

## District 9800 Rotary Youth Exchange Program



What is the purpose of an exchange program for young people? Why would anyone wish to challenge themselves so much by entering a foreign language environment for a whole year, with different expectations of every aspect of life. Schooling is so much harder, expectations of your family are so much greater – you don't know what is expected of you from your 'mum and dad' - and you change them every few months and have a different set

of rules to live by on each occasion!

Over 7,000 young people embark on this 'journey of a lifetime' each year from all over the world. Most choose to enter into a foreign language experience – to seek to widen their skills, their contacts, their richness of life.

Truly a courageous choice – to be an ambassador for your country, your local community, your local Rotary club and for your family! This decision to embark on the exchange program opens a world of opportunity, with most who partake of the journey, finding so many fabulous experiences that it changes their lives forever! Friends are made and lost as they move from one area of the exchange to another – friends who will never be forgotten, for they have played a part in this richest of cultural journeys. Most friends remain and become a part of their growth from naive young adventurous student; to mature young adults who can converse with politicians and kings – and make an impression on all that they meet.

Enjoy some of the stories from our latest group of young adventurers who bravely chose a year away from their comfortable Australian lives. Those who challenged themselves to broaden their horizons and learn so much about foreign culture by becoming a part of their foreign community and learning (in depth) of the cultural and language differences which make our world such a diverse and interesting experience.

I extend my heartfelt thanks to all those who took part in the program this year for their best endeavours to represent Rotary, their family and themselves in the manner in which they did during the course of the past 12 months.

Thanks also to our New Generations Director (Vanda Mullen) and her husband Barry for their efforts in preparing this production for our enjoyment. A fantastic effort from everyone! Enjoy the reading experience.

Graeme Bird

Chairman District 9800 Rotary Youth Exchange Committee

**YOUTH EXCHANGE COMMITTEE 2011 - 2012** 

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		Hungary/Sweden:	Garry Gunnell
ROTEX:	Brigette Barson-Cole		
	(Pam Testa - Poland/Finland/USA/France)		

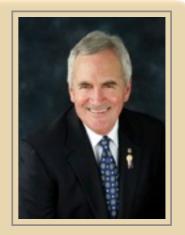
### A MESSAGE FROM DISTRICT GOVERNOR KEITH RYALL

I had the very good fortune to attend the Rotary International Convention in Chicago, USA in 2005 and heard the strongest endorsement I have ever heard from the incoming RI President Karl Wilhelm Stenhammer; he indicated that if all the youths of the world had the opportunity to take part in a Rotary Youth Exchange Program, the world would be a much better place. From what I have heard and seen from both incoming and outgoing Youth Exchange students, and from Clubs and Host Families, I agree 100%.

May I quote from a former Youth Exchange student..."Youth Exchange has made a better person in myself and in the way I look at the world. I know that I have become a lot more independent and I have more courage than I have ever had. It also reinforced for me the importance of family support, particularly when living and studying in a strange country."

Rotary, I believe has by far and away the best Youth development programs of any organisation in the world; either voluntary or commercial. Think about the Fourth Object of Rotary..."The advancement of international understanding, goodwill, and peace through a world fellowship of business and professional persons united in the ideal of service." What better way to really improve international understanding and friendship than beginning with a Youth Exchange program? May I now quote from a current D9800 President of a Club actively involved in Y.Ex;

"The exchange students really brighten up the mood



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of members and meetings with their youthful exuberance. They are always smiling and members enjoy talking to them about their week, as well as learning about them and their family back home. They add another perspective to every aspect of the Rotary experience. The students take great interest in members and seek to learn what they can about Australia from the stories of members. Members enjoy organising time for the student to travel with them or just to take them out for dinner or to events that the member is going to. It is a great reminder of why we are in Rotary - to make the world a smaller place through through exposure to and understanding of different cultures. With Y.Ex, we simply do it one person at a time."

This year we have just over 300 young Australians from our 22 Districts taking part in Youth Exchange so our number of 18 is just above the average; may we continue to be a leader in all aspects of development of our richest talent - our young people.

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### LETTERS FROM ABROAD

### **DECEMBER 2011**



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### IPDG Iven Mackay - "I share the passion for Rotary Youth Exchange . . . "

Rotary's Youth Exchange program has been running successfully in District 9800 for a very long time now. This is a wonderful opportunity for secondary school age students to travel to another country, another culture, in what seems like another world, and further their life's education in a completely different and new way.

