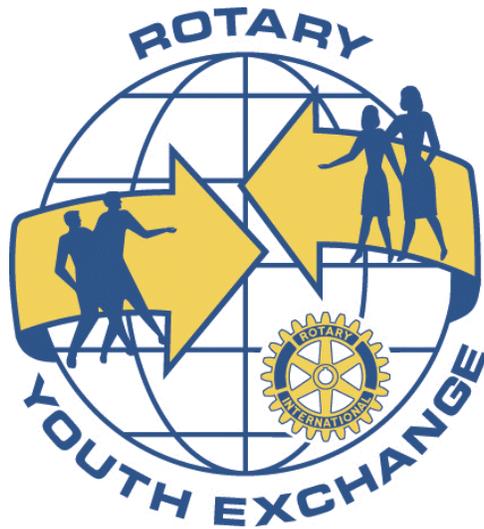


Rotex Round-Up Spring

2004 - 2005



Submissions by:

District 5060 Outbound Students

Prepared by:

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Alex Fitch

The end of April is here, and another three months has come to an end. Life for me in the province of La Pampa has become first hand, and my life in the states is slowly slipping away into to my memory. The way the rain storms come and go, the people, and especially the beauty of the setting sun over the vast land with endless possibilities has transformed me into a pompanos that loves a good asado or bar-b-q just as much as the typical gaucho. Over an endless summer, a fresh start school, and traveling the beautiful countries of Argentina, my eyes have been opened to the world around me.

My summer came to an end at the end of February, and I was sad to see it goes. I had become used to the pools, the sun, and of course the fact that I could to do what I wanted to do all day long! In the end of January my Host family took me to their ranch close to a city six hours from my house. For the entire week we were isolated from the world. We had no TV, and no telephone. We only had country, and more country for as far as the eye could see. One day we took an excursion to the beach. I couldn't believe the beach culture here in Argentina. From around eleven o'clock in the morning until seven at night the beach is packed with thousands of bodies. It is hard to walk around, and even swim in the ocean. There are millions of little cabanas lining the beach, and each family rents one, and that turns out to be like your house for the day. As busy as it was it turned out to be a great day to just sit on the beach, and watch the people.

I loved the summer here in Argentina. I was able to see many different aspects to the culture that I wouldn't have been able to see if I had been in school the whole day.

As January slipped into February, and February into March, it was time once again to start school. Since they put me in the senior class last year, I have new classmates this year, but I am still in the senior year. I find that school is pretty much the same as it was when it ended last year, but this year I can understand everything. I try to do most if the work, but they don't grade me on anything. So, I mostly go to be with my friends, and to see if I can learn something new.

In the end of March I had another opportunity to travel the country of Argentina. My parents from the states came down, and I wanted to show them some of Argentina. We spent some time in Buenos Aires (which I didn't even know up until that point). It is a great South American city with a European flare. It was great to see skyscrapers again, and to just feel the movement of a grand city. We then headed over to Mendoza, Argentina's wine country found at the foot of the Andes. One day we went up into the Andes. We were so high up it was hard to run, let alone breathe. Then we spent time

visiting the bodegas or wineries of Mendoza. I have to say that the Argentineans sure know how to grow some great grapes, as we walked out of the wineries with more than ten bottles of wine. It was great to have my parents here and I had a great time showing them what my new life is like. As it turns out, right now I am on another trip. I am on a trip passing through all of the provinces of the north of Argentina with the other exchange students from my district. We just finished our days in Iguazu which is

a rainforest with luscious waterfalls? It was absolutely breathtaking. When I first saw the biggest cascade, 'La garganta del diablo' or the devil's throat', I was astonished. I had a moment where I knew what this whole year is about. Instantly bad thoughts were pushed aside, and every great experience I have had came rushing back into my head.

Rotary in Argentina is fantastic for organizing such great trips for the exchange students down here.

Time is quickly passing, and now I have less than two and a half months. One of the most difficult times in my life was coming down here, and I know that leaving Argentina will be twice as hard. Saying goodbye to the families that have cared for me, the friends that have welcomed me, and the land that seems to never end will be sad, yet I will feel fulfilled because I have accomplished something that at times seemed impossible. Suerte to all, and I hope that your year ends as good as mine.

Allison Leslie

Holstein, Germany

Wowee, time for the next Rotex letter already! Time sure flies when you're having fun. Seems like just last week I was reading the last Rotex Round-up. Oh, wait....it was just last week. Well anyway life's just rolling along here in Northern Germany. Between school and soccer practice and the occasional trip to the disco, things have been pretty busy for me.

I've experienced some pretty cool stuff in the last few months. At the beginning of March was another Inbound meeting on an island called Föhr with Inbounds from both my district and the neighbouring district. We all got along really well during the long walk on the freezing cold and windy but also beautiful beach, the nightly dancing, the trip to the aquatic center, and the all-you-could-eat cake and coffee buffet (I managed 3 slices but others beat me by a mile). The fact that we got along well is very positive seeing as we will be spending 17 days together on a bus travelling around Europe in the very near future.

The second weekend in March was also one of little sleep what with travelling to Hamburg to see a very cool play and going to a disco in a guy in my class' basement. The following weekend was taken up by a friend's birthday, a soccer game which my team won and a day trip to Kiel, the capitol of my State in Germany.

Then, since it was Easter holidays, I caught a plane to visit my relatives in Southern Germany. I spent a few days visiting in their tiny village before leaving at 4:00 am one day to drive to Austria for a week long ski holiday. This was great for a ski-junkie like me who hasn't even seen mountains in 8 months. Skiing in Austria was a new experience for me due to the pushy lift line people, the lack of lift attendants, and the chair lifts involving conveyor belts. That's right, there were conveyor belts and all the British tourists kept falling off them. It was a great week of snow and sun before heading back home to write some more exams. My return trip involved a ride on a double-decker train though so that was pretty cool.

Another cool thing is that I can now write fairly good exams. Okay writing exams isn't cool but the fact that I can do it is very impressive to me. I even wrote my German exam today without the help of my German-English dictionary which I just happened to have left on my desk at home. It's amazing how when a language clicks, it just clicks. I've had several German dreams now and have screwed up while speaking English on the phone to my parents so I think I can pretty much say that I'm fluent.

Oops, I've passed my word limit now but I'm going to keep writing anyway. I thought I'd write about some of the things that I've discovered here and some of the more interesting questions I've been asked so here it goes:

- 1) Mister Clean is called Meister Proper here
- 2) Oil of Olay is Oel of Olaz
- 3) Nutella (a chocolate hazelnut mixture for spreading on bread) does not taste good with bananas or peanut butter
- 4) Don't staple things on a glass topped table (the table tends to break)
- 5) Double-decker trains are cool
- 6) And now the questions (translated for your convenience): "Do you put as many Christmas lights on your house as the Griswald family?" (Christmas Vacation movie with Chevy Chase)
- 7) "What are the words to Rudolph the Red Nosed Reindeer?"
- 8) "Do people in Canada drink too much because of the long winters?"
- 9) "Aren't a turkey and a rooster the same thing?" (One of my Canadian exchange student friends)
- 10) "Does it offend you to be called an American?"
- 11) "Do you eat turkey at Christmas like the Griswalds?"
- 12) After a conversation about the elevation of my hometown "How do people get to Revelstoke if they don't have a car?"
- 13) And my personal favourite: "You want to study Chemistry? Aren't you afraid no man's going to want to marry you after spending all that time in the lab? I'd be scared you'd know how to poison me really well"

So now I should probably wrap this up. I don't think I've written it before so I'd better write it now. Thanks a ton Rotary. This has been an amazing and interesting year and it just keeps getting better. Thanks so much for the opportunity and support that made this possible. I'll appreciate it for the rest of my life.

Amanda Porcheron Sponsor: Penticton Rotary Club

Host: Rotary Club of Plutaluang (Sattahip, Chon Buri, Thailand)

Is it already to write my last Rotex letter? Time really does fly when your are having fun. This year I have experienced so many emotions but when it comes time to look back on this year the majority of the emotions are positive.

