seems that a great start to this year. However, that's been the worst thing that has ever happened here.

My host family is amazing. They don't speak much English, actually close to none, due to the fact that they grew up in the German Democratic Republic (East Germany) and had to learn Russian in school instead of English. However, I arrived with conversational German, which I'm so thankful that I had, after I hear about some of the hard times that other exchange students have had. If you're going on exchange next year, don't wait to learn the language, that's just stupid.

School's been a breeze here. I don't really have to do homework, since I don't get marks. It's certainly nice to have had everything in Canada finished with before coming here.

The German food is fattier than what I was used to in Canada. Then again, I never ate fast food in Canada. The butter tastes really good though. Also, vegetables are not an integral part of the diet here. Instead, they've been substituted for bread. A lot of it. No word of a lie, the Germans eat at least ten times as much bread per day as Canadians.

The ability to travel is great. I've been all over Germany already (I'm actually going to Leipzig tomorrow) and I've also been in Holland and Austria. It's really hard to comprehend how small everything is here. The same distance to drive to Calgary will get you into Southern Italy from where I am!

The German Autobahn is amazing. My first experience with the German highway was on the way home from the airport in Frankfurt. I was a little bit unnerved by the fact that we were traveling 200km/h at midnight as it was pouring down rain, but now I'm quite used to it. The Germans are much better drivers than Canadians and drive way faster. However, considering the narrowness of the streets, the Germans have to know exactly what they're doing.

Even though Germany is wonderful, I actually miss my family, friends, and Canada in general more than I ever thought I would. The fact that Canada is so open and that as Canadians we're given so many opportunities doesn't really hit you until

you've learned to live in a different culture and country where all houses are built up because they don't have enough space to build out and the unemployment rate is considerably high.

All in all my experience has been great, I'm excited to see what'll happen in the next 7 1/2 months that I'm still here!!

Chelsey Adams

Sponsor: Shuswap

Host: Netherlands-Multi

Groetjes van Nederland! These last 3 months have definitely been a challenge! I arrived on August 6th and the first month really flew by, everything was so new and exciting. It was still summer holidays when I arrived here in Holland, so the weather was beautiful and everyone was still in "Party mode" ha-ha. My host sister (who is my age) was very nice about showing me around and introducing me to all of here friends here on the small Island of Texel, which is located way up in the North of Holland. I was hit with a few surprises in the beginning, like how extremely windy it is here on Texel, and when your bike is your main source of transportation you really notice it! Trust me! Also the amazing displays the Dutch put in their yards or "gardens". They really go all out with beautiful flowers and different plants and all sorts of decorations and make the best out of what little space they have. Their gardens are a source of pride for the Dutch, they like to show them off along with the displays in the front windows of their houses and it is really neat to see. Another surprise was everything here is about half the size of things in Canada, the yards, the houses, the streets, the cars, the meals...

I kept very busy from the moment I stepped out of the plane, exploring the island, and studying Dutch during the day, and going out dancing at night. I was feeling pretty happy and content with everything towards the end of August, my host family was overly nice, and really helped me settle into my new home, I was picking up the language very quickly, I was meeting a lot of new people and making friends way faster then I ever expected, and I had just joined a soccer team and got my new tennis membership, two things that were very new to me and that I have always wanted to try. Everything was going so well... And that's when the bombshell hit! Summer was coming to a rapid end, and it was time for everyone, including myself to prepare for school. What I didn't realize was most of the friends I had made would be leaving the island to go to University in a bigger city since it isn't offered on Texel. It also meant that it was time for my host sister, who had sort of become my safety, to start her exchange year in Canada. I was really on my own now. But that was nothing compared to what was to come. For the next two months I was really sick with Mono or "Pfeiffer" as they call it here, and I think that REALLY triggered the homesickness! It was so horrible! It started off with flu symptoms, nausea, fever, body aches and pains; I had no idea that I had mono. Then my tonsils became so swollen they were touching each other,

and I couldn't talk or eat for 2 weeks, that's when I knew it was time to see a doctor! I missed 3 weeks of school completely, but I figured that once my tonsils were better that I was cured and I could continue on with my daily activities, so I jumped right back into school and started playing soccer and tennis again after what felt like forever, definitely not a good move! 3 weeks later I had really hit rock bottom! I felt completely worn out, physically and mentally.

I had no idea that the affects of mono could be so bad. I started to feel really depressed, and I totally lost all interest in the things that I had once loved, I was just too tired to care anymore and the idea of concentrating on Dutch, or traveling to London on a school trip felt extremely overwhelming, I was really not feeling like myself, and it scared me! All I wanted was to go home!! But at the time I didn't know that it was the mono that was making me feel this way, and I almost felt ashamed for feeling the way I did, so I was hiding it from my Rotary Club and from my host parents, until finally I really broke down, I couldn't take it anymore and one night I just broke out in tears and actually told everyone "I'm going home!" ha-ha. Deep down I knew I didn't really want to go home, it was just all too much and being able to get all of my feelings out was such a huge lift off of my shoulders. Thank goodness I have an amazingly supportive Host Rotary Club, as well as an amazing Sponsoring Rotary Club, host parents and real parents; I really wouldn't have made it through this without them. My Host Club councilor took me back to the doctor, who I hadn't seen in about a month, and she said I was doing WAY too much WAY too soon and it wasn't a surprise that I was feeling the way I did, so that was another big relief. I had felt really obligated to be active in my new community and to get out there and do as much as I could, I didn't realize that I was still sick and my body just couldn't handle it. It took another whole month, an enormous amount of sleep and a lot of homesickness before I was feeling almost normal again, and I am glad to announce that starting last week I have been able to go back to school and keep up with my daily activities once again! But I still have to be cautious and take things slowly, I even still get pretty homesick once in a while and it is far from easy! I feel a little behind since I pretty much spent the last 2 months at home. But I really learned a lot from this experience, I still am.... and sometimes it takes hitting rock bottom for something really great to happen. It has been a bit difficult to jump back into things, I am almost 2 months behind in school and I haven't had a good opportunity to make good contact with very many of the students in my class yet, but I did receive a few very nice visits and gifts from a couple of them while I was sick!

I will get past this, and I will be nothing but a stronger person for it. I give myself another month and I have a pretty good feeling I will really be ready to take on the world again! I know I have definitely been through the worst of it,

and I am confident that things will only get better from here and by the end of the year I won't want to leave!

I have a lot of traveling coming up in the next couple of months and I am really looking forward to it so I have to stay fully rested! This includes trips to London, Paris, Berlin, Sweden and 10 days skiing in France, pretty amazing!!

There is so much that I could say, but I think this may be getting a little to long, so I will save it for the next Issue! Thank You to everyone for making this Trip possible! Miss you lots.

Claire MacKinley

Sponsor: Kamloops West

Host: Japan 2770

Hello you lucky Rotex roundup reader!! This is coming to you from Saitama, JAPAN, where I, Claire, am currently the sole 5060 representative. And I've got to say this place is incredible. To be honest, when I was first told that I'd be spending this year in Japan, of course I was excited, but I wondered if I wasn't better suited to somewhere else. Well, apparently these Rotarians know what they're doing... (Thank you Jack!!!) I think a part of me was born to be Japanese. I thought that coming into a culture so completely different from my own and in a language that I could barely stutter out `hello`(konnichiwa) in would be incredibly challenging. Reasonable, no? Buuuut, my FABULOUS host mother, helpful counselors and

wonderful girls at school made it so easy. Not only were they (and still are) incredibly enthusiastic about showing me new places and sharing my experiences but they are also very eager to hear about what it's like back home, what's different and what's the same. And I can tell you, there's not much of the latter. Makes for a long but entertaining story time. Now to get to the good stuff, you may be wondering...what weird, no- sorry Ernie - different stuff have I eaten over here...and you know I'd love to tell you, but at this point you eat first, ask second, and usually smile and nod third because even when they tell me I don't understand or get an idea and decide maybe I don't really want to know. The cuisine is astonishingly interesting though, and there is something new everyday. Especially as my current host mother doesn't like to cook, in the month that I've lived here I've eaten dinner at home only five times. The rest of the time has been out at some casual and some very fancy restaurants, with mainly traditional Japanese food every night. I didn't know tofu could be prepared so many different ways!

I've been wonderfully busy lately with something or another every weekend and often outings during the week as well. This year the `World Cup` of Basketball was held here in my city!! So I was given tickets to that, as well as to two J-League soccer games for our local (and fabulous) Urawa Reds! My last host dad is a dentist for half the team so I was introduced to one of the most famous players.

That photo had my friends at school pretty green with envy. Too bad at the time I'd been here only one week and had no idea how famous he was!

Tokyo is a short train ride away from my city...around 30 minutes. We get everywhere by train here. At first, my morning train was pretty intimidating as it is absolutely crammed full of people by the time it gets to my station that often the doors cant even open because bodies are pressed to strongly against the doors. On my first morning a few trains came and went and I was left on the platform, thinking the next one would have room for me. Now I know, there's ALWAYS room, you just need a little tenacity.

This morning I noticed that while some Japanese turned away from a train car, I decided to tackle it and managed to push my way on. I'm getting the hang of it. As for school, it's still a high school like back home, but that's about as far as the similarities go. I made a speech on the first day (in Japanese-eeek!) to the 1000 students and since then I've been meeting new people everyday. I've found that people are very receptive to something as simple as a smile. My really good friends at school are so incredible, and as it is a foreign studies class, they are very helpful, especially because they speak English. Japanese has three different alphabets that are completely different from roman letters (which are also often used). I've learned the two simple ones and am working on the more complicated one that is derived from Chinese characters.