We have seen the impact of Youth Exchange, over and over again, every year. The students leave their hometown and return as young citizens of the world, just 12 months later. Youth Exchange does not just impact on the students; it touches families, Rotary Clubs, schools, friends and all who come into contact with this program. This bond lasts way beyond the 12 month exchange away, it lasts forever.

Students leave as ambassadors for Rotary, Australia, their School and their family. They embrace new ways of life, no better no worse, just different. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity and a life changing opportunity.

We must thank the mums, dads, brothers and sisters that take the big step of sending their loved one away and realising that they will not be part of the family for a whole year. In fact when they return, they will have many new families overseas, and they will always have a special affinity for the new friends they have made. Thank you to the District Youth Exchange Chairs and Committee, who facilitate these exchanges, from well before they start to well after they finish. These highly committed Rotarians have the experience and passion needed to ensure the smooth operation and the successful completion of the exchange for the student. The Committee work tirelessly and we are all very grateful for their dedication. The Youth Exchange program is under the umbrella of Rotary's New Generations (Avenue of Service), and the District Director in charge has led with distinction in 2010-2011 and 2011-2012.

And finally of course, we must congratulate the Youth Exchange students. Each year your applications arrive, from the country and from the city, and without question, you are all to be commended on taking up this opportunity, pursuing your dreams, embarking on this adventure, which you will never regret and never forget.

I share the passion for Rotary Youth Exchange and have had the pleasure of being touched by it continually since joining Rotary as a young Rotarian some 26 years ago. I hope you get much enjoyment from this publication and to those that have produced it; this is an outstanding record for Youth Exchange in RID 9800 in the year 2011-2012.

Pictured below - Chairman Graeme Bird and IPDG Iven Mackay with outbound students 2011 after presentation of their blazers in December 2010 - the images and words of these students are the inspiration for this publication.



#### DECEMBER 2011

*"We didn't understand why they were crying before, But now our heads are bent to our hands, letting the tears finally run. The people surrounding us are simply our portrait, framed in the past".* 

-Quoted from my blog; andbombsflyoverhead.blogspot.com

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KIMBERLEY KONISBERRY FINLAND 2011

he reason why I quote that to you isn't to promote my blog nor is it just meaningless text I decided sounded good enough to open with. It's a piece of writing I composed just after my six month mark in Finland. I was referring to our growth. My growth and how I see the next generation of exchange students.

My name is Kimberley Konisberry and in a short summary; I am a fifteen year old living the best possible life one my age could ask for. I applied for exchange when I was fourteen, left four months after my fifteenth birthday and am now preparing to celebrate my sixteenth birthday in Finland next month.

Of course by now you know, my exchange year has taken place in Finland, the wonderful land of the north. It's now August, the seventh month into my exchange year.

I'm living in a small country town of 8000, which is very different to my city of 4 000 000! At first I was really worried to be living in such a small town, but of course now I wouldn't trade it for anything.

I remember in my second week here, it was -24 outside. I came to the breakfast table and my host mum told me I better hurry up if I was to get to school on time. I asked her what she was talking about. She laughed, handed me a hand-drawn map and told me to start walking, the car wasn't starting.

Compare that to a few weeks ago when I woke to a breakfast buffet in Paris, the Rotarians



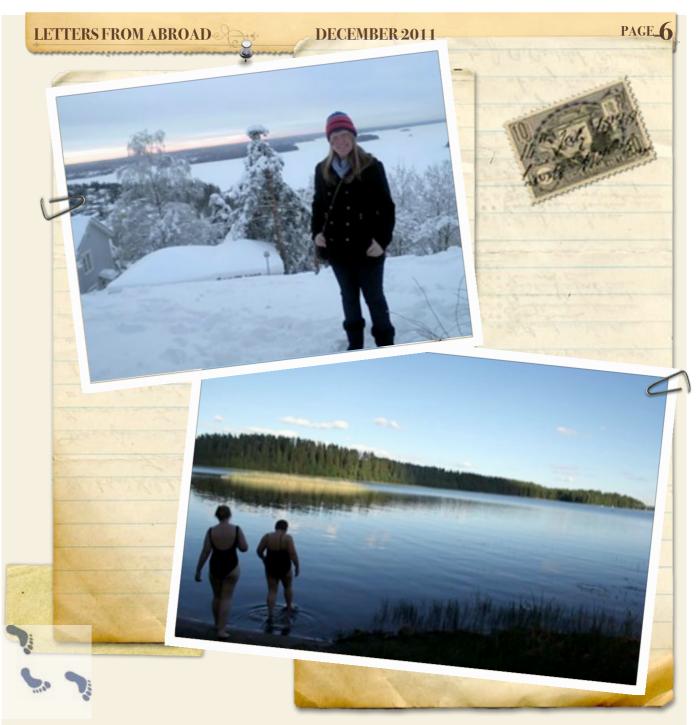
telling us to be back on the bus by 9am, when our eurotour would continue

Both experiences were just as exciting, new and pleasant. My point is exchange is a collection of experiences tied together by the student's will and determination.