I have had a very busy last few months. On April 13-15 was the famous Thai water festival called Songkran. The month of April is unbarably hot here in Thailand so it is nicely refreshing when you have ice cold water thrown at you. The baby powder being

smeared on your face that follows get annoying pretty quickly because the stuff is messy and goes everywhere. It's all done in fun though and there are pretty much no rules. You can even throw water and powder the faces of elders and police people. Anyone is fair game!!! This is a festival that could only be celebrated in a country like Thailand where there is an amazing amount of respect shown towards everyone. In Canada I could see a festival like this getting way out of control.

I also got an opportunity to go up to the ancient capital in the north of Thailand called Sukothai. It is an area rich in history. We toured the ancient city, tasted local foods and also got to see an elephant festival. About 30 elephants were dressed in hats, painted and then paraded through the main street with all the local people dressed in special matching dark blue shirts and big straw hats. Each elephant has its own marching band and group of people following it who sang songs and danced.

Another great experience was my recent trip with my host mom to China on a tour for 4 days. I got to see walk along The Great Wall, tour the Forbidden City, the Summer Palace, see an acrobat/contortionist show, visit the Ming Tombs and see many amazing things. It was a fun packed 4 days and I enjoyed every minute of it. There were a few major differences between Thailand and China. First of all, China from what I saw was much cleaner than Thailand. There was never a spec of garbage anywhere. Secondly, it's so weird but you really have to search to find a gas station. In Thailand you look and they're everywhere or both sides of the road but there, they were far and few between. Also, you never saw an overweight person. The reason for this, I was told, was because the Communist government puts all the overweight people on the top floors of the buildings (which are all very tall I might because of the price of land in the Beijing area). I guess they don't have elevators!!!

As of today, I have another two months before my return to Canada on July 18. I am excited to get back and see all the people I have missed but I also don't want to leave. I have made amazing relationships with my host families, Rotary Club member and friends here and leaving them will be very hard. I have become fluent in speaking Thai and am able to read and write a bit as well. This is a huge accomplishment considering that when I got off the plane at Bangkok International Airport nine months ago I could only say hello, thank you and count to ten. On my final days here, I will get myself through the process of saying goodbyes by thinking to myself that this trip is only one of many that I will make to Thailand in my lifetime. I will definitely be back here to see all the people and places I have come to love. I could possibly even see myself living in Thailand one day. I feel I have two homes now, Canada and Thailand and I love them both!

Andrea LeComonte

Well the last month has probably been the most exciting and fun of my entire exchange. All the Peruvian exchange students from countries all around the world went on a month long trip to Bolivia, Brazil, Argentina, and Chile. The definite highlight of the trip was Buenos Aires in Argentina, the most Beautiful city that I have ever had the

chance to see. It was literally incredible. The culture was abundant, with tango dancers on the street, screaming patriotic football fans filling the stadium of a soccer game and an immense amount of antique shops almost flooding out onto the sidewalks. The architecture was also very amazing. There were many European churches and government buildings from the gothic era. The people were so friendly, understanding and respectful. The other countries we visited were also very amazing but the impact of my four days in Buenos Aires will remain in my memories forever.

Ashley Ekelund

Kamloops B.C

Austria

Thursday afternoon at sunset, as I'm sitting with a good friend at an outdoor, balcony coffee shop looking over the royal garden in Vienna city centre as it's in full bloom, just chit chatting, people observing, and enjoying the peacefulness. I then say to my friend, " You know Lisa, right now I'm living my childhood dreams!" As simple as a thing it seems, saying this phrase holds greater meaning than words can express.

As the last few months have unfolded themselves, I have really felt a part of this people and culture. I have had even more incredible experiences, like travelling Russia and visiting the great cathedrals of tsars and emperors, or a beautiful ski week in the Austrian Alps. But somehow, what's most important is the relationships I've created. The friends I have made, learned from, and had fun with. Or even just learning the culture of this unique little country. Experiencing the big city Vienna lifestyle, and at the same time the tiny village culture of the north. The Austrian people, I have learned, are so friendly, courteous, and unique. After being here for months you really get into the true culture learning, where you are learning from the people's traditions, their mindsets, and their lifestyles. As different as this new culture is from your own, you learn to love it and even accept it even as your own. Everything becomes routine and every day life; normal for you, something you like and appreciate.

Until one day, something happens. Something terrible and wonderful at the same time. You receive the schedule for your flight home!

Suddenly you realize that this dream you are living can and will come to an end. That you can actually get on a plane and fly away from this place, never knowing when you will be back. These wonderful experiences and friendships will not necessarily be closed and over, but changed, extended over thousands of miles. And although, there may still be 3 or 4 months left of your year, it somehow feels like mere days. You're faced with questions and expectations that hit you like a bullet. Have I experienced everything I could? Have I done everything I wanted to? What should I do with my last few weeks? How can I go back home to what used to be so normal when, **I**, now am so unnatural?
PANIC!

Unfortunately, because my brain is still in this panic stage, I cannot tell you the answers to the questions. Ask me after I arrive in the Kelowna airport at 11:00 at night on August 2nd. Ask me then, what I thought of my year, and I'd probably be speechless.

I'm sorry I haven't written about all the unbelievable experiences, or even really the Austrian culture. But, I think maybe sometimes what's most important are the feelings and emotions involved. After all, that's what we're really learning from isn't it?

Thank-You Rotary for providing me with this unforgettable experience! I'll be home soon!

Ashley Parnell

Anyways, I can not believe it's April! The last three months have really flown. School is much better now - I have more friends, I speak more French (with my awful accent!) etc. Everything is great!!

There was only one HUGE downfall. My best friend was sent home. We aren't even sure why - she was doing great. But her first host Mom wasn't exactly nice and we think she had something to do with it. I was extremely disappointed in our DC's decision, especially since I couldn't understand it. But this was in February and things have gotten better since.

I'm not sure how I feel about going home. I am so indifferent about it. I miss a few things (Starbucks!) but Lyon seems like my home now, I know this city like the back of my hand. Sure I miss my friends and family as well, but I adore Lyon and all the people I have met here. I've changed a lot as well and I'm not sure how readjusting will be.

My other problem would be the weight I've gained. I hope I'm not the only one with this problem! I was going to start jogging but then I read Stephen's letter and decided I would rather not get hit by a car :) I guess I will have to try another approach.

I love when I speak English and accidentally use French words or phrases we just don't say in English. It's pretty funny actually - my Mom gets pretty confused.

There isn't a whole lot to say - I am just having the time of my life!

Caralie Olson Sponsor: Kelowna Morningside Host:ta. Rosa Centro, Philippines

So this year has just flown by! I've been living in the Philippines for 10 months now! I really am a Filipina now. And I realize that I'm really late on this roundup but better late than never. I just have not been around enough to write. I have been out of school since March and since then I have been traveling and touring this beautiful country to the fullest. Also, I've been getting to know my fellow Rotex even more and more, because we have spent the last month and a half together. We have spent weeks on the beach islands, a week up north in the remote rice terraces and then just endless

sleepless nights in each others houses. In these past months I have also manage to accomplish going broke several times. I don't know how many times I have called my mom with money on my mind the whole time and asking for just another hundred or two. But I have managed well thanks to my folks back home. Plus I just celebrated my 19th birthday on May 15 so that gave me a little bonus. My birthday was great, all my friends and some Rotarians drove to a far off province where they were celebrating their "Pahiyas" festival. It was amazing, something straight out of a movie with the lights and food and music and people blocking all the streets. It was a picture perfect birthday. And now I have only 1 month left, I don't feel it. This is my home now, I can't even imagine saying goodbye to everyone here and leaving them forever. I'm sure everyone else is experiencing these emotions too. I don't want to leave this country. I have made so many friends learned so much from the people here and I actually enjoyed school here! Ha-ha because it was only July until March, only under 10 hours of class every week, and I didn't have any obligations just to learn and take in as much as I wanted because I was "non-credit". So for my last month I'm going to try to keep a low budget lifestyle. Spending as much time with my family and friends and having fun, drinking and eating all the things I know I will be crying for once I get back to Canada. Especially all the crazy fruits I'm going to miss such as; mango, fresh coconut, and my new favorite sour soap fruit. So I hope all the other Rotex of 04-05 the best in their last months abroad and I will see you soon at our rebound orientation! Mahal ka kayo! (I love you all)

Chelsey Curry

Well, it's our last Rotex roundup, and we will all be home soon. I have mixed feeling about returning home, sometimes I can't wait, and others I try to come up with ways to stay here forever. I have made a great group of friends here, and they all want me to stay! Also, there were problems with would be second host family, and because of that I have been with the same family all year, which will make it even more difficult for me to return because we have become so close.