Ah, I think my page is almost up, as is my time because I'm getting up before 5am tomorrow for my school trip to Kyoto, Hiroshima and Osaka!! So on a final note, I've found that while Japan has its own very distinct and ancient culture, it is also a rapidly changing and developing country, One where the world seems to be coming together all in one place. Tokyo is definitely one of the most international places I've ever seen. And not even so much in people, because all the exchanges here feel very unique and foreigners are few and far between. In the smaller cities, but for nearly anything, no matter what you're looking for, Japan has got it all. And most people will go to incredible lengths to help you find an answer to a question or your way in the dark, no matter what the inconvenience is to them. I'm so grateful to be in such a diverse, different and totally dazzling place. Another impression I've had is that I'm starting to see Japan as a connection point between less developed countries of Asia and the more modern western world. It's astonishing to see a country so advanced in so many respects, but yet at the same time there's often a sense of being stuck in the past and a lack of common modern developments. I have yet to live a day here without being completely shocked by one thing or another. It's awesome. There are so many more things I would love to write here, but I guess I have to save it for next time!

Take care everyone, kiyotsukete, and if you find yourself wandering the beautiful boulevards among the stunning lights of Tokyo, drop me a line!! Cheers.

Eli Bravo

Sponsor: Prosser

Host: France-Multi

Well now I have been here for almost three months and I can honestly say this is not easy but I would trade this experience for anything. I feel like I am getting used to life here very well. The first two weeks were very tuff here, the language barrier here was definitely very evident. I am very pleased to say that now language is not a problem at all. My vocabulary has been growing so much, that it's surprising. At the beginning I would come home and just want to sleep or I would come home with a headache. However my host family has done a great job at introducing me and helping me out here in daily life. School has definitely improved here I'm taking some pretty heavy courses and many of the things are new to me. I take an economy class, philosophy, English, Spanish, politics of commerce, history, math and a class of French Literature. So as you can see I'm learning some pretty cool stuff. These subjects are all very different than the standard American courses. Right now my favorite subjects are English and Spanish, since I actually know what is going on. Tuesdays I basically have three hours for lunch, one hour for lunch and two periods where I don't have classes, so it usually turns into a three hour lunch. My friends and I usually go to the nearest bakery and buy these heavenly made sandwiches. They are always made with fresh bread and the freshest ingredient, Subway does not stand a chance here. We sit with our gigantic French baguettes and just enjoy the nice bit of freedom before we have to go back to school. I will definitely remember my three hour lunch periods for the rest of my life. My host parents are wonderful; they never fail to surprise me with a new sight or monument. In the morning they are always waiting for me with coffee and many many jams to spread over toast. I do miss having heavier breakfasts like in the US (something the French find unthinkable). They are very attentive and they have introduced me to my other host families. I move in with my next host family the 9th of December. I will have a host sister and a little host brother which is a nice change, being an only child can get lonely sometimes.

Elizabeth Wierenga-Lee

Sponsor: Prosser

Host: Ecuador 4400

Ecuador is a wonderful country and has surpassed all of my high expectations. I live in Riobamba, a town high in the Andes and surrounded by mountains and volcanoes. On a good day, I can see Chimborazo (highest mountain in Ecuador), Tungurahua (which erupted the day before I arrived in Ecuador and continues to spit out ash into the air), and Altur. If I climb a little, I can also see Sanguay and Cotopaxi.

Yum, the food is so good here! Rice and potatoes with everything, but in different forms. And I had my first ceviche...it was heaven. There is also ceviche in the sierra, but it is made with pig skin. I love it but my exchange friends are not too thrilled. The first time I had it with my family I didn't know what it was until I stirred in my aji and found a chunk with hair (not normal). Now my family always teases me about my food con pelo. The other typical street food is pork. They gut and roast a whole pig and then put it on a table in the street and cut off chunks as people come to buy it. It's always fun looking lunch in the eye. Everything is fried and KFC is big here. They also have a restaurant called Texas Chicken...HAHAHA. They are big with condiments, which gets me to my new love...aji. It's like a salsa with only onions and a spicy liquid, I don't know, but it's wonderful. Many places make their own. I put it on everything. Almuerzo is the biggest meal of the day and is soup with rice a salad and a meat. The salad is usually only flavoured with mustard and lime or lemon. I am going to get fat.

I'm in a routine now with school. I'm friends with the whole class, which is fun because I know people from all different backgrounds. I am the class clown...what can I say...yeah. My specialization is The Food Industry. Pretty much the classes I consider important (Biology, Math, Language, and English) are really easy. My math class is a joke. My math teacher is the same height as me when I'm sitting down and she is in two inch heels. We are working on exponents right now and the last thing on the syllabus is trig functions. Pretty much all of my teachers love me (minus my language teacher, I'm not sure why...I think it's because he caught me skipping his class...but I didn't know I was skipping his class. I was just doing what everyone else was doing (Exchange student words to live by...when in doubt do what everyone else does) and he got really mad at me and I couldn't answer what I was doing because I didn't know). My Biology teacher is really cool. He's really funny and lets us get away with everything. My Social Studies teacher is impressed because I know a lot about forestation and gave a presentation on tree farms without any prior knowledge. My PE teacher is on crack...the first day he lectured the class on respecting our parents and about not getting pregnant for the whole class period. Which I thought was strange until on Friday, the smartest girl in class brought her two month old baby to class and breast fed him in front of everyone. There are 3,000 people in my school but only 1,500 people in the morning session (three sessions total). My uniform is the best in the city. The girls that go to my school are called conejas or conejitas (rabbits) I'm not sure why...I have a plaid skirt and knee highs...the only ugly part of our uniform is the shoes but they don't make shoes in my size so I had to buy another brand. I have the biggest or second biggest size of everything. I am a giant here; most of my

is a median, you stay on the right side of it, no lanes, and posted speed limits are actually just under half the speed you're supposed to go. One way streets are a suggestion, and if they drive on the wrong side of the road in England, there is no wrong side here. Also, sidewalks are a good source of parking space, and defensive driving and seatbelts are an imaginary nightmare to the local drivers. Yet even with all of these rules, and the fact I was in a Car accident on my second day here (not serious, the driver backed into a parked car) I feel just as safe, or safer on these roads than I do back home. Funny how that happens.

2. **Family:** One of my Turkish friends put it well when he said, 'In North America, you live to work, here, you work to live.' That approach really does dictate to me, the experience so far. Everyone is very friendly, my host family has welcomed me in and treats me with more kindness than I could have imagined, and we spend time together, just being together. This is, for me, one of the best things about life here. We aren't constantly on the go, or in front of the TV or computer, and that's ok. I hope that I can help bring that approach back home with me, as I find it a lot more enjoyable than the constant buzz back home.
3. **School:** Everyone told me that uniforms would be the hardest part about adjusting to school here in Turkey, but they were wrong. I am lucky enough to get up every morning and go to a school that has the most amazing campus I could have imagined. It's right on the Mediterranean Sea, has a pool, a covered basketball and tennis courts, as well as soccer and volleyball equipment. On top of that, there is a cafeteria, canteens and some amazing hang out at lunch time spots. It was once a hotel, and has been turned into a school. Despite all of this, the students take the fun approach to class as well, and have a tough time listening to the lectures without interrupting and playing around. Often you hear 'Taman ojean, bir dakika' (Yes teacher, one second) after being told to be quiet. All in all though, school is still really positive experience.
4. **Rotary:** As in Canada, the Rotary meetings are held over food. My club in Iskenderun meets during the day, and due to Ramazan (Muslim fasting from sun up to sun down) hasn't met for lunch in the last 29 days (length of Ramadan, which ends on October 20). Not that work hasn't been done; they have been holding unofficial meetings of the committee heads once a week to ensure the continuation of their work. The club here also meets at an amazing restaurant, where I had the pleasure of dining with them before Ramadan started. Their main project at the moment is a raffle to raise money for an all purpose children center with free doctor checkups, day-care programs and many other things. They have thousands of dollars in prizes and are giving away a car as a grand prize, treadmills, mountain bikes and much more amazing prizes like

those. My club is rather small, and was founded in 1998.

5. **Trips:** I have enjoyed every Rotary trip I have ever been on. They are defiantly experiences of a lifetime, and, if you have patience, and want to have fun, I would suggest 'chaperoning' one. They are a ton of fun to be a part of, and something to always remember with fondness. My first rotary trip this year was no exception. It was, without a doubt, three of most fun and interesting days I have ever lived. I learnt so much about turkey, history and the world, that when I reflect on it, it's with sadness because it's over. The trip was to a place in the center of Turkey called 'Kapadokia'. This area was formed by volcanoes and due to the soft earth, was hollowed out and lived in by Christians and Muslims alike. We were paired up with the best tour guide in Turkey, who had shown the same area to the NASA Mars space team only a few months before. I could write an entire novel about all that I witnessed, learnt and enjoyed on that trip, and even when we were being scolded by our Rotary 'chaperones' for not listening, we were all still smiling and laughing. Where else in the world, can you pull over on the side of a road, duck into a cave and find a Christian church from the crusades, with next to untouched murals and other tunnels leading to unexplored underground cities and not be charged a price of admission. I would have to put it up as the number one place I have ever visited, and if anyone is looking for a fun and interesting vacation, I've found it.
6. **In the end:** All in all, I will be extremely lucky if the rest of my year goes as well as the first ¼ did, but I think it will. Please feel free to e-mail me anytime with any questions, comments or anything in general. My e-mail is, geoff_is_not@hotmail.com and I will be sure to e-mail you back as soon as I can. **Thanks so much for the opportunity,**

Helen Shuttleworth

Sponsor: Sunnyside

Host:Belgium 1620

Greetings from Belgium Flanders: D the land of chocolate for breakfast and waffles for Desert: D. Wow, I can't believe its time for Rotex already time has been flying.