Exchange of course, also has its low points. You just need to think of these times as temporary and dismissive. They pass and at the end of the day, you don't really remember them.

The time I've spent here so far, I consider a gift far greater than any I could possibly ask for. A lot of people consider exchange to be about the student going. I've found it's much more than that.





It's also about the families you stay with, the friends you make and the culture you accept into your life.

When I decided to go on exchange, I didn't know I was accepting all of this. Had I known, I would've encouraged as many people as possible to do the exact same thing.

It's changed my life and altered my future. I've grown and matured as a person, but I've also helped those around me do the same. I will always remember this.

There's so much I want to compose, but I would require another year to record it all and then perhaps another year after that to publish it. I didn't tell you much about my experiences because you can ask me yourself; instead I tried to tell you how much this year has meant to me and how important exchange is.

I hope you got my message.

Kimberley

Statute and state

### **DECEMBER 2011**





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I t feels like just yesterday when I was sitting in the airport in Sao Paulo shaking wondering what I had gotten myself in to.

All I can say about my decision to come to Brazil now is it has been the best decision of my life.



Only now do I realise how lucky I am to have parents supporting me to do an exchange, host families willing to look after me and my friends here looking out for me and helping me whenever it is needed.

I never imagined myself making such strong relationships with all of these people. Being here in Brazil has really been the making of me, I have much more confidence in myself and I am always willing to experience new things.

I have managed to travel and see great places all over Brazil! I have been to big cities, small cities, country towns, the middle of the Amazon River and my favourite of course my home town, Florianopolis.

The most interesting part of my whole trip has been experiencing the culture of a country like Brazil. I now realise how lucky I am to live in Australia and how much we take for granted.

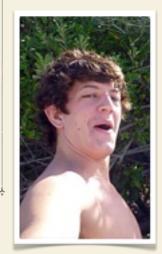
But all in all the time is going far too fast, I can't believe I have already been here for almost seven months. It is true, time does go fast when you're having fun.

Strath

## Strath Barton

### Brazil 2011

"... my decision to come to Brazil... has been the best decision of my life."





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### **DECEMBER 2011**

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## Abigail Trewartha Brazil 2011

estate.

hen I signed up for exchange I knew I was handing over my sanity for one whole year but little did I know how much of an amazing and life changing rollercoaster ride it would be!

Ola everyone! My name is Abigail Trewartha and I am 17 years old. I am currently situated in lovely Brazil and I love my life!

I live in a city called Belo Horizonte (population of around 5.4 million) in the state of Minas Gerias. It's so fantastic to be living in such a large metropolis that is such a contrast from my small town in Australia. The state in which I live here is a particularly cultured and lively one and so I am never short of things to do or places to see.

I have been here for about 7 months so far and am already dreading the thought of returning to Australia in less than 5 months. I know my remaining time is going to go fast, its been going at an incredible rate all year! I feel I have achieved so much here!



For example, if you had told me 7 months ago that I would be comfortably speaking a foreign language now, I really wouldn't have believed you! (My English is becoming horrible as a result of this!) "My exchange has enlightened me about my life and I know that I have matured as a person because of it."



been moments that I have found exchange a massive challenge. Sometimes I have looked at myself and thought, 'Are you crazy? What were you thinking? One whole year away from all that vou are comfortable with?'. But then there are those amazing moments here that make me realise that exchange is one of the best decisions I have

Truthfully there have





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ever made in my whole life and then I am so proud of myself for getting this far already.

Ars.

Day to day life here is so breezy, although normal isn't a word I would use to describe it. Being on exchange you really never know what is lying around the corner and each day is the

start of a new adventure. Even going to school now is something I look forward to because there might be the chance to learn a new word in Portuguese or to make a new friend.

I have done things here that before I only ever dreamt about. A major highlight was when I lived 10 days in the Amazon. I met the locals, went fishing for Piranhas, swam with wild dolphins, petted baby Crocodiles, met 90 other exchange students from across the world, swam in the Amazon river, ate native fruits and was immersed in an entirely different culture and lifestyle. It is almost impossible to describe in words how amazing this experience was, it is something I will never forget.