Currently I am on tour of the northern provinces of Argentina, in Salta Capital to be exact, and have co-incidentally met up with Robert and his district form down south. I love the change in culture, temperature, and landscape that we experience in each tiny province!

I return to Buenos Aires the 19th of April, and then return to school. "Tercero" is very much like "Segundo" and is still just as boring, but at least this time round I understand what the teachers are saying.

I can't wait to see you all!!!! I leave Argentina the 4th of July and arrive again in Canada the 5th.

¡¡Hasta luego!! ¡Besos a todos!

Christopher Wagner

Hey everyone this is Christopher Wagner from Barcelona, just finishing up the year here in Catalonia. Well, I will say that although the first four months can be quite difficult and unpredictable, as well as slow at times, these last four months have truly flown by. I would say that everything Rotary advises us eventually comes true in one way or another. For example, the more you improve your language skills, the more comfortable you will feel in your surroundings (that applies to every situation), and it will result that those in your surroundings open up to you and you can start to really communicate and create relationships. After roughly eight months, I am far from claiming to have the "truly" fluent grasp of the Castilian language, and much much less of the Catalan, but I have no trouble speaking, and even less when it is utterly necessary. It is no longer a question of survival or the fear of failure, instead a mere decision of continuing to improve what you already do quite well, or remain at the bottom level of comfortability which gets the job done too. It is truly amazing how much you can change in such a short period of time, and although I don't see perfectly how far I've come, I know it was not what I expected, nor where I expected to be before coming (whether or not I've met my personal expectations or not). I still stick with the belief that before everything the language will affect your exchange. As well, I have found the family, friends, and Rotary organization to be both integral and crucial (though in the end a good part of the exchange ends up being good or bad luck, and the rest your attitude, efforts, and preparation.. as well as just who you are as a person). However, if now and then you don't have one or two of them, you can still survive! In the end, I think everyone who makes it through the exchange finds a way to meet ends in every category of need, no matter how rough it is. I like to think of it as both a survival and an opportunity to thrive. You do spend the majority of your time in survival mode, but towards the end, and so much, you can make those outreaches and great connections, those that seemed completely impossible just a few months ago. Sometimes I feel like I am about to uncover just what this year has signified and opened up to me, but still yet I can't totally uncover all these sensations and revelations (perhaps upon return they will all dawn on me at once!). but I will say I feel an overwhelming sense of everything... or as they say the high level (intensity) of emotions they promised me I would have around this time. My date to return is the 8th of June, and in the last few weeks, amidst perhaps difficult dealings with Rotary Spain regarding the plane tickets and date of leave, I have finally arrived to get a set date that we all are in agreement with, and can say without hesitation that I feel an peculiar sense of finality with my year of exchange as well as being very happy. It's the first time I can truly say I accomplished what I came here for, or perhaps what became my goals upon reconsideration, and am now ready, sad, excited, and anxious to return to what was then my norm, the world upon which I based my ideas and judgements before going through this adventure of a year. Recently, I have had the incredible luck to be part of the Spanish League Championship that accomplished my beloved team Barça in the last week. After six years of futbol drought here, I will say that I have never seen a spectacle like that which occurred this weekend in Barcelona. There were roughly one million people in the streets to celebrate the teams victory (roughly the half of the population here) and I have never seen more flags, capes, flares, explosives, chants,

craziness, joy, etc... in all of my life! I still have yet to see a true bull fight (Catalonians don't like bullfighting) but I am pressing to get it done in the next few weeks. I went to the April fair in Barcelona, as well, and got a good taste of the Andalusian spirit, since I have not been able to travel there in person. I am slightly obsessed with Flamenco of the moment, and will be sure to travel there sometime in my life, even if it may not be this year. As well, I continue playing futbol sala, and finally got a chance to show the Catalonias how a typical high school american plays Basketball (although I didn't represent it too great in the end!). The weather has gone from what was miserable, to something of a paradise. It's now a challenge to stay inside ever... Everyday we have blue skies and fair weather (although sometimes death humid) and I have been going to the beach every weekend... I am sure to miss the sea next year! I would keep going here, but I realize I've already overdone the limit. Well, in the end you finally are faced with the sad truth. Just when you've finally arrived to be someone you hoped to be from the beginning, and are fully enjoying this great culture, city, and year, you've gotta GO!!! Yeah, I know, it happens to us all "igualmente"... Well, with only three weeks left, I can't spend too much time writing emails now can I? For now, back to reality--

Diane Wright

Well, I can't believe how fast my year is going and I can't seem to narrow it down into something profound to share with you all...

I know this is the first Rotex Round-Up I have written and my only excuse is that I am really busy and that Rotary always told me to live my year instead of spend it in the internet cafe's!

Ecuador is a wonderfully diverse and interesting country. I have been so blessed by being here and I think everyone should come discover this country, culture, and language. I'll hit you all with some highlights from my year...

The Rainy Season! Boiling weather in the morning to hail and rain all afternoon. My friends and I have made a habit of walking, dancing, and singing in the rain.

Cuenca! As I like to say, the best city in Ecuador! Cobblestone streets, flowered balconies, chill cafes and gorgeous churches are just some of the greatness I have become accustomed to here.

Christmas! I celebrated with my host father's side of the family in Guayaquil. 40 degrees felt more like a sauna than holiday cheer... We opened gifts and ate a Christmas dinner on Christmas Eve and the next morning when I greeted "Merry Christmas" to the breakfast table they looked at me like I was crazy. It turns out life continues Christmas Day. I laid around the house almost all day, wallowing in the heat and to top the day off, we took a trip to the mall! Way to really commercialize the holiday! :)

New Year's Eve! Although several of my friends burned dolls which represented the death of the old year, I took a trip with my next host sisters and brother and several of their friends to a national park. We backpacked up a gorgeous but rough trail, camped in Incan Ruins and sang around the campfire all night long. We were in a place higher than Quito, and they all told me that when I go climb mountains in the US I'll do it like a super hero after scaling the Andes!

The Amazon! As a tour with Rotary, we spent 6 days at Yachana Lodge along the Napo River. My most memorable experiences are swinging from a Jungle Vine while shouting like Tarzan, learning about the plant and animal life of the Rainforest, helping the locals with their daily chores like planting corn, eating cacao and jungle grapes, taking a boat upriver and then floating back down to the lodge in the current with only a life jacket to Save you from the Piranas (haha), and learning how to throw a spear!

The Galàpagos Islands! Another trip with Rotary, I did lots of exciting things like bird watch, see and swim with sea lions and marine turtles and lots of funky fish I'd never seen before. On our last snorkeling venture, and my favorite, we swam with FIVE sharks, and a pod of sting rays! I was so hard core! I also loved life on a Yacht. We just spent the whole time relaxing in swim suits and listening to wonderful things like Bob Marley and Tracy Chapman.

Well, that is the really exciting stuff to share for now! Spanish is moving along and I have learned a TON! And, after some horribly embarrassing situations, I'm not as worried about looking stupid- most people understand- even if you do spill the offensive slang with your bad pronunciation like I did (oops). I hope all is well in District 5060 and I will see you in July!