Alright for a bit of background information then, I'm currently living in a small town De Haan that is right on the English Channel (I'm a five minute walk from the beach: D) Have two host brothers and one host sister but the host sister goes to boarding school so it's me and the boys (I might add brothers are a new experience all of their own) I go to school in a near by town Blankenburg where I study tourism in a technical school. I'm currently attempting to learn Dutch, French, German, and Spanish. I don't recommend it but it came with the class. I really love my class because we travel and learn all about the history and tourist

attractions

all

over

Belgium.

I've been getting along really well here I got off to a bit of a rough start but it only lasted for about a week then it was all up hill from there and getting better and more exciting every day. My first impression of Belgium was "man is it tiny" he but some how it gets bigger everyday. I now find myself sometimes thinking that the half hour drive to my family's cousins is a long way. When I went to visit a friend in Germany during the vacation I couldn't get over how big everything was: S. It kind of took me by surprise.

The social life in Flanders was a bit difficult to get used to but its coming. First and foremost I had to give up any idea that I had a personal bubble. For some random reason I don't understand, people will walk as close to you as possible or walk between you and whoever you are talking to even if there is a whole bunch of room. I was at a concert with moma (the oma from my host family) and while leaving the building there was a bit of a pile up by the door. Some man behind me keep walking after I stopped walking right into my back, then continued to move his feet in attempt to push forward even though I wasn't moving.

The second hurdle here was making friends. People aren't nearly as open and friendly at first sight here as they are in America and you really have to just walk up and start talking to people. It's not as easy as it sounds when you don't speak the language. But after a while I started to make some friends and now I hang out with them every day at school and twice a week at volleyball. I also recently joined an orchestra and am a member of scouts in De Haan so I'm making more friends there also. I don't see them so much out side of that yet but hopefully that will come soon. It's slightly difficult though when everyone lives in different towns.

The last big challenge here was the language but I'm sure that is normal for everyone even if you already speak it. But unlike those who could speak the language, I only know one or two tiny words which I pronounced very wrong. I'm learning fast though and, even though I don't think so, my host mother tells me I'm pretty fluent. But of course with a new language come lots of funny stories to tell about your mistakes. In the beginning everyone spoke English with me for a week or two until I got settled in but they would try to say the small stuff like "hoe is het" to me. Now you're wondering I'm not sure how this is at all funny. Well Hoe is het is pronounced "who is it" and means "how are you" so every time someone asked me how was I would start looking around and reply I don't see anyone. Then my other big blooper was accidentally cussing on my religion test with a miss spelled word. My class got a good laugh out of it though.

I don't know if anyone remembers when we had to set goals where we were at Naramata but when we did I said my main goal was to see as much of Europe as financially possible. Well I am very happy to report that this plan is going very well and I have the best host family I could ever ask for helping me with it. (They don't even know it was a goal) I'm so excited I have already gone to Germany and my second host family will be taking me to Amsterdam between Christmas and New Years then after New Years I'm going with a friend to London. We're going skiing in Italy in February. My second host mother saw me one day and gave me a calendar so that I knew when we were going to Normandy and St Petersburg Russia. I'm going to Russia I never expected that one but I'm definitely not complaining. Also on our way to Italy were driving through Germany Austria and maybe Switzerland to get there. It's so amazing I can't wait but I'm sure it will happen before I know it.

Well that's all I have for now. I hope everyone else is having an awesome time all over the world and I hope everyone back home has enjoyed reading about mine. Tot de volgender tijd Ik hoop iedereen veel goede dagen hebben. Daag Helen

Hillary Lavelle

Sponsor: Revelstoke

Host: Thailand Dist 3340

Hello everybody from Thailand! The last three months have been wonderful here, a few problems here and there (THE LANGUAGE, THE LANGUAGE, THE LANGUAGE!) but mostly, I am just so amazed with everything I see, all the things I have done, and every experience I've had. I love this country!

Like I said, the language has been a bit of a challenge, but I find that I have days where I am so proud of the Thai that I do know and other days...not so much. I'm trying as hard as I can, but I think my host mother is more interested in learning English from me than in teaching me Thai!

I've done a little travel around Thailand, but one of my most exciting trips was when I went to Laos for 5 days with my Rotary club and about 10 other Rotary clubs and 15 Buddhist monks (in a CONVOY of three double-deckers buses). I had so much fun, although I had to get over my stress about being in such close proximity to monks; there are a lot of rules about social interaction with monks, especially for females, and I was petrified that I was going to do or say something wrong. Once I got over that, I had some really great conversations with a few of them, a lot of them speak excellent English, and were able to tell me these really interesting histories of the temples we were visiting. I also went for a boat ride on the Mekong River, which was so cool, because we learn about that river in Social Studies...and I'm on it!!!!!!! Next week, I'm going on my first of three Rotary tours with the rest of the exchange students in my district. I'm so

incredibly excited to meet all these people in person who I've talked to on MSN for the last 3 months! Our tour is a 5 day trip to a national park called Phu Kradung, we'll hike up a mountain and spend 3 nights at the top, which is a massive plateau. It'll be the first time (and probably the only time) that I'll feel cool weather in Thailand!!!! We are currently in the "winter" season right now...but winter in Thailand really means 25 degrees Celsius (I heard that it was snowing in my town in Canada, and I nearly cried!).

One of the best things about this exchange is the people I've met; not just my family (amazing, I'll be with them the whole year and I feel so lucky), or my Thai friends (the cutest girls in the world!), but I've made two absolutely amazing exchange student friends here, and I don't know what I'd do without them. Lucky for me, one of them is from District 5060 and she lives only a few hours away from my hometown (LOVE YOU, TARA!). Unfortunately, this is not true for my other friend who is from South Africa, but I feel so blessed to have even been able to meet him and I know we'll be friends for a long time after this exchange is over.

Well, I think it's time for me to say goodbye for now, I hope you are all doing well in your various parts of the world and are having as amazing a time as me. Chok Dee and Ruk Mahk (Good Luck and Lots of Love)

Kate Blair

Sponsor: Wenatchee

Host: France-Multi

I have developed a new habit my first few months in France. It's not that I especially love looking at my feet or that the side walk is significantly beautiful but I do not look up while walking. If I do, there are serious consequences. You see, no matter what part of France you go, dogs are part of the city and so are the surprises they leave behind for you to step in this is just one of many cultural differences I have encountered thus far. This experience is not what I expected. Some days are so hard, I don't know if I'll ever catch my breath and others are so wonderful they take my breath away.

I live in Dommartemont, a village of 750 people resting above Nancy, the largest city in the region of Lorraine. It is beautiful, and of course, very old. I honestly couldn't have a better host family. My dad, Jacky Chef is the CEO of PromoTech, an international company that helps starts other businesses. He is also the Tiger Woods of France and president of the village wine production. I have had the opportunity to work in the vineyard and winery on multiple occasions (I avoid that golf as often as possible). My mom, Françoise Chef is a biologist and obsessive photo-taker. They go out of their way to make me feel like part of the family and help me emerge into this culture. I go to the best (meaning hardest) high school in Nancy, called Pointcaré. I'm making lots of friends and am starting

to really enjoy it. I have also gained lots of amazing friendships with other exchange Students!

I have already had the opportunity to do some traveling. For Halloween, I went to Paris with my mom and sister, Amelie. It was absolutely extraordinary! Amelie reminds me a bit of my sister back home, so it is refreshing to be with her. I got to take in the beautiful city of lights and Love not as a tourist, but as a true Frenchman (or Frenchwomen for that matter!). My family also has a house in Cabris, near Nice. We went for a spectacular break to Nice, Cannes, Monaco, and little villages along the way.

I couldn't have asked for better weather! I fell in love with Monaco, so far, it is my favorite "country" in the world (although, I still have MUCH to see!!). I went on a hike between Italy and Monaco along the ocean. The water was turquoise and breath taking.

My Rotary club is taking very good care of me. I am however, only allowed to go to one meeting a month. I was very close to my club in Wenatchee before I left, so I am having Rotary withdrawals. My club has taken me on hikes in the Vosage Mountains. I'm not much of a hiker or an outdoors gal- but I'm learning!

French is VERY difficult for me. It is limiting and frustrating. I thought I had a good enough grasp of the language to communicate when I left but I was wrong. I think there was an evil French fairy that brainwashed my knowledge of the language when I stepped off the plane. It really gets me down sometimes. I have realized that every time I start to get down, is the time I really start improving. That encourages me! I have also started French lessons after school on Monday and Wednesdays to speed up the learning process. I have something going on every night of the week! It's nice to keep busy. I have joined the "Mississippi Gospel Choir," which is amusing because they cannot pronounce the words (seeing that all the songs are in English!).