My exchange has enlightened me about my life and I know that I have matured as a person because of it. I came here totally unaware of the world around me and the roll I played in it. Now I feel like I have two homes both willing to embrace me, Brasil and Australia. I believe that thanks to my Rotary Exchange I am even more confident than I ever have ever been before and I'm ready to take on all challenges that come my way.

Abigail





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### ANTON CONOS GERMANY 2011

LETTERS FROM ABROAD

s I sit here writing this, already past the halfway mark in my Exchange year I ask myself, where did the time go? I came to Germany not knowing what to expect, and almost seven Months in, I've got the exact same feeling. But that's ok, because I did exchange to experience Germany, but I experienced Europe. I've travelled in Italy, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Austria, Spain, Holland, and all over Germany. I tell my German friends where I've been and they say that I've seen more of Germany than them. I may not have realized it before, but that was one of the reasons I went on Exchange.

Another reason is to learn. If I try now to imagine the immense amount I have learned on my Exchange; a new language with Vocabulary, Grammar, and about myself, I can't. The amount one learns is infinite, because you never stop learning. Everyday it's a new word, a new Grammar sentence, but you also learn about people, a new friend's name, how an old friend reacts to a joke, or how I react. The most you learn on exchange is about yourself.

My Exchange has literally changed me for the better. One and a half years ago I was drifting through school with no purpose, no idea of what I wanted out of life. I had no passion, and hardly a taste for life, and when I say life, I mean the thrill of doing something new, actually doing something simple, but exciting everyday of the week. Little things which make me smile, and make my friends and family smile too. Doing things that you can write about, not missing out on any good memories. I have a theory, I try to live without regrets. I've made sure that at the end of everyday I don't say 'I wish I had done this' or 'how could I have missed out on that'. I eat up new experiences, they give me the energy to deal with Exchange.

"Exchange is hard. My first two months I didn't have many

friends, and I didn't get out very much, and it was cold. My

expectations fell rapidly. But I worked hard to make new friends."

Exchange is hard. My first two months I didn't have many friends, and I didn't get out very much, and it was cold. My expectations fell rapidly. But I worked hard to make new friends. Those first few months went by very slowly, but lucky for me spring was creeping around the corner. I left one very grey day to go on Eurotour. And I came back after an amazing two weeks to find my House transformed. Everything was reborn into a green paradise. That is when my Exchange turned around, when I started enjoying it.

Exchange was introduced to me by my sister's friend. She is a Rotex member. and was in Germany at the age of sixteen, exactly like me. She didn't explain much to me, but she did put the idea in my head. I thought about it. And with no idea of what would happen, I decided to do exchange.







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I filled out the forms, said my goodbyes, and left. I'm glad and proud of my decision. I knew one thing was sure to happen to me in Germany, that I would change. I have changed and I hope it will turn out for the better in the future. If I could share one little secret about exchange with everyone I know. It would be that Exchange is great. There is no better or faster way to experience life, to live the ups and downs which prepare you for what's to come later on in life. Like exchange, life is difficult. And an ex-Exchange student is someone who is prepared to deal with whatever life throws at them, whether it be a good experience or bad. An ex-Exchange student can handle that experience and always take away something positive from it.



**DECEMBER 2011** 



"Simply, my life I have in France is not a story I can write or summarise, I can't pass the knowledge I have learnt on, nor can I tell any other person what exchange is like, what I can do is leave a word for you all to think of that summarises my view on 2011 and that is EXPERIENCE."

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xchange is a word everyone uses so often to describe my life and in a way I guess this is true, I'm an exchange student living no more than 35km north of Paris. But to me this is my life, I wake up each morning and get ready for school or a day of holidays like I have for the past 16 years of my life, I have a 'Family' or 3 who love me and treat me as their own children, I do my chores, nothing has really changed since being on the other side of the world.

I arrived in late Winter to a freezing 1 or 2 degrees with next to nothing in my little suitcase, I went off to a massive French high school on day 3 and was thrown straight in to some of the hardest classes I have ever come across, and not only because they were in a language I hardly spoke a word of, I was put into the French equivalent of year 11 even though I had only just finished year 9, 3 months earlier in Australia. School was not about learning my times tables or writing book reports anymore, it was about meeting friends and learning a culture and I can say that I learnt so many amazing and exciting things through my friends at school.

My French life has given me the experience of having 3 new families, all of which live very differently but all have the same amount of love, patience and excitement every time I am in their presence. They have gone out of their way to make me fit in and keep me involved in European culture, not just that of France itself but everywhere from England to Croatia. My Rotary club and district have also played a huge part in many of the things I have learnt and done on exchange.