Elizabeth Ford

Sponsor: Wenatchee

Host: Rouen, France

Good morning America! I'm reporting from a city about an hour and a half north-east of Paris. 400,000 people live in Rouen herself, not including the other six surrounding cities. This is also the location where Joan of Ark was burned at the stake, so a rich history envelopes all of the buildings and people. Every day, I walk by the tower where Joan was held. I also visit the modern cathedral constructed in her honor, and eat lunch beside the memorial garden. Other extraordinary city sites include a magnificent Cathedral with a green spire and the Beaux Arts museum with several Monet paintings.

If any of you remember me, you probably remember my insane passion for the piano and non-stop singing. As crazy as it sounds, my biggest fear in coming to France was that I would not find a good musical environment. But I think God, or chance, or both, must love me. I discovered a conservatory in Rouen after two weeks, and passed an entrance audition after one month. Now I'm taking an accelerated course level so that I will pass 5 years of theory in 1 year, and will also try to receive a diploma in vocal studies and chamber music at the end of the year. The professors are brilliant and connect well with the students. My voice teacher is especially sweet, and helps me to speak and sing French without an American accent. And the students at the conservatory are friendly and outgoing. But the best part is that whenever I

miss my family or struggle with the culture, I can walk to the conservatory and pour out my emotions and confused thoughts into music.

To pursue the conservatory education, my hosting high school allowed me to quit a few classes. Still, I am taking a heavy class load and tutoring kids in English. The philosophy, history, and economics classes are especially fascinating. Philosophy is cool because I discover the French point of view on morals. I'm even more interested when the students speak, because I can see how the young people react to an older generation. History is a must-take-class in a foreign country. When we studied WWII, the facts were infinitely more personalized, as the armies actually marched through Rouen. Our History class also got the chance to visit the D-Day beaches, US memorial, and Museum of Peace at the beginning of the year. The graveyards were so long!!! And if I may advise any travelers in France, everyone should take the time to see the D-Day beaches, and also visit the Museum of Peace in Caen. The museum is full of history of war, and covers the movements of World War II with extreme accuracy.

Economy (and sociology) is a whole different genre. I had never taken economy before this year, and now I have 7 hours of class a week. Most students would choke and scream that 7 is way too much. But I love it! The teacher talks about the trade exchange rates and my ears perk up. We discuss the economic perks in the past 50 years, and especially consider how the economics in France and the U.S. have affected each other. We examine crisis such as the Tsunami and September 11th, and then try to calculate how much the growth rate will be cut. I've been buying the economist magazine and reading a text outside of class so that I can understand more. I find that the most interesting part of economy is the theories. Basically, we study how people interact with each other, and I love studying people. Maybe that's why I'm an exchange student...

Socially, I haven't exactly achieved Miss France. While I genuinely like all the kids in my class, and I think they also like me, they are usually too occupied by school to hang out. Either that or they throw a party when I have a concert at the Conservatory. In any case, I've gotten to know a few kids pretty well, and I thoroughly enjoy their company. We occasionally eat in a café named after Marilyn Monroe and discuss politics or gossip about romance problems. Funny how some things don't change, regardless of culture.

In any case, I get along best with the students at the conservatory. Most of the students are very serious about music, and very talented. They spend hours practicing, and hours more in class. Thus I have learned to work well with other musicians. But they also know how to enjoy themselves. Long breaks, coffee (necessary), chairs out in the sun, dancers carrying each other, horn players making duck sounds, singers learning Russian pronunciation, and the guys still talking about girls and romance problems. All the while, we're surrounded by other musicians practicing from the windows above. People continually comment on the composer or piece, then continue with conversation as if nothing has passed. They live and breathe music, but are still light-hearted human beings. Thus I fit right in to the social circle. I can practice music to fulfill my heart's desire, and kick it when vocal chords get too tired.

A couple of other perks about Rouen include the three way-cool American chicas that also live here. They come from Idaho, Minnesota, and Iowa. Whenever things aren't going well, we always have a support team. We also have other politically educated Americans to debate Bush or Kerry (even though the elections are finished...). Most importantly, we observe the French separately, and then add our observations together. I think we have learned a lot more about French culture in this way. And... we also go ice skating together. And shopping.

A few boo-boos in the French language:

1. I needed contact solution that is preservative free. I translated directly, explaining that my eyes are allergic to "les préservatifs". Found out later that a "preservatif" is a condom, and I had just explained to the pharmacist why I couldn't put condoms in my eyes.
2. Musician mistake: I'll be performing "Les Nuits d'Eté" next month. But as I explained the piece of music to a fellow performer, he misunderstood my accent. He thought I would be performing "la nudité."
3. This one's not really a mistake I made, but rather something I find goofy. The moment I stepped off the plane, my French father greeted me with "cuckoo." I thought he was joking and laughed. Now I realize that "cuckoo" is an accepted French hello. But I still laugh every time someone says it.

Best wishes to everyone back home and thank you Rotary so much for allowing me to go to France. I am enjoying it to the fullest.

Emily MacArthur

To use a hackneyed phrase, I can't believe a year went by so fast ! Many times, it seemed slow, long, or even boring, but looking back everything seems to have sped by, leaving me with only a month and a half until I return ! I still have so much to look forward to though—I am not yet contenting myself with memories. I am currently living with my third (and last) host family, which is going « plutôt bien . » The situation is a little different, because they are currently in the process of building their house, but that doesn't stop me from having an awesome time with them. The mother, Hélène, is a Spanish teacher at the local « collègue , » and Noé, the father, works in business. The two girls are nine and eleven, and they are both wonderful to live with. They are very respectful, and careful to include me in everything (including games of monopoly and cops and robbers).

I am still very involved with other activities in Mende, notably singing. Right now the local music school is in the process of producing an opera, and I have a small, but interesting role—honestly, the drunken sailor is as good as it gets. It is an English opera, which is fun too. I am still enrolled in the « club d'athlétisme, » although it is almost getting too hot to continue !

I am leaving for the bus trip next Monday, which will last for two weeks. I'm looking forward to seeing all my other exchange student friends again. It is strange to think that the people I have had so much fun with will soon be so far away from me. We have only met each other three times throughout the year, but our shared experiences (and language) seemed to make us pretty close. We will be travelling through five different countries : Italy, Spain, Austria, Germany, and Switzerland. I definitely plan to rent a gondola in Venice (with a fellow Canadian), and maybe even try a yodel in Switzerland.

It is strange to think my time at the lycée here is almost done. I have two days left, and then I leave it forever ! Although the courses are interesting, and I am capable of following them, the ten hour days are getting to me ! I have to admit, studying physics and math wasn't my favourite part, but I did really enjoy my history and French Literature classes.

My family came to visit me a couple of weeks ago, which was really wonderful. Eight months is a long time—I never imagined I could be so happy to see anyone! We had a good time together; they got a chance to meet all my host families, friends, and Rotary club members. If I were asked to sum up this whole year in a sentence or two, I don't think I could do it. It has been so diverse, so completely full of interesting, hard, and amazing experiences, that it would actually take pages to explain what I really mean! One thing I can say though, I am happy. I am happy to have had this opportunity, and I am happy to be in France, limited though the rest of my time may be!

Lauryn Baranowski

Copenhagen, Denmark

The year is coming to an end, and this is the last Rotex Roundup. Of course, the year isn't over YET, I still have one huge thing to look forward to: EUROTOUR!! But I thought that I should do something to kind of sum things up. So here is my year in Denmark (for the most part), presented in list form!

We'll start off with something not too serious...

6 Useless Things I've Learned in Denmark

1. European music is an oxymoron
2. Writing haikus can be really fun
3. You MAY NOT throw hubcaps in the courtyard of the Queen's palace
4. Do not watch German TV right before you go to bed, it will give you nightmares
5. The accordion is one of the funniest instruments out there
6. Finland is the home of both Santa and the devil

But of course there's this too...

5 Useful Things I've Learned in Denmark

1. How to take the bus
2. How proud I am to be an American
3. Be confident, even when you're making a mistake
4. How short a year really is
5. How to ask for help

5 Things That I Miss (but didn't expect to miss) from the US

1. Ziploc baggies
2. Cheap Mexican food
3. Free water in restaurants
4. The Goodwill
5. Driving

5 Cool Things About the US vs. Denmark

1. You can name your kid Sunshine, or Jesus, if you want to
2. We don't have to pay 200% tax on cars
3. I can go to a movie for less than \$15
4. Yummy American foods like Jell-O and Peanut Butter

5. Talk Like a Pirate Day

On the other hand....