I do have a story that I'd like to share. One day before a football game, there was a group of hooligans from Germany roaming the streets of Nancy. As I was eating near the cathedral, I saw one of them wavering and- suddenly fell to the ground. I was in Sports Medicine for 4 years and certified in CPR 6 times, so my first instinct was to go help. When I got there, he wasn't breathing and didn't have a pulse. I preformed nearly 25 minutes of CPR. There may be some brain damage from the lack of oxygen to the brain, but I'm told he will be fine (I was proud of myself). I'm not going to lie; I get homesick, spite all of my wonderful

experiences. It gets hard. This is an emotional rollercoaster, but I find myself becoming a stronger, more independent person because of it. PAIX!

Katey Hoffman

Sponsor: Vernon

Host: Brazil 4520

My Brazilian adventure began with a hundred teary goodbyes, a frantic night of packing (I definitely did not pack enough underwear), a hysterical mother, and me-plane ticket in hand, wide-eyed and ready, with butterflies in my stomach. 3 months later (has it really been that long?!) I have a new home in Ipatinga, Minas Gerais and can't imagine ever leaving this place.

Ipatinga is a gorgeous city of about 200,000 people- big for me, small for Brazil. It's hugged by rolling "mountains" (HA! Brazilians have no idea what real mountains are!) and is known for its steel industry and uncomfortably hot climate (seriously, whenever I comment on the heat, my Brazilian friends just laugh at me, telling me I haven't seen anything yet- just wait till SUMMER comes. I am scared.) I'm lucky because Ipatinga is a safe city- I am able to take the bus to a friend's house or explore the city center on my own without having to worry that my obvious *gringa* (foreigner) appearance will get me into trouble. The people here are so welcoming, friendly, happy, and festive- a Canadian party will never be the same for me!

I go to a good school here and, being the only exchange student in the city, I have made lots of Brazilian friends which are great because I am always speaking Portuguese. I've finally gotten to the point where I am dreaming in Portuguese! At this rate, my plans to forget English in 9 months seem attainable. I will keep you posted on the progress. Of course there are people who try to practice their English with me, but I just tell them that I'm here to learn Portuguese and that if they want to speak English, they have to come visit me in Canada (Get the guest room ready, Mom!).

Brazil is an incredibly beautiful country with so much to offer and so much to see. Last month I went on my first Rotary trip to the Pantanal, the largest wetland in the world- so big it could fit the Netherlands, Belgium, Hungary, and Austria inside of it! Needless to say I had the time of my life with the other inbounds going on safaris, fishing for piranhas, snorkeling with tropical fish, swimming in waterfalls, and just being goofy exchange students. Even the 48 hours on the bus were fun!

As I am living here in this once-foreign country, it is becoming a part of me- so close to my heart. Everyday Brazil amazes me with its natural beauties and people who, despite a corrupt government and extreme social inequalities, take the time

to smile at you as you pass them on the street. Brazil is a country of many faces; the most popular one being the beautiful sandy beaches you see on the post cards. Living here for the past three months I have seen another: the starving, uneducated children put to work by politicians to hand out flyers, the *favelas* or shanty towns that just scream lost hope, the utterly wasteful election process that left the streets strewn with litter for weeks... But what's left in the end is a country so full of pride and passion that you can't help but fall in love with it. The other day Canada was playing Brazil in beach soccer (Canada lost 12-1!!!!) and I had no idea who to root for. I think only another exchange student could understand what that's like, feeling so tied to another country, another place to call "home".

I am still with my first host family and I think I will stay with them until after Christmas. They are absolutely fantastic and I know I will be so sad to leave them. I leave for my second trip next week to the Northeast of Brazil for one month and I am dying of excitement! I am learning that each region is so different and special- I'll be sure to write about it in the second edition of the Rotex Round-Up.

In the meantime, I will continue enjoying every single moment of this life-changing experience. I am doing things I would never have thought possible for myself thanks to Rotary. I am SO happy and SO grateful to be here... VIVA BRASIL!

Katie Staudinger

Sponsor: Yakima Southwest

Host: Brazil 4590

Following advice we received at Naramata - I entered Brazil in August with few expectations - beyond having an excellent year. I think the only thing I was really expecting was soccer-- lots and lots of soccer -- which is probably why I was genuinely shocked when the first TV I saw after I got off my plane was showing basketball! That event was one of many surprises I've encountered during the past 3 months.

The majority of these surprises have been pleasant -- but I have to admit - my exchange has been far more difficult than I had imagined. I knew Portuguese would be crazy-hard, but I didn't realize how hard it would be to adapt to a new culture. The most challenging parts of adapting have to do mostly with the language-- and also the fact that despite my efforts - gaining weight has been inevitable.

Brazil is a gorgeous country-- with beautiful people! I love meeting new people and I love how friendly everyone is. My first family was no exception. They warmly welcomed me as a daughter and a sister and have been an incredible force --

pushing me past homesickness and into a comfortable life. The food in Brazil is also exceptional - so if I'm gaining weight at least it's caused by weekly BBQ's and cakes to write home about. :) The culture is truly wonderful - from the parties (for every occasion) to the fabulous music and constant desire to be happy and carefree. Not only is the culture festive and friendly - its passionate. Everything Brazilians do is filled with passion--- whether playing soccer, watching soccer, cooking, dancing--- even math class - filled with a strong desire to live, appreciate and enjoy!

School is nothing at all like home-- but my classmates are really friendly and think it's hilarious to listen to me trying to read out loud in Portuguese.

Rotary, of course, has been excellent. My district is really cool and always has activities planned and gives us reasons to get all the exchangers together. I think one of my very favorite's things about Brazil is getting to know the other exchangers. I love hearing from them and the fact that I've only known them for a short time and they already feel like family.

Overall, time is flying by but I'm enjoying every minute and whenever I get frustrated or sad --- it never fails that I see a Brazilian sporting the nationally famous "No Stress" t-shirt -- and I always smile.

Kaylan Madeira

Sponsor: Oliver

Host: Brazil 4760

I am living in a huge city, in my standards only of course, called Belo Horizonte. The population here in the city is roughly around 2.5 million....a far cry from my little hometown! The flight was extremely long to get here, but as I look back it was definitely worth it. Although the 10.5 hour stop over in the São Paulo Airport after an already 18 hours of flight and stop over, was a little much...I managed to survive!

I live on the fourth floor of an apartment and for the first couple weeks the weirdest thing for me was to wake up and see numerous apartments instead of a picturesque landscape of fruit trees and mountains. Nevertheless, I would wake up, look out the window and a smile would form at the corner of my mouth and in my head I would say to myself "Wow, I am in Brazil!" I feel so privileged to be here and to be having this experience of a lifetime.

I've been wondering when or if homesickness will ever set in...But not to offend anyone of course, I don't think that will ever happen. On departure day my parents had made bets on when I would miss home, but I have surpassed those dates with utmost ease and life is only getting better! Here in my Brazilian district there

are around 20 other exchange students which I think has made it a bit too easy as of course everyone knows English and it is the principle language that we speak. Although I always get to have a good laugh when we walk down the street together in a huge group and there are several different languages being spoken...most people try not to stop and stare, but it is inevitable!

I love my current host family and they have been amazing, I talk too many of the other rotary exchange students and they say that their host families rarely go anywhere so I consider myself lucky. Since I have been here I have gone to various neighboring towns to meet relatives and been given the chance to see the country side of Brazil. It is an astounding place, filled with rolling hills, lush green fields, and soil that comes in the most amazing reddish color. On the flip side, the roads here are dreadful and many places throughout the city are still cobblestone, I have forgotten what smooth pavement feels like as no matter where I go it feels as if I am on a really bad rollercoaster ride!

I only have one thing to complain about, the medical system. When I had to see the doctor he simply prescribed antibiotics that he felt would make me become better and there was no test to see exactly what I had. So after five days there was no improvement and I went on to see two other doctors and they all believed that I was on the right medication. I proceeded to get three new prescriptions and soon I was taking 5 pills a day. I knew that something was terribly wrong and it was frustrating that they were not doing any tests to see what I had and just filling me with medications. So on the 8th day, I had reached the worst point where I was barely able to breathe. I was rushed to see yet another doctor and only then did I find out what I had(Quinsy) so after a 20 minute procedure of needles and a scalpel incision, without any pain medication mind you, there I was. Although it wasn't a great experience, I now have another scar with a story behind it!

Learning Portuguese has proven to be more difficult than I thought as everyone here just wants to speak English and they want to improve what they already know! Rotary did provide Portuguese classes for the exchange students but they didn't provide access to the necessary materials for us such as the book that we were being taught out of. The bookstore had only 3 copies of it and it would take more than two weeks for a shipment to come with the necessary numbers for our class. So, regrettably it seemed to be more of a social gathering than a language class, but it made for some hilarious memories and the start of close friendships. Although now I am going to seek out private lessons because at this point there is no other option for me to learn how to read, write and fluently speak Portuguese. I am starting to think in Portuguese and over the past two weeks I feel that my ability to understand has greatly increased...which means that confused crinkled

forehead look is slowly but surely going away...thank goodness!

To re-cap...Brazil is amazing and I love it! Although I lied about one thing...I said I only have one thing to truly complain about. But there is one more thing...something that is undoubtedly the worst thing about being in Brazil...and it breaks my heart! When the sentence "Have you ever heard of Field Hockey?" comes out of my mouth...and of course I ask everyone I meet... the answer is always: "What's that??"....or....."Don't you mean on ice?"...luckily I managed to stuff my stick into my larger suitcase, and so I play all by my lonesome at my apartment buildings basketball court, much to the confusion to all those who walk by.