4 Cool Things About Denmark vs. the US

1. The drinking age is 16 (not to say that I have done any drinking here, of course)
2. They speak a completely useless language and they're proud of it!
3. They have really pretty money with lions and hearts on it
4. NIK OG JAY are the coolest rappers ever

I also had a list entitled "5 Reasons I'm Scared of German People", but I left that one out in consideration for anyone who's in Germany right now! But in all seriousness, I would like to send out a huge thank you to everyone who helped make my amazing year a reality – the Rotarians in the US and Denmark, my parents, and all the other exchange students. You guys make it all worth it!

Leslie Kincaid

Yakima, Washington

Papenburg, Germany

Wow, unbelievable - my year here is nearly to an end. I honestly don't know where the time has gone! Around the time I wrote my last Rotex- Roundup I was usually looking forward to my departure. Now, however, I hold what may be one of the most confusing feelings ever. When I think about going home my stomach turns into a rollercoaster. It's nearly climbing to the top with butterflies and anticipation, thinking about returning home. But then when I think about leaving this year and not coming back it all the sudden sinks, giving me an empty feeling. I know it will be wonderful to go home, be with my family and friends and speak my native language. However I'm pretty sure there's no way to replace the memories and friends I've made this year.

About a month ago I made my last and final family switch. It was a very very good switch, and sort of made my great exchange year complete, considering my "not so great" last host family was the only thing setting back a near perfect exchange. I fit in so well with this family and it is a much better situation than the last. We communicate extremely well and I feel I am learning from them as well as they are learning from me.

I have not been home a lot these past few months, as I have been traveling, but considering my new great host family and friends in my town, my time at home has been well spent. At the end of February I spent a week in Austria visiting the family of my fathers host brother when he was an exchange student in Austria, (which was quite a long time ago). I spent the week in Austria hanging out with his 3 sons and traveling to Wien, Salzburg and Slovakia. In March my wonderful family came to visit me! We spent a fun filled week in Germany, first meeting with my host families and then seeing some sights in Germany. After a week my sister's and mother went home and my father and I continued on to an awesome week of traveling in Spain. A few days ago I returned from my most recent trip. I spent 8 days traveling through Portugal, Spain and France on a business trip with my first host father. Not only did I

get to see many new sights but I also had the opportunity to observe the world of international business in action.

So in these next few months, as my exchange year wraps itself up I realize I must cherish my time and make the very best of everything. With language barrier no longer a problem I will try to deepen the wonderful relationships I already have and hopefully create even more new ones. I am going to try to "live" up my last few months as much as possible. In 2 weeks I embark on my districts Euro Tour. From what everyone says, and the fact that I will be with 55 amazing kids from all over the world, I know this will be an incredible 2 weeks. When I return I have about a month back at home to wrap things up and say goodbye, which by no means will be easy. I feel so blessed to have had this opportunity to go on exchange. This year has been one of the best of my life and has truly shaped who I am. Thank you Rotary!!

Malia Smith

I have now been in Spain almost 9 months...yikes! It is a great life here and I will be sorry to see it go, although I am excited to once again see Wenatchee and then start at University of Arizona in the fall. Right now I am just enjoying the time I have left and doing all the little things that I have been wanting to do, but haven't had time: small monasteries, little side-street museums, renting Star Wars for the first time, etc. But anyway...these last few weeks have been some of the best of my life, so here goes...

Grandma and Grandpa Westerberg came from Arizona to visit me and take me on a trip of Italy and Greece. We met in Madrid and then flew to Venice where we then proceeded to Florence and Rome and then back to Venice to meet our cruise ship which took us on a week-long tour of Italy, Greece, and Croatia and then back to Venice for a few days of touring and then back to Madrid where I got to play tour guide and show the grandparents the sights of my lovely town. The trip was amazing and I am so thankful to have been given the opportunity to see those places and spend almost 3 weeks with my grandparents. Let me tell you...you learn a lot about people when you travel for that long with them! Italy was insane and almost indescribable. We spent time in the "typical" cities of Italy and got to see some crazy sights: the Vatican, St. Peter's Basilica, Coliseum, Venice canals, Florentine art, and of course...those Italian men! Since Spanish and Italian are very similar, it was fun to practice speaking and trying to figure out what was being said. Then we boarded the MSC Armonia (an Italian cruise line) and set sail for the islands of Greece. The cruise was awesome. I loved everything from the food to the staff to the crazy activities to the discoteca! Beautiful ship, beautiful people, and gorgeous places every day! It was also really good to spend time with Grandma and Grandpa and I got to learn quite a bit of the family's history. Then back to Madrid where they got to meet my host parents, see where I live, and tour my city.

Since the grandparents left, I have been getting back to normal...well at least what is considered normal here. I got to experience a bull fight in the best bull arena in the world...interesting. Very traditional, but extremely gory and I wouldn't want to see another fight. The weather has been incredible, so a lot of time has been spent outside by the pool or walking the dog. The language is coming along and I feel fairly comfortable with my ability to speak...grammar on the other hand...not so much! I am excited at the moment because my

friend Melissa Lafayette is coming to visit and we may get to do some traveling...double bonus! Thanks for all the love and support and I will hopefully be seeing most of you in a little over a month!

Much love, Malia

"May I never get too busy in my own affairs that I fail to respond to the needs of others." - Thomas Jefferson

"Someone once told me that time was a predator that stalked us all our lives. I'd rather believe that time is a companion who goes with us on the journey and reminds us to cherish every moment, because it will never come again." STAR TREK GENERATIONS

The secret of contentment is the realization that life is a gift, not a right.

All you really have to do is decide what to do with the time that has been given to you.

Marie Vance

Vernon

Czech Republic

I haven't sent one of these out since before Christmas, so I figure I'm due for a new mass-email. Things are definitely moving along over here; it's hard to believe I have less than four months left in the Czech Republic. Time's going by so quickly and sometimes I find myself looking around, missing this place already.

Winter broke on Monday and the snow is melting like crazy. It was so nice to walk home with my jacket in my backpack, the sun on my face and arms. Of course now that the weather's improving, the tourists are beginning to arrive in busloads. I mean, we've had hardy Japanese coming through all winter, but walking home from school yesterday I heard British-English, American-English, Italian, Russian, and German. On the 15-minute stretch through the old-town, I'm sure I became part of at least a dozen photographic memories. "Group of Italians w. random girl in background." "Cesky Krumlov Castle w. random girl in foreground."

My Rotary meeting this week was very cool. It was a wine-tasting... in the cellars beneath the castle. Everything was old stone and dark corners down there. Plus, of course, the new pine shelving and a few thousand bottles of wine. It's crazy to think that during the Communist period, the cellar was used to store gas-masks. I prefer it the way it is now.

Last night was also a lot of fun. It was my host-sister's graduation ball. I'm really glad I took dance classes in the fall, because I don't know how I would have made it through without them. When a guy asks you to dance, you better make sure you know your polka, waltz and cha-cha, or you're in trouble. Everyone knows how to dance properly here! Not that there wasn't a lot of disco music too, but the traditional dances are just as popular. So we danced, threw silver (it's traditional to throw small coins at the

graduates as they walk to receive their diplomas... when the ceremony ends the floor is covered and shining), drank wine, and took a lot of photos. I left my host-sister at the pub around 4am and walked home on cobblestone streets, the castle glowing behind me. When I got home I had to take a moment, just to absorb everything, so I sat on the front steps of my current home, listening to the first birds singing in the dark.

Well, that's pretty much it for the moment. It's misty today, bordering on rain, and even though it's past noon I'm the only awake in this house. I have to leave for the train station in a few minutes, to pick up an American student who'll stay here tonight. Tomorrow we'll travel together to Slovakia, for a week of skiing with Rotary. So, wishing you all the best.

Michelle MacRae

Well, it is now the 5th of May, and as much as I don't really want to come to terms with it, it means that I've been living here in Switzerland for a whole nine months !!! For the longest time my time here was like an extension of summer vacation. Until late October I would walk around, or meet a friend at a café, and have to stop and be like WOW`!, this is just incredible. But now its just.. home. That does not mean that its any less spectacular then before, its just that I know everything to be like that. I also don't think that I could really pin point the exact point in time where Winterthur stopped being some European destination, and started being my HOME. The German language barrier broke from very early on for me, but I think that when the Swiss dialect started clicking, the transition from Canadian exchange student to Winterthuren truly began. And of course the arrival of the "newies" from the southern hemisphere also played a large part in the processes. ...mmm...

So, reflections asides, around the middle of March I changed host families for the last time, except this move was a little unexpected, but more then welcome. Things with my second host family went very badly very quickly, due to a depressive mother and a very troubled son band, oh and the fact that they wanted no part of Rotary youth exchange to begin with, so that every little thing that I did wrong was blown out of proportion and never forgiven. The worst thing about the whole situation was that my host father was my local club`s youth officer and that my HM was supposed to be my councilor, so I had really no swiss adult to talk to about the problems, and get a perspective of the bigger picture and how to deal with it all. But thank god for Peter Heuzeroth(one of my clubs members whole had me from time to time and more and more increasingly over for dinner). With out me saying very much of anything realized how much trouble I was in, and arranged it so I could move in with his family. I will be forever grateful what he has done for me. So I now have FOUR crazy younger brothers and best relationship for with my host family ever!! The other day they said something that I have waited the whole year to hear: that I was part of the family!!! Truly, no other words have meant sooo much to me this whole year. The household is terribly unSwiss and I absolutely adore them all for it!!!

Another thing that was rather unSwiss was the first half of my spring vacation; I and four other parties who will remain nameless in case this ever falls into good old Walter Wesers hands, managed to spend 6 days in Paris!!!!!! The time I spent there is defiantly going to become one of those memories that I will pull out to savour when I am too old to go out and explore the world. It is truly priceless to me. But aside from indulging in the splendor of Paris`s architecture, history and rich culture, and not to mention national art galleries, the trip really brought forward the things that Switzerland did NOT have to offer. We`ll use the Metro system as a microcosm; In der Schweiz its clean and well ventilated, safe and very well organized. In Paris we got lost in the first 20minutes, it stank and we were all worried about loosing our goods to the nitrous pick pockets. But those were only the obvious differences, and we didn`t notice the important ones until the end of the third day. In Paris, early morning or late in the evening, people smile, talk and laugh on the train, which is something that very rarely occurs in Switzerland.

Now I am not saying that France is better than Switzerland at all, because if there is one thing that I`ve learned this year it`s that nothing is better or worse, its all just different. Im just saying that the trip put my own personal taste into perspective for me, because I know now that I would gladly trade all the niceties on Switzerland for the vivaciousness of France any day. One the guys I traveled with, on the other hand, carried a bottle of hand sanitizer every where he went and could not wait to get home to his nice normal Swiss family. So there you go, there is just no pleasing some people.

Also, right now my time here is getting shorter and shorter, but better and better everyday. Friendships with school friends have blossomed and become beautiful blooms. I am, for the first time here, am truly comfortable my family, and friendships with other exchange students have become sister and brotherhoods. On the opposite side, I am getting more and more reflective about a lot of things, that would not have been such a serious occurrence 2 months ago. All though there were times that I wished things could just be easy like there were at home, where I had my friends and family who loved me, I am very grateful for all the lessons I learned this year, even if most were learned the hard way. And I`m rather happy that in my case, they saved the best for the last. So with that as a closing thought, I wish every one an amazing few last months! live every day to the fullest, but remember to take time to be thankful for what your enjoying. And with that, I`ll see you all in about 2 months at Omak.

Natalie Lachowicz

Kamloops Downtown

Brazil

Wow, what a year; that`s all that can really sum up my year. I can`t really say it was "the best year of my life", as there were too many, sob filled calls home, scribbled out pages in my diary, lessons learned the hard way. But, don`t get me wrong, I enjoyed my year and I know in the future, I will claim this to be the best year of my life;

after some time to reflect and let the emotional wounds fade away. It could be in five months, or five years, but I'm sure the day will come.

I learned so much here, sadly not from my textbooks, as physics is still an hour and a half time, to doodle, or write notes home, but I learned more valuable lessons, mainly about myself - I found a side of me that I had never seen before, I 'm more emotional, patient, and I found faith here (a country that's 75 % catholic, will do that to you).

And of course, I learned other things that I didn't need to soul search as much - I learned how to scream my head off at the ref of a football match and to dance with a little rhythm. I know I'll miss Brazil's beautiful sunsets that look like a paint box just exploded in the sky; the Pao de Quijo and many other little thing, that have made this year so memorable.

But it's time to say good bye, pack my bags and go back to the great white north. But before I do I have to thank Rotary, here and back in North America for letting me find "me". Biejios, the new (and perhaps) improved, Natalie

Natalya Melnychuk

Shuswap

Thailand

It has been eight months now, and I am continuing to have new experiences. Whether it's trying a new food, visiting a new temple, or swimming with elephants; there is something that makes each day an adventure. The highlights of the last three months included in January: another trip to the famous mountain, Phu Kradung for an English camp, and a trip to Bangkok to visit friends. In February, there was a very interesting trip to Nakom Ratchasima for the 100 year Rotary Celebration, as well as, a visit from some friends from back home that led to a few interesting adventures around Loei. March brought the start of the hot season, as well as, a wonderful trip to Kanchanaburi for a week. It has been an amazing three months as I continue to have the year of my life.

January brought with it the return to the famous mountain plateau, Phu Kradung for an English camp with the students of Loiepittayakom. The thirty plus kilometres of hiking for the three days was once again completely worthwhile, and seeing the beautiful cliffs, waterfalls and spectacular views again did not lose its beauty in anyway. Also, during the month I travelled to Bangkok to visit my friend from home that was living in Phuket. We spent the weekend shopping at the world's largest outdoor market and many of Bangkok's malls, visiting the China-town of Bangkok, dancing on Khao San

road the infamous backpacker street and enjoying the craziness of Bangkok and its many wonders. I also had to say goodbye to nine other friends from Australia, South Africa and Brazil as they had finished their exchange year and were returning home that same weekend. It was hard to say goodbye to people that you know you might never see again but I am very thankful for the time I got to spend with them and for experiencing a bit of their culture as well.

In February, the 100-year celebration of Rotary was held in Nakom Ratchasima. I joined twelve of the members of the Muang Loei club on the adventure to the celebration. We made a stop in Chok Chai at Thailand's biggest farm. Now, seeing cows and horses is something that I am not very interested in seeing but watching Thai people be as amazed at cows and horses as I am over elephants made me realize that everything holds its own value to the beholder. Watching each Rotary member take turns milking cows (as well as everyone else) was probably as funny as foreigners look riding or feeding elephants to them. So, even though the farm experience wasn't very exciting it turned into a worthwhile stop as I was completely entertained by Thai people being fascinated by milking cows and riding horses. The celebration was a hit with hundreds of Rotarians from all over the district turning up for a lovely evening of live entertainment and delicious food. At the end of the month another girlfriend from back home and her boyfriend who are travelling south-eastern Asia stopped by for five days. It was good to see some familiar faces and to catch up on life with them. We had some adventures, including a very interesting trip to Earawan Cave with a Thai man that decided to be our tour guide and take us to parts of the cave that most people don't go to. We also, went on a bamboo houseboat with some Thai ladies and swam in some very mucky water in the middle of a lake outside of the city. We met some very interesting people and I got the chance to explore parts of my own province that I had still not ventured into.