Kevin Eastwood Sponsor: Kamloops Rotary Host: District 4300 Peru

Here it is, far from perfect, infinity from sufficient to describe my experience, but perhaps a snapshot of some of what is Peru. My experience is more that where I go, what bus I take and what I take pictures of, the following is what I absorb everyday. Thank you for the opportunity to write this email from this amazing country, I hope you enjoy it.

Oops looks like more than a page, cut out what you must, I will save a complete copy to mail to people on my contact list. Maybe it all fits on a page if you make the text really small.

The page below these first letters seems immense, and yet here I arrive at the end of the first line. This is how the year is going, time is flying. I'm Kevin, and have brown hair and blue eyes, and thus bestowed encounter no difficulty in finding dance partners at the discothèques here in Peru. I fear how I will cope when I want to go dancing back home; however, my salsa steps should be sufficient suave to no longer rely on being a Gringo. Exchange is an experience of extremes, either you are treated specially or you are ignored, not to mention the potent cocktail of emotions that you find yourself drinking. I am two days short of three months, and have now already been away from home longer than ever before. Being my second exchange I am less challenged by the language, and am learning more about Peru.

I have been blessed with the best host family I could ever wish for, all ten people in my house, three dogs, iguana, ten birds, and two turtles, not to mention the relatives next door. I have found myself in a home away from Canada, complete with interest, care, good food, and a magic bed that occasionally makes itself when I forget. I am the first exchange student for my all-women rotary club, and must admit the dynamics are different than at home. However they have been welcoming in inviting me to spend a weekend at all of their houses. To Rotary,

and to my host family, you are the foundation for a successful exchange, thank-you for all that you do.

I have traveled three times outside of my city now, to Puno on Lake Titicaca, to Canon del Colca, the second deepest in the world, and to Camana on the coast. All three trips were awesome, and the countryside is spectacularly different from home in places. I have seen Vicunas (little llamas) Flamingos, Condors, as well as a variety of other birds. Hopefully I will get to visit Machu Picchu and the Amazon Jungle, but we will see.

I often wonder where all the adults are, during festivals the "grown-ups" give the kids a tough competition scrambling for candies and getting up to dance in the parade as it passes. I am still alarmed when everyone simply throws their trash on the ground as I walk around with stuffed pockets. The environmentally conscious here push the litter into the sand with a foot, or even occasional get their recyclable bottles in the rubbish.

There is the occasional runner or cyclist here, but sometimes the runner is being pursued by angry dogs, or the cyclist is on a bike much too shiny for his clothes. There are few public rec centers; therefore the active population is almost exclusively upper class.

Fashion is very conforming; everyone wears jeans, apart from me and my shorts. I have not personally tried on any women's pants but apparently the fit is very different from home. Fortunately there seems to be very little Americanization thus far in Peru. Traditional dress can even be found downtown worn by the poorer farmers, or during festivals.

The elections are approaching quickly, although I have not tuned into the local TV to see if the candidates give speeches, every billboard, blank wall, and lamp post is painted or plastered in campaign posters. The campaign promises are diverse, ranging from Obras, to Obras y mas obras, to the exotic, Trabajo y Obras. Every candidate has a symbol in his check box, you can choose from shovels, llamas, pots, a house, a star and more. Cars also patrol the streets blaring the radio or campaign information to the masses.

If I had to choose a national dish for Peru it would be rotisserie chicken, its everywhere. Apart from this surprise the food here is very distinct from home; I would attribute the desalination of the world's oceans to Peru. I enjoy fresh mango, giant avocado, ceviche (raw fish, squid etc. served in lime juice with onion and spices) and many other fruit not easily found at home. Papaya here is

actually edible! I will admit I have been quite sick on a few occasions, but that is not unexpected.

The climate in my city is an eternal mild summer. When the smog clears out Arequipa is quite pretty with the snow capped volcanoes at its back. The Plaza de Armas is beautiful, bordered by columned buildings and a large white stone cathedral. The desert is in shocking contrast with the terraced farms fed by natural springs.

One of the hardest things to adjust too is being treated superiorly for being white. In Puno a waiter kicked a group of locals out of their seats to make room for us, and often discothèques don't charge gringos at the door. Tourist businesses also have English signs to draw the gringos. Of course, being ripped off also takes adjusting to, to visit Canon de Colca cost S. 3.50 for a local, 17 for a student, and 35 for a tourist. Taxis charge a lot more if you are inexperienced in bargaining, and hot springs are five times the normal price.

There is no lack of excitement in Peru; you can go dancing until the wee hours, sprint through the poor neighborhoods with angry dogs at your heels, go for taxi rides with drunk drivers; embark a dangerously overloaded bus, or just try to cross the street. I tend to stick to dancing. If you aren't stimulated by any of these activities, earthquake tremors can help to wake you up a little.

Forget tranquility, the clubs don't get busy until 11 and keep the music pumping until after 5. There is always music playing, a marching band practicing, dogs barking or a TV on all night. The roads are packed, with few traffic lights, and complicated by street vendors selling ice cream, cookies, bananas, meals, juice, or collecting odds and ends from houses.

Peruvians are proud to think of themselves as Incas, and enjoy blaming problems in their society to bad genes inherited from the Spanish colonists. Every region has its own unique music, dance, and food. The people are very proud of the Incan culture, having both the highest navigable lake in the world and the deepest canon. Interestingly enough the people of Peru didn't make any of these things themselves.

For every Canadian dollar, I get 2.6 nuevo soles, which makes everything very cheap considering the prices are already low. Of course the Billabong, Nike, and other brands I find here are not likely often genuine either. All of you who would like to order some rip off clothing can place your orders now, lol. However

I can't help with the electronics, there are no ipods here, although I hear they are to be found in Bolivia, maybe even with music still on them.

I have recently had some trouble with the internet here, so I will be filling in the gap in my regular emails soon. I will try to get my pictures posted as well. I would be glad to add you to my mailing list if you would like to receive my emails. kevinastwood@hotmail.com

Kira Petri

Kamloops North

Austria 1920

Well, I have been in Austria for 3 months now and I love it. Nothing in the world could be better. Of course I have times where I miss everyone from home but they go away as soon as I am with the exchange students or with my friends and host families here. I really feel at home. Having a language camp helped a lot. Without that, my German wouldn't be very good. Also, it was a great opportunity to get to know the other exchange students. We became like a family within 5 days.

The first day of school was a little scary because I was going somewhere where I knew no one and could barely speak the language, but I was also excited. Also, it was something I had done before except on a much bigger scale. Before, I came to a new country where I didn't know the language or anybody there except for one exchange student that lives 250 kilometres away from me. It was one the first day of school that I made most of my friends.

I have had many opportunities to see Europe already. In October, my class in school went on a trip to England and I was able to go with them. It was very fun, and even though I was in England, I was still speaking German every day. A week before London I had the opportunity to go to Italy but I was unable to because I had a Rotary weekend. It was worth it to stay behind because I got to see all of the exchange students again and another beautiful city of Austria.

There are many things here that are similar to home and just as many things that are different. Back home I lived in a city with about 83 000 people, here I am in a town with about 4 000 people. Big difference! But strangely enough, I don't feel much of a difference. I still walk about a kilometre to school and home and it is still easy to get lost. I am slowly finding my way around Kirchdorf.

So far, I have had very little or no experiences that could make even the tiniest aspect of my exchange negative. I have loved everything here, the culture, the food, the people, and the language. And, sorry mom, but I do like the food here more than yours sometimes. It is amazing how much I have changed already. It is hard to explain but I can feel it. This part of the year has been great and if the

rest of the year goes like this I definitely won't want to come home. Like rotary said "It's not right, it's not wrong, it's just different."

Krystine Éclair **Sponsor: Penticton** **Host: Belgium 1630**

Well, how do I sum up my first 3 months... Well I suppose the fact that I can't find the right words to describe it must mean something. Belgium is so magic. In the beginning I will admit I was having a few difficulties trying to fit into their culture, and I think that might have a little something to do with the fact that it was nothing like I thought it would be. In my mind I had this great, picture-perfect view of Europe and the way things would be, but when I arrived it really hit me. I am not a silly little tourist here to have a great time and then go back to my life. This is my life for one full year.

I am really glad that I could communicate with my family right away. Luckily, I had a good enough grasp of French to start off with. Of course I still have a lot of feminine and masculine nouns to memorize but knowing the basics REALLY makes a difference.

So far making friends has been one of the hardest parts of my stay here. I am really having trouble with that because I live in a VERY small village with one school and all of the students have been best friends since age 5 and they don't respond too well to change. Unfortunately, being a bit older, quite a lot taller and having a funny accent seems to be just a little bit too much change for them. They seem to be almost afraid of me. I of course approach them being very friendly and happy and they sort of respond with a "wow she's insane" sort of look and carry on with their business. Well, I guess I shouldn't really worry too much. It's all a part of the experience.

I absolutely ADORE the food here. All of the bread, cheese, chocolate, fries, coffee, croissants, pastries, candy... I could go on for days but since I only have one page I think I should stop there. It is all sooo good, and my host mom teaches me how to cook all the time. I can't wait to come back to Canada to share all the great recipes. I'm really starting to feel a great bond between my host mom and I. I really enjoy spending time with her and she loves the fact that I enjoy learning her culture. Another thing I noticed is that I ask a lot of questions about Belgium and the customs they have here and my family is always so excited to tell me how things are. I am really starting to fit into this family and it is going to be really hard to leave them next month!!! These first months have gone by so fast!

I have managed to do a bit of traveling because of the All-Saints week holiday they have here. There was no school from October 28th to November 4th so my host family took me to Venice for 4 days. It was so incredible and enchanting. It was at least 25 degrees outside everyday and not a cloud in the sky. Gelato, gondolas, sunshine= perfection. It is really one of the most beautiful places to see and I feel very, very lucky to have been given the opportunity to see it. When I got back from Venice, the rotary district here had a trip to Paris planned so I hopped on a big bus and headed to France. Wow. So romantic. I mean I always knew that it would be beautiful but seriously, wow. I am officially in love with the Eiffel Tower and I can't believe I have seen the Mona Lisa. I have always had this secret passion about art and history. Paris is so glamorous and rich in culture. Another small trip I have made recently was on November 11th in Ypres, Belgium. I walked through 200 m of real trenches from World War I and saw the Canadian Memorial right near Flanders Fields. Unfortunately there were no poppies because they only grow in spring and summer but it was still very special. Well, I wish everyone well over there and best wishes to everyone on an exchange, I hope you're all having an AWESOME time. THANK YOU ROTARY I LOVE YOU ALL!!!! Bisous,

Logan Coutu

Sponsor: Osoyoos

Host: Brazil 4600

Hi I'm Logan Coutu; I'm living in Guaratingueta, Brazil. I have enjoyed my first 3 months here in Brazil and there are so many funny stories to be told but the one that just sticks out in my mind has to do with me declaring my love for "Poop". Yes my second week in Brazil I was out walking with my family when they all started talking about coco, which I took as Coconut, I love coconut so I stopped them and told them I loved Coco, that loved eating things with coco in it. Well the minute I stopped and saw that they were all hysterically laughing I knew something was up. As they explained to me there's coco which yes is coconut and then there's coco which is poop and they were talking about poop, Yes I am officially the Canadian that is in love with Poop!!!

Megan Calhoun

Sponsor: Kamloops

Host: Ecuador 4400

It's hard to believe that my exchange year here in Portoviejo, Ecuador is already a quarter of the way over. These first couples of months have had their ups, downs, and in-betweens, but then again, that is to be expected. My Spanish is improving and I have a language class five days a week for an hour a day. Some of the foods here are the same as at home and others like ceviche (a cold fish soup) is very different. Things I took for granted back home, like hot water, I know have a new appreciation for. Things I was amazed by upon arrival now seem completely normal. Traffic lights are only decoration, and the amount of seats in a car is a mere suggestion for how many people you can pack in. Sometimes living

in Ecuador feels like living in a different century, things here are not as advanced as we are accustomed to in Canada. Only the most upper-class families have computers and internet in their homes, and most streets are only partly paved. Driving on the roads here resemble an obstacle course at best. I still make my own bed every morning, and clear my own dishes from the table, much to my host Mother's dismay, but some things just can't be untaught. I am still haven't quite gotten used to having a person who works for the family in the house all the time, cleaning, cooking, and generally keeping the place in good running order. I have traveled around my province - Manabi with my family and with Rotary, and the richness of culture in all of the cities and towns, big and small, never ceases to amaze me. Here in Ecuador I have had my first election, my first baile de gala, and my first, second, and third sunburns - they really aren't kidding when they warn you about that equatorial sun! I am still getting used to living in a country where safety is a constant concern, and it definitely gives me a new outlook and appreciation for the community I was raised in. My host family is great right now, things had to get bad before they got good, but I grew because of it, and learnt a lot about myself.

Meredith Robinson

Sponsor: Wenatchee

Host: Argentina 4930

My Journey to Argentina wasn't exactly the best start to and exchange year. I flew alone from Seattle to LA, then alone again from LA to Lima, Lima to Santiago Chile, and Santiago to Buenos Aires. When I changed planes in Santiago I forgot to take my ipod with me when I got off the plane, and I didn't realize it was gone until about 5 minutes before boarding. Then when I got to Buenos Aires I had to find my way, alone, to a hotel they had booked for me. But by the time I boarded my plane to go to my host city, everything was going smoothly.

My host family is absolutely precious. I live with Horacio and Sandra and Sandras 13 year old daughter Jennifer. They are very much the Argentine family and they are so nice to me.

We live in a little town called Trevelin which they say has about 7000 people, but I have a feeling that number includes the sheep. It's an old welsh settlement, so the people are all very (for lack of a better word) white. Most people have last names like Williams or Evans, and the old folks home looks like they just picked it up in the UK and dropped it down in Argentina. The people have really embraced the small town mentality. I can't walk home from school without seeing someone I have to stop and greet (the kissy cheeky thing) and every stranger you meet says hello. It is so safe that my host parents rarely take their keys out of the ignition. On Sundays everyone goes to a big park that we call "la plaza" to walk around, people watch, play football, and just chill.

My school is really distinct from any school that you would see in the US or Canada. There are about 130 students in grades 1-12. My class has 8 people, 6 girls, and 1 boy, and 3 of the girls are pregnant. We always stay in the same TINY classroom, and the teachers come to us. My classmates are absolutely crazy, but I love them all a lot! We don't really accomplish much school wise, but we certainly have some violent discussions, and drink a lot of mate.

Mate, is the national drink of Argentina, it tastes like a strong bitter tea, and you drink it loose leaf out of a hollowed out gourd. Everyone takes turns drinking out of the same gourd with the same straw (it's a special metal straw with a filter), until everyone has said "thank you" (which is the code for I don't want more mate). There are about 5000 other rules, and I am just starting to get a hang of them all.

Mostly, I am really really happy to be where I am. When I first heard that I was going to a small town, I was very disappointed, but in actuality it was the biggest stroke of luck that could have hit me. Everyone has been so welcoming, the town is gorgeous, and very safe, and really I couldn't ask for more. Chau!

Morgan Cole Sponsor: Salmon Arm Noon Host: District 9710 Australia Yass, NSW

I would like to start off by stating that these first three months of my exchange have been absolutely phenomenal! From the moment I stepped off the plane in Canberra airport, I have been learning about the "Aussie" way of life, developing wonderful friendships, and making my presence known both within Rotary and the community.

Leaving Canada, I felt very confident and even surprised when goodbyes seemed far too easy. "I'll see you in a year!" I would say nonchalantly. I embarked on the twenty-two hour plane ride alone, and revelled in my first taste of independence and responsibility. Upon arrival, like I mentioned, I hit the ground running. After two days I attended my first day at Yass High School. There are 400 students ranging from Year 7-12, which is quite a change considering there were that many students in my graduating class alone!

I spend each day, and almost every lesson with the same 40 students, although most classes are composed of only 7 or 8! As soon as I could, I began dancing every Saturday morning, mainly as a teacher's assistant. Another weekly event I attend is Rotary meetings which I have come to thoroughly enjoy. My first host father is currently the president of our club, so I feel fortunate in that respect. With his help, along with the interest shown by members, I quickly felt welcome at meetings

and have now been involved in a few rotary events. At the end of October, the Rotary 9710 District Conference was held on the coast. My host father helped organize the massive event, therefore I observed just how time consuming and at times stressful the job is! Of course the weekend went wonderfully and all the inbound students had a blast kayaking, playing beach volleyball, and attending the 20's themed rotary dinner.

Before I say too much more, I'll describe the area I've come to call home. Yass itself is a small town of about 4,000 people with a main street of little shops, and a few little restaurants including the recently opened Subway! Most people actually live out of town in the various "communities" or suburbs, and this is what is called the Yass Valley Shire. (Think of Salmon Arm and Canoe and Sorrento). Farming, mainly of sheep for wool, is what you see around this area; although the ongoing drought is making life difficult for many. Yass is fairly central in respect to the larger cities such as Australia's capital, Canberra, which is an hour's drive south. This allows me to experience a bit of the city life, learn about Australia's history, and of course do some shopping! I am truly enjoying the small town life though, as living on a farm has been an aspiration of mine for years! My previous host family had a large property 10 minutes out of town with about 3,000 sheep and 3 dogs. Each afternoon I looked forward to coming home to its serenity and beauty. I can already tell I'll miss waking up and falling asleep to the parrots squawking and the kookaburra's adorable laugh. Within the community, I have done a few radio shows, recently did an interview for the local newspaper, and will be one of a few MC's at the annual Yass Valley River Festival held this weekend. After presenting my speech about Canada for my rotary club, I overcame the slight public speaking nervousness I had, and now can proudly say I am more confident than I ever thought possible!

I have even noticed a difference in the way I interact with new acquaintances, it's truly amazing. Finally I would like to touch on just a few of the aspects of the culture and language I have noticed. Almost from day one I have felt extremely comfortable and welcomed by the people of Australia. In town, people will take the time to stop a friend on the street and have a good "yawn" (chat), no matter what their agenda. I'm not sure when exactly this began to occur, but I've now realized that to my ears the Australian accent isn't really an accent at all anymore! Of course they have many different words and phrases such as: ketchup is tomato sauce, dinner is sometimes afternoon tea, a sweater is a jumper (pronounced "jumpa"), and how are you is "how ya goin'". I find the slight differences extremely interesting and have had countless conversations comparing terms with people on this topic! The stereotyped "Aussie BBQ" is in fact very popular and

since arriving here I have come to enjoy lamb chops, and have even tried kangaroo!!

To close I would just like to thank Rotary for this amazing opportunity. I am having the time of my life and feel as though this is exactly where I am meant to be. Everyday I am growing into a more mature, independent, responsible young woman and can't wait to see what these next three months have in store for me!