For a week in March, I was fortunate enough to be able to join my best friend and her family on a week of exploring through the province of Kanchanaburi. We visited a cave temple filled with Buddha images, as well as, thousands upon thousands of bats. We also spent some time playing with tigers in "Wat Suea," (Tiger temple) a sanctuary not only for those dedicated to following their religious leader, Buddha, but also for animals in need of a home. It is quite the feeling when you can give one of the world's most magnificent creatures a hug. It was nothing compared to swimming with elephants though, the next day. After an elephant trek through the jungle we got the opportunity to splash around with elephants in the river Kwai. The elephants would lie down in the river; completely submerging themselves in the water, taking us under with them. You had to hold on tightly as when they stood back up it was quite the ride. Swimming with elephants was better than any fair rides that I have ever experienced in my life. Also, in Kanchanaburi there are the ancient ruins of Prasart Muang Sing (ancient city of the lion). Seeing such fantastic structures that were built in the 12th century gives you a small insight into the world before modern technology. Within the week we also traveled to the northwestern part of the province to spend some time exploring the exotic waterfalls of Earawan National Park. The lush tropical forests that surround the turquoise waters of seven waterfalls throughout the park made it seem like you had just walked into a National Geographic Magazine. Kanchanaburi is famous for the

railway that was built before the POW's in the WWII from Thailand into Burma. Two of the biggest fetes while building the railway were: Hell's Fire pass and the bridge over river Kwai. The train still travels over on the bridge (I traveled on it) but the railway has been torn up through Hell's Fire pass. Knowing how many people suffered and died in the construction of this railway and then seeing it in real life was like traveling through history and making history books come to life. This week was definitely the highlight of March and I am so thankful to the Guilbault family for the opportunity to join them in exploring one of Thailand's fabulous provinces.

Life here is relaxed or *sabi*, as Thai people like to put it. It is relaxing even though everything I do has value to it. There is so much to see and do and I am fortunate enough to be able to have the time to do the things I want to do. Whether it is going for a morning bike ride into the country and getting the chance to see the sunrise over rice fields and banana fields or traveling around the country to see nature's most beautiful creations, everything is spectacular and worth seeing. April is going to be a hot month with temperatures around forty-five to fifty degrees but despite the temperatures I have much planned including a trip to the floating market and two trips down south and to many islands to enjoy the beautiful beaches. I am not sure how I am supposed to leave here in four months...

Paul Wolda

Lake Country Rotary Club

Brazil

It feels like that time again, when I sit myself down with the computer, alter the normal unfolding of events, and attempt to reconstruct months of my life into words on a page.

Six months have passed since I embarked on my journey and I seem to be seeing things in more perspective, or with a new found clarity. My Portuguese has altered drastically and has thus led me to understand many more things about my surroundings. No longer do I sit at congested tables listening to the continuous hum of the Portuguese language.

The language that once resembled the incoherent drone of taxing airplanes has now unveiled itself and identifiable Portuguese words and sentences spring forth from all ends of the table. All planes have a slightly different manner of speech - some bellow their story for the whole air field and require a lot of maintenance, while others, generally older models, have trouble starting up but once engaged will make you wonder why you ever bothered turning them on. Each model has a slightly different manner of speech but one thing ties them all together, and that is that their engines now emit the gentle hums of an understandable language.

I have learned one important thing about Brazilian story telling. The value of the story does not lie close to the truth. The true value of the story lies within the manner and skill with which the truth was manipulated to resemble something of a far grander scale. The good story is not based on fact but on emotion and the good storyteller is he who occupies the most time. The good storyteller captures his listeners with jesters,

facial expression and a commanding voice. He tells his story countless times, adding characters, dialogue and events that were never really involved but make the story that much better. As a listener you are somewhat obligated to sit in silence and try to decipher the true sequence of events. Yes, my dinner conversations and social outings have now become far more interesting but usually leave me with more questions than answers.

The last two months have been so full of experiences that it is hard to know where to start. Events become jumbled in my mind and the more impressive events overshadow others. I have spent the last two months traveling, with short spans of time spent at home with my family. My first trip was to Gaurdernema, a small city in Sao Paulo state, where I was to stay at the house of my good friend Gustavo. The trip itself cannot go unmentioned however as I met four very interesting Brazilians and passed a good portion of the seventeen hour bus ride conversing about everything from geology to Brazilian Natives to Canada and rock-climbing. One thing stuck with me however and that was the way one particular Brazilian addressed the natives.

The conversation was held in Portuguese but the translation went something like this.

“They are all drunks, the Indians; lazy and don’t work. The government makes special schools for them but none of them can read.”

I was taken aback by this man’s statement, who before this had seemed like a fairly level-headed conscious individual. I sought to bring some sense to this man and mentioned that in Canada the native population has also had problems adjusting to alcohol and our way of life. I talked about how their whole way of life had been changed in close to just one life span. What I said and what I wanted to say could have been two different things however because to communicate this I had to use a lot of examples and search and replace words to accommodate my Portuguese vocabulary. In the end he responded by saying that the Indians are not allowed to drink but people still sell them alcohol, that the laws should be more enforced but that it’s hard to enforce a law like that in Brazil. I agreed, that a law like that would be hard to enforce. The Brazilian then brought up another subject but I was left thinking about how all over North and South America the native populations have suffered and been thrown aside as our more dominant cultures take over.

The other interesting event that happened on the bus that is worth recounting was the meeting of a Cuibanan bus driver, who over the years of driving freight around the country, and now people through the city of Cuiba, had learned and memorized no less than three hundred and sixty full length poems. As we drove through the jungle and on to the flat savanna land of Mato Grosso da sul we were serenaded by his pitchy, but wholesome, voice.

On my arrival in Sao Paulo I met my friend Gustavo who now seemed a lot fuller chested and more confident than the Gustavo that I had met in Canada. He said that likewise I was taller and looked very different, but the important thing was that we were the same two friends that had met in Canada and now we were in his country, speaking his language. The conversation took off at high speed and left us

both laughing and talking about the time he had spent in my home, and our camping adventure that had ended up very wet and cold.

A series of small city buses carried us out of the hectic metropolis of Sao Paulo, into rolling hills and pastureland. The bus slowed to a stop at a little roadside bus station. The sign politely read, Guardernema, in small print. I clambered out of the bus with my 95L double goretex layered mountaineering backpack and stepped on to the cobblestones of a town that could have existed one hundred and fifty years ago. Guardernema is a town of about twenty thousand inhabitants, located about 60 km outside of Sao Paulo Center. Situated within a valley with a lazy river running through its center, Guardernema is surrounded by forest and pasture land. On our arrival in Guardernema Gustavo phoned his mother and we proceeded to the house of his grandmother, apparently under some sort of dead line. A sense of urgency accompanied Gustavo's steps which I later discovered was due to his mother's phobia about keeping to schedules, dead-lines or pre-set plans. I unloaded my bags at Grammas house, which was vacant at the time, and Gustavo and I waited for his mother to come and give us a ride up the hill. Angela, Gustavo's mother, was very nurturing and kind and made sure I felt very at home. She was a pretty woman but since the loss of her husband she had set to worrying about life, creating timetables and important events as a way of distracting herself. That night left me very tired and I crawled into bed to wash away the hours of road fatigue.

The next morning I awoke and found that Gustavo had already left for school. I had a late breakfast and then accompanied Angela to her mother's house where I met Gustavo and his grandmother, who from now on will be referred to as Avon. After lunch Angela rushed off to meet one of her deadlines and left just the three of us. Avon was a strong woman but was afraid of any sort of change in the way of life she had established as correct. As Angela later explained Avon was the beam that held the whole family together. Avon also had paranoia about English because she was sure that Gustavo and I were talking about her and of things not absolutely clean and organized. After Lunch Gustavo brought me to what was to be like my second home in Guardernema, the Caballero (barber shop), or as Gustavo and his friends preferred „The Bat Caverno, which said in a Brazilian accent, sounds more like, O batch Carverno. The Bat Caverno was a barbers shop with the upstairs transformed into a comfortable residence. The bat Caverno was owned by Adeuson, the local barber, who I referred to as Deus, God in Portuguese, and who will go by the name of Deus from now on. Deus had three sons, Marcio, Alachandre, and Almir, who all have nicknames as well but I think this is already confusing enough, so maybe I will just leave you with their real names.