I spent my first week at their beach house in Alicante on the Mediterranean, and knew this was the start of an amazing year. The day we got back my sister and I went to a fashion show, and the next day we headed off to the village. We picked grapes and their uncle showed me how he makes his own wine. Every family in Madrid has their own village which is like their family's "home base", they are tiny and extremely old, the houses are all connected, and the roads are skinny and made of stone.

My dad got tickets to the bullfights, and explained to me that everyone who goes owns yearly passes so they are difficult to find. The stairs were the size of cinderblocks and the seats were original as well. You sit on a cement step with someone you don't know in between your legs, and you between someone else's because the rows are so compact. It was so traditional, I could tell everything was being done the same way it was hundreds of years ago, making it even more interesting, but it was still a little sad.

I get to go to a museum every Wednesday because they have reduced rates those days, so it's a great experience to enjoy all the history Madrid has. I've been to the Reina Sofia, where I saw Pablo Picasso's most famous piece Guernica, and also went to the Guggenheim in a city in the north of Spain called Bilboa. But my most memorable experience so far has been the Real Madrid game and seeing David Beckham in real life. The energy and amazing amount of people was unforgettable. They sell 6 inch oval shaped loaves of bread with thinly sliced ham in the middle at the games, I had to smile when I unwrapped it and discovered it wasn't what I expected; a hotdog.

We eat some type of fish everyday, and bread with every lunch and dinner. We eat dinner at 10:30 P.M. or later every night, and everyone is so shocked to hear I usually eat dinner around 6 P.M. Everyone uses bread to push remaining food onto their forks, and later to soak up all the olive oil after the meal. Olive oil and vinegar is on everything, and it makes it all taste better; green beans, potatoes, spinach, doesn't matter what it is. My first week here for breakfast all we ate was chocolate. Chocolate cereal, chocolate bars, chocolate pastries, 32 chocolate milk, it defiantly scared me. But after we returned to Madrid we had toast, fruit and non-chocolate cereal, so now I don't dread

Rebecca Tishenko Sponsor: Rebecca Tischenko Host: Brazil 4600

IO!!!!

Well Brazil has been amazing so far... I have learnt so much about myself and I have already grown so much and it's only been 3 months. So I'm going to tell you about my first school day at my university. My host mom Monica took me into my class and introduced me. Everyone was staring at me of course and she asked if anyone knew how to speak English. One guy spoke up and everyone laughed. I had no idea what they were laughing about. I found out later that the boy said that he did know English, when he really didn't know a single word. So I sat at the front of the class and tried to get settled in. Luckily it was biology class and we were learning stuff that I already knew. Plus I probably wouldn't understand in Portuguese anyways! So after the class every one was crowding around me and talking and touching my hair. They were asking me questions and all I knew was `SIM`which is YES! After this crazy attack I went home and told my mom... I guess I had said yes to going to someone's house at 7:00 and I had said yes to training a girl at a local gym! So the next day everyone was asking where I was and I had no idea how to say anything!!! Oh man!!! So the first couple weeks were soooo hard. I wanted to say so much to people but couldn't at all. It was very frustrating and challenging at times. But I can now say that I am adapting into the culture and realizing that life here is not right and not wrong it's just different!! I also realized that I love every minute of it!!!!!! TCHAU!

Spencer Coers Sponsor: Armstrong Host: Switzerland-Multi

Hoi everyone, Switzerland is great. I am having so much fun. I've been to Zurich, Basel, and Luzern. I have hiked in the alps, I am going to the Matterhorn in December; it has just been great. Not going to lie, there have been some low points, it is sometimes hard with the language barrier, but now after three months that is getting way, way better. I am surprised at how much I have learned in such a short time. The school is going good, the Swiss kids are all great, a little

standoffish at the start but once you crack'em they really open up. There have been some sticky situations when I really wish I knew more German, but I managed to work through them. The school is getting easier, I understand more and more each day. But it still pretty hard. I am failing every class, but I try all the homework and I write all the tests, and it is slowly coming. It is really hard sometimes, you feel stupid. The teacher asks you a question and you know the answer, but can't say it. It was a really hard to go from top of the class to bottom. But you just keep on trekking and it gets better. I am finding it really hard with the language here. They have Swiss German which is used in everyday speech then High German that is used in school. So it's like I am learning two languages at once. I have been ok except for home sickness. You feel it sometimes when see something that reminds you of home, but it is usually interrupted by someone yelling German then you forget about it and try to understand what was said. I find that at the end of the day, I am just beat. Listening to a foreign language all day really takes it out of you. You get home and just want to sleep. But you can't because you have to do your homework. It's crazy. But it has been just a wonderful experience for me. I am having the time of my life. The people are good, my host club is great! It is awesome.

Stacy Wormel
Rotary

Sponsor: Merritt Rotary Club,

Host: Bromma-Stockholm
District 2350

A very (needed) warm hello from the cold country of Sweden. Well this is our first Rotex-Roundup update and this is a public apology to Janice, I'm sorry that I was late with it, but a very quick THANK YOU SO MUCH to everyone in 5060 who keeps updating me with your travels so far. It's really great to know that even though we are all spread out in different places of the world, we still all stick together for support, 3 cheers for District 5060!!!!

Everything in Sweden up to date has still been amazing. I have an absolutely amazing host family who has really been a huge part of my exchange so far. My host mother Eva is more like a friend than a host mother, my host father Anders is always making sure that everything is going well with me. They both make sure I get as many opportunities as possible with my stay here in Stockholm. I've been here for almost 4 months and the time is flying by so quickly!

We are all gearing up for Christmas right now and I am very excited for that as they celebrate Christmas a bit differently from the way we do back home. The start of my exchange was a little rocky.

Landing in Sweden on the first of August I had nothing but my travel on bag in which was stuffed full of all those "last minute" things that I forgot to put in my luggage. My actual luggage had been delayed in Copenhagen for two days. So here I am, in this big country full of different languages, customs, VEHICLES but most of all, bathrooms without anything that I actually needed or wanted. This was a completely new feeling to me. The first week I was here, my host siblings (I have 3 hot siblings; john-18, axel-15, anna-12) had all been away for the week at Sailing camps. So my host parents took me around Stockholm and surrounding area's to get a taste of just how beautiful the city is. I spent the remainder of my summer out sailing with my host brother and his friends and spending time out at my host family's cottage.

There were so many differences when I got here that were really overwhelming, such as: eating sandwiches for breakfast, having a sauna in the house, sparkling water, BLOOD PUDDING and of course a bathroom that did not have a shower stall. It took me a while to get use to that one. My host family was so nice and threw me a *Welcome Stacy* party. All of my host relatives were there, some people that would be in my class and of course some of the exchange students in the area. I'm really lucky because I have become really close with one exchange student, who just lives down the block from me, and he is from Victoria Island, B.C, I thought that was SO COOL!! Sooner then I thought, school started. My school is small with 180 students ranging from kindergarten to grade 12. School here in Stockholm is a lot different then back home in Merritt. There is no school spirit, student council, Leadership class, Athletics programs or even after school clubs. So that was defiantly something to get use too. I got bored really easily because there was nothing to fill my time with. So, when Language camp came and all of us exchange students met each other, it was like we became an instant family. Even though Rotary says not to hang out with exchange students all the time. I'm sure we can all agree on the fact, that while you're abroad, exchange students are the COOLEST people in the world!! However, I have a really amazing group of mates at school. They are really patient with me and we all have a lot of fun.

My family took me on vacation to a small Mediterranean country called Cyprus. It's a small island that is divided by both Greece and Turkey. So I got to see both cultures. We were there for a week and I had the time of my life and hope to go back to Greece one day, that's how much I loved it. We had a school play at my

little school this past weekend. That was so much fun. I was the exchange student that could speak perfect English and really crap Swedish (go figure) but it was a lot of fun. Gave me a good opportunity to meet some people I probably wouldn't have met. Other than that I am completely enjoying Scandinavia. I was just in Helsinki two weekends ago with a bunch of the exchange students and it was fun. My next destination is Denmark to visit Steph and Nicole!! Just after Christmas day (which is the 24th here) my host family is taking me to Åre, which is hosting the 2007 downhill ski worldwide championships because they have a cottage there and we are going to go skiing for 5 days. I am so excited for that. It has been unseasonably warm here in Stockholm this season so it will be nice to have some snow!! To everyone back in Canada, ENJOY THE SNOW FOR ALL OF US!! Here's a big hug to all of you all the way from Stockholm, Sweden, Europe!!
Merry Christmas EVERYONE!!!

Stephanie Keller

Sponsor: Quincy

Host: Denmark-Multi

Greetings from Denmark! I have now been in Denmark for a little over three months, and I have to say they have absolutely flown right by. They say that your first three months really drag on and on, but if that was considered dragging on and on, then I'm scared to see how fast the rest of the year is going to go! When I first arrived in the Billund Airport, I met my counselor, her daughter and husband, who I was to stay with for my first week, my second host family and my third host family's daughter. We sat in the airport and drank orange juice and ate Haribo candy!! I have to say that it is the best candy I have had so far!!

The Wednesday after arriving I started language school as well as creating an amazing bond with about 20 other exchange students from around the world. That same day we also got to meet our 'oldies'! The oldies are the exchange students who have been here since January and ours were the ones who had been in the same language class when they arrived. So they brought us cakes and afterwards quite a few of us went out for a drink. The next morning a lady almost made me get on the wrong train. Later that afternoon Drew (Canadian) and I caught the train home and he got off in Fredericia (which is the train station where trains disconnect and connect with each other and either go south or east) I stayed on. When the man came around to check the tickets, he mumbled something in Danish and I asked if he could speak English, because obviously I couldn't understand him, then in English he asked, 'Where are you going?' I simply replied, 'Middelfart?' Then he told me that I wasn't, and that the train that we were currently on was going to GERMANY!!!! Okay, I am not used to taking people too seriously so I waited a bit, to give him a chance to chuckle and say just kidding, but no I was simply on the

wrong train and headed in the complete opposite direction!! Luckily my host sister called and I explained to her what was going on and she told me what to do!

To end my first week, my counselor's daughter took me to a birthday party where we went clubbing for the first time. We sat around and played games till about midnight and then we went to the clubs. I found it odd that nobody goes out till midnight, but then I realized why when we came home at 6:30 AM!! The next day I moved in with my first host family, whom I had never met before. Since then I have experienced so many things. I started school at Middelfart Gymnasium where I am in the second grade. My class is absolutely wonderful! They are all very friendly, and I have managed to make enemies already with one guy in my class, so I think I'm doing great! We also found out that in March our class is going to Dublin for our Study Tour, I can't wait for that! I have been sick and unfortunate enough to have my temperature taken the 'Danish way,' which was in the rear! The doctor thought that I had mono but they never found anything and I was miserable the entire week along with really bad homesickness. All I wanted was to go home and have my mom make me some chicken noodle soup and snuggle up on the couch. But on the more positive note I was able to go to the Rolling Stones concert with my second and third families. It was so wonderful!

One morning, a frog jumped out of my shoe after I took it off to see what was in it. I can't imagine riding my bike 6 km to school with a frog in my shoe! Every day, if I'm not feeling lazy, I ride my bike 6 km to and from school, then on Tuesdays and Thursdays I hop back on my bike and ride 6 km to and from volleyball practice.

For our Autumn Break my host family took me up to their summer house in Hals, where we drove and spent a day in Skagen. I got to go up to the very tip of Denmark and stand in the water where the two currents come together. It was absolutely amazing and incredibly beautiful!! This past Saturday my class had our Christmas dinner or Julefrokost! It was so crazy, everyone was completely drunk, but that's when the Danes are most friendly, is when they are drunk and willing to speak English. I handed my camera to a friend earlier in the night and got it back with over 100 new pictures of everyone. I have to say, I have not seen that side of my class before! It was very entertaining!

In two weeks I will be switching to my next family and after being on the go all last week this family and house really feels like home. I am really looking forward to moving to my next family but at the same time sad to say good bye! However, we have already discussed that I will be coming for dinner sometimes for our traditional Jeppesen's Sunday Pizza! I am also in a sort of dilemma with

moving because The Beach Boys are playing that same night here in Middelfart and I want to take my host parents to see them as a thank you for everything they've done for me. Then at the same moment I don't want to abandon my next host parents on the night that I'm supposed to be moving in with them. So in the Winter Issue we will find out which parents I chose to take to see my amazing Beach Boys!!! Take care and Happy Thanksgiving, Merry Christmas, and Happy New Year!!! Feel free to e-mail anytime if you have questions or just want to know what's going on.

Tara Francis

Sponsor: Summerland

Host: Thailand 3340

To say the least my exchange has been some what of like being on a game show, most days are fabulous, some moments you feel absolutely stupid for something embarrassing you have done and almost all the time you still get the feeling like your trying to talk under water and all that's coming out is a bunch of gargly bubbles. I'm located in Muang Udon Thani, Thailand, which is the third largest city in Eastern Thailand. There are five other exchange students in Udon with me which is nice because I don't feel alone. Before coming here I thought Thailand would be "exotic" and "beautiful" and all those things you se on TV, yah it's definitely not like that anywhere other than the south of Thailand. I believe my first thoughts were its dirty, smelly, noisy and not exactly my cup of tea, and somehow I have fallen in love with the culture, the people and everything around me. My school, UdonPit, has 5000 students which is a far cry from my 400 student school in little Summerland, BC. Most days I get lost about five times but on a good day only once or twice. Everyone wants to be my friend because I have blonde hair and green eyes and I'm the most beautiful to everyone even thought I see Thai woman far more beautiful than I am. It appears my white skin that I detest and want to darken with the sun as much as possible is envied in Thailand. One thing I never considered when I came here is that a good portion of the population would be homosexual. For some reason that is lost on me, in a conservative society, where sex before marriage is considered very wrong the boys very often turn to the opposite sex, surprising yet entertaining at times. Thailand is known for their "Gatoy's" also known as a man that dresses like a woman. There a lot of festivals to do with the Kind and Queen and to send wishes to the sky on candles and during these festivals the Gatoy's will put on parade's and they will dance and sing, most times they are far more beautiful then the actual Thai woman. Homosexuality is definitely not frowned upon in Thai culture. At my school girls are forbidden to wear make up and everyone wears uniforms. Exceptions are made for exchange students to better their situation but because the boy's are not girls and because most boys want to be a woman they will wear excessive amounts of make up to school along with girl hairstyles. The only thing that keeps them from looking very female is their boy's uniform. I was surprised that this is acceptable but if a girl wears make up like this it is not. My first host family is very kind and they

take me every Sunday to see some part around Udon Thani to see famous temples and various markets. In a town not far from me called Nong Kai there is a famous temple with monks in a garden of Buddha sculptures about 300 feet high where I happen to go to the top of the temple and I was ushered into a room at the top by some very enthusiastic Thai people where I was able to see a ten year old dead man in a glass case. This event scared me to no end where I proceeded to beg my host parents to take me somewhere else. They thought it was hilarious. Never the less, it was fun. So far I really enjoy Thailand, the food which was hot at first is no longer spicy and the strangeness of eating congealed chicken blood or BBQ intestines has passed. I don't think I can get over the fact that in a province close to me they eat dog for dinner but some things never change. I find that the Thai word for "hug" is "gawd" which I liked very much and that the people are so friendly and they are very caring. I don't mind the popularity and I love the festivals because they are always unique. My favorite was the Loy gatton festival where people would make Gatton's and sell them by the lake where you would proceed to by one and then you would light the candle in the middle and place it in the water and let the Gatton float away, it was made from banana leaves. It was said that you were sending your wishes to Buddha to come true. It's surprising that there is one set religion in Thailand, Buddhism. It's not like Canada where we can choose our religion or choose not to have one at all but you are born with your religion and it's considered a great thing if you are able to study the monk hood in a temple at young age. I have donated to the monks and very much enjoy the Thai's Buddhist ways. So far my exchange has been more than I could have ever asked for. Minus the horribly embarrassing moments and the fact that I end always end up saying something else when I try to speak Thai and I've got myself a nice little set up. I very much enjoy it so far and I hope there are more exciting thing's to come. Thank you.

Tara Francis (Thai name) Numsai Prao meaning clear water and sparkly like a diamond...

Wes Maples

Sponsor: Yakima

Host:France-Multi

Going on a Rotary Youth Exchange is not easy. After the high of arriving in your new country wears off, you might start to ponder, "Why did I decide to leave the life I've been building myself for the past 17 years to go where no one knows me?" As time goes on, this question becomes less and less of a mystery. Now that I've adjusted to french life, it seems like each week gets exponentially better. Continuing this pattern for another 8 months might make it so the French government will have to forcibly deport me.

People from other countries think it's hard to make friends with the French. People in France think it's hard to make friends with people who live Normandy, my host district. There's some truth in this, but it is always difficult arriving in a new place. As the youth of my town start to know me for who I am, rather than their mental idea of an American, I'm developing relationships that will endure long after the exchange is over. Last weekend I went on a class trip to the historic D-Day beaches of Normandy, and the American cemetery at Colleville. It was a great chance to bond with my classmates and an overall amazing experience. It was moving to see all of the names and states on the graves of all the young men that died in Europe, and hearing American patriotic songs ringing from distant bells. While the people of Normandy may be hard to get to know, they definitely remember and appreciate what the United States and Canada did for France in World War Two.

I attend a private catholic school, where the students work very hard. Most teachers have very low expectations of me. They like me well enough, but don't think I'll be able to follow what there are studying. Now that my French has improved enough for me to participate in the classes, the teachers are amazed whenever I say something. It's a pretty nice situation to be in. The school has also been giving me lots of great opportunities. I take part in 4 different grade levels, ranging from 8th grade to senior year. I help with the advanced English courses in the senior class, and learn French grammar with the younger grades. Whenever one of the classes goes to do something interesting, I always get invited along to benefit from the experience. However; I decided not to go with a school group to New York. It seemed a little... counter-productive.

Rotary has been treating me well over here. I am the only exchange student for the small club of my town, Elbeuf. The club always invites me to the meetings and dinners and I feel very welcome. There are some really nice exchange students in the district that I have become friends with. For an exchange student meeting, we all went to Mont Saint Michel for a weekend. There were 93 in-bounds and out-bounds from numerous regions of France, and a tremendous time was had by all. I discovered that Rotary youth exchange dances are exactly the same here. After playing my saxophone in front of the group at the little international youth expo, the district governor invited me to play at the district conference. They put me on the program as "Saxo Jazzy," as I am now known to many Rotarians in France.

My favourite thing about France is how much the French appreciate everything. They appreciate beauty, art, music... most of all they appreciate their food. Having said that, it's time for lunch. Thanks, Rotary for giving me this excellent opportunity. Vive la France! franceandstuff.blogspot.com