On my second day I had already adjusted to the life of a Guardernema. My days would usually pass as follows. I would wake up at Avons house where Gostavo and I both slept. Each morning I would usually do something wrong like step out of my room with bare feet and be blasted out of my morning half- dream state by Avon - faze mal - which means in a very literal translation - wrong done. I would then eat breakfast and try to talk to Avon which usually turned into me listening to her talk about everything young people were doing wrong these days and me smiling, nodding and eating my

breakfast. I would then go to the bat caverno for the day, making small errands through the city with Almir, talking to the people in the barber shop and playing loud games of trook, a Brazilian card game which I really do not know how to play but it did not seem to matter. The bat carverno was the place to be - a kind of meeting place for the city. People that did not even want their hair cut would go there to socialize. Time seemed to slow down. No one was worried about where he or she was going or what he or she was doing. The mid- day heat would set in and even the flies would seem to be tired as they flew through the air, their wings operating on a lower ampere.

Guardernema was a charming little town and soon had me cast under its spell. I fell in love with the small bakeries, the restaurant where you could pay tomorrow if you did not have money today, and the small town plaza, where the youth of the city gathered. I think the real charm of Guardernema however; lie in the people who inhabited it. Near the end of my stay I was introduced to Gustavo's second grandmother, from his father's side, which I also called Avon. Avon was a short little woman of strong Italian descent, with a face wrinkled from years of smiling. Her movements were quick and precise but were unable to completely mask the passage of time. Her walk was accompanied by a small shuffle as she made sure that Gustavo and I felt totally at home. Avon told us Italian stories and made a beautiful dinner for us, refusing any help or even letting us leave the table. After dinner we sat and listened to Avon's stories in her small kitchen with tea and biscuits. The night drew on and finally arrived at the time that felt right for our departure. We hugged Avon and then she walked us down to the road were she watched us leave. I felt like a horrible person just walking away from one of the sweetest old-fashioned grammas I have ever met. I looked over at Gustavo as we walked down the cobble stone streets and said, "Why do you think grammas are always so nice?" Gustavo laughed and then looking at me smiling, said, "It is probably because they have had a lot of practice. They have been taking care of people for most of their lives" A smile broke across my face and I told him that he was probably right. I hope the art of being a wonderful grandmother never dies. It would be such a shame.

As my time in Guardernema was drawing to a close Angela devised a plan to send Gustavo, the others and me that frequented "the bat caverno", to the sunny shores of the Brazilian Atlantic to a small beach called Caraguatatuba. Or more simply, Caragua. As Angela put it, "Você vai fechar sua tempo aqui com uma chave de ouro" (you will close your time here with a golden key)

Caraguatatuba was a beautiful beach at the base of a mountain range called, "Serra de Mar", or cliffs of the sea. Caragua is an isolated beach little known out side of Sao Paulo state. My days at Caragua were filled with sun, music, waves, beach volleyball, friends, and lots of sun screen. Time eluded me as I tried to enjoy every moment of Caragua, like the way sand finds its way out of a clenched fist. My time at Caragua and Guardernema finally came to a close and as Angela said I had closed my time with a golden key. I returned to Guardernema and packed my bags to prepare for the long bus ride back to Tangara de Serra. I ate dinner and then went out for my last night in the bat caverno and Guardernema. The next morning I shared a teary good bye with Angela and stepped onto the little city bus.

As I looked out of the window I saw a little sign that politely read Guardernema, in small print. I smiled and thought how much more that little sign now said.

The trip had gone full circle as we headed back into the noisy metropolis of Sao Paulo we talked about our future plans and the times we had shared in Guardernema with the same enthusiasm as when I had arrived. Then the bus slowed and we both knew our time together was drawing to a close. We walked to my bus platform and then said our good byes. After a big hug Gustavo turned around and walked into the indifferent mass of people. I watched his orange shirt disappear into the crowd.

I stepped onto the bus and sat beside an old lady "oi tudo bem" "sim" But maybe I will leave that story until later.

Rji Khurana

Merritt / Merritt Sunrise

Brazil

So I feel totally guilty for not writing in so long, and when I did it was kind of a cheap email. But come on, so much to see and do in such little time! Alright, not the best excuse... where do I start?

This year has been unforgettably incredible. Don't get me wrong, I'm not going to just go on about how much I love it here and how great everything has been, there have defiantly been some hard, homesick times. Good news is I know that it is completely natural and it happens to the best of us. One of the hardest things that I have gone through is being away from sidekick, my best friend who I spent most of my days with, Rachele. This year abroad has proved to me how much our relationship really means, how she will always be there for me when I need motivation during my lowest moments; that alone has made this year worthwhile.

But wait, there is much much more that has made this year super neat!! My host families have been unbelievable. During my stay with my second host family I unfortunately had some health issues that needed to be dealt with (don't worry, there's a happy ending to this story), and my Mom, Isabel, scarified various work days to take me to the hospital. When I told her how much I appreciated everything she had done for me and all the time she had taken out, she plainly said "I'm just taking care of my daughter", only Portuguese style. I can't even begin to express how I felt when she said that, how she was so sincere about it. I think that's partly the reason why it has been so hard on me to move host families, even though everything is going smoothly here.

The best part of this year for me is defiantly the connections I have made here in Brazil. How do I even begin to explain all the learning I have gone through, all the growing up, and all the new found appreciation I have for everything. I believe it's more of a feeling inside, and perhaps, I think it's pretty safe to say you only know this feeling if you go

on exchange, or live abroad for a certain period of time. I have tried so hard, many times to write down this feeling of pure accomplishment, this indescribable chapter of my life, but it never comes out the same as it feels. Nossa, I can't believe this is it, it's almost over, but I know I can say I am more culturally educated and better person because of this year of my life. There are so many new interesting people that have been placed in my heart, including a family that I can honestly say I feel is my own.

Unfortunately, I have to let you know Mom, there is part missing without you, you are the most important thing in my life and being without you this year has been a challenging at times harder than I ever imagined. I want to thank Rotary for everything and more, Carole thanks for the concern and the phone calls, you really don't know how much that means to me. Dad, thanks for taking good care of Mom for me; Karmmi, don't know how I would have made it without all your "small packets"; Luck, you coming here to see me was 'ridiculously' cool dude, and Sheil and Jeej- "Every new beginning comes from some other beginnings end", right? Viva Brasil!

Robert Boettcher
Argentina

Sponsor: Kelowna Sunrise

Host:

It is hard to believe but the end of my exchange in Argentina is in sight. I only have 2 months and a few days left until I return to Canada and I really do not know where all the time has gone. These last 8 and a half months have been some of the most amazing times of my life. I have seen and done things that I never even imagined possible!!!!

Since my last Rotex report two really important things have happened. The first important thing is that I started school again and the second is that I have just returned from my Rotary Trip to the North of Argentina.

This year I switched from my private catholic high school to a public high school and I am really enjoying it. All my class mates are really nice and I think we spend more time talking and carrying on than studying (but I have come to understand that that is the Argentinean way). I am taking some interesting classes like Psychology, Political Sciences and FRENCH! Who knew that I would have to learn two languages this year?!?!?

I have started bassoon lessons with a really cool teacher and this week I should be starting my volunteering at English Institute. I am going to be working with the younger kids. I am really looking forward to it.

Last week I returned from my Rotary Trip to the North of Argentina. It was an amazing 20 day trip covering most of Argentina's vast north. There are not enough words to express how amazing the trip was. We went and saw the Andes, drank wine at an authentic winery in Mendoza, visited ancient Incan ruins, were awed by the Iguazu Waterfalls; saw Tango in Buenos Aires, and so much more! I will never forget all the amazing things I saw and did on this life changing trip.

I didn't participate in anything for the 100 yrs but that is not a surprise as my club only has 6 members.

Soon I will be back home in Canada and my year in Argentina will be a collection of souvenirs and hundreds of photos but I will always remember in my heart the amazing opportunities I have been awarded here. I can definitely say that I will come back a very different person. Thank-you Rotary for providing me with this amazing once in a life time opportunity!