Rotary didn't just give me the opportunity to discover the world; they gave me the opportunity to discover myself and just how far I can push my limits to succeed in what I want out of today, this week, this year and my life. Rotary has reinvented me into



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someone who thinks of my surroundings and where I want them to take me. The main thing I have learnt is that not everyone has it easy, nor does everyone have a choice.

The best thing about coming from Australia into a European country in Summer Vacation and all the opportunities to travel, as I come to the end of my Summer vacation I have seen the sun rise and set in Germany, Croatia, England and Corse as well as the beautiful Paris itself. Yes, this makes life on the other side sound so much greener than home and that's true because there isn't much of a drought here; there is always a day or two when the dry, brown side shines brighter.

I made some of the best friends ever on my exchange, not only those that I go to school with or play sport with, but those that come from all over the world with the same dream as me; the ones who know how it feels to be "the exchange student" and to change family every 3 or 4 months.

Simply, my life I have in France is not a story I can write or summarise, I can't pass the knowledge I have learnt on, nor can I tell any other person what exchange is like, what I can do is leave a word for you all to think of that summarises my view on 2011 and that is EXPERIENCE.

Billie

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States and space

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"Whoever thought that their childhood is the best time of ones life, has never been an exchange student."

BRETT RILEY GERMANY 2011

er denkt, dass die Kindheit die beste Zeit des Lebens ist, war noch nie Austauschschüler! Whoever thought that their childhood is the best time of ones life, has never been an exchange student. I will tell you one thing; it's true.

After being an exchange student in Germany for the last 7 months my life has changed completely. Whilst being on exchange with Rotary I have learned that it is one big international family full of the most wonderful and amazing people.

After a really long flight I arrived in the north German city of Bremen. I was greeted by both of my host families, my counsellor and my clubs YEO. I was totally excited to meet them all and to begin my new year as an exchange student. However, first I had to cope with my jetlag. For me the first 3 months went insanely fast I had met all of the other exchangers in my district and we were instant friends. After about 4 months I started to get a reasonably good grasp for the language which made me feel like I really belonged.

School played a big role in my exchange. Even though I knew that I wasn't going to receive any marks it was a really good place to develop my language skills and friendships. At first it was very nerve-racking considering my German skills were very minimal but everyone was nice and included me in everything. The friends that you make in school will be there for a very long time to come and be the ones that you call on a rainy sunday when there is nothing interesting happening.

In my experience there were times that there was really nothing going on and I wanted friends just to have a nice 'chill' time. On the other hand, the other exchange students were the best bunch of people that I had ever met in my entire life. Some of them will be life long friends in amazing far off lands that will always be there and will always have an open door and somewhere to sleep. Over my exchange year so far, I have created an entirely new network of friends and family that will welcome me with open arms whenever and wherever.

I would consider myself to be extremely lucky to be sent to Germany, after all it was my first choice. However, I would have been happy no matter where I was sent. There are still people to meet, still places to go and still the best year to have. However, in saying I was truly lucky to be sent to Europe which enabled me to participate in Eurotour. We visited a total of 6 countries in 16 days and saw the sights that Europe has to offer. I have also been able to see a

little bit of what Germany as a country has to offer: South Germany through a Rotary youth week (Jugendwoche), Berlin, Hamburg, Hannover and of course the little towns around the city of Bremen. Believe it or not there are beaches with 'real' sand in Germany.

Rotary has enabled me and provided me with the support and a network of tools and information that allowed me to experience the best year of my life. When I return to Australia, it will not be a goodbye, it will be a 'I will see you again'. A piece of my heart, my life, a piece of me as a person will be still here forever. It will be the year that I will never forget.

Brett



CAITLIN

CORNAGGIA

FRANCE 2011

### LETTERS FROM ABROAD

**DECEMBER 2011** 

"None of the amazing things I have done this year would have been possible without Rotary, so I thank them immensely. This year has really changed my life ....

nce upon a time, there lived a young princess. Everyone knew that she was brilliant and persistent, one could say she was almost stubborn, however her shyness was not unknown to her subjects. The shyness almost scared the princess's family, as she could never rule the kingdom if she was afraid to speak in front of people. However, this adamant trait also gave the princess a certain drive. One day she heard about a certain program that could send her overseas for a year, and so she made it her goal to go. She made friends and had been accepted by families everywhere she went, and luckily for this beautiful princess they helped her to explore. She was able to see some of the most famous monuments of the world. She had walked on streets almost as old as time. She had touched buildings, older than the oldest man, that were built with basic tools. She visited another world of princesses and castles and she was the happiest princess in the world.

Imagine the story above. Now imagine the story above without the princess but with a girl called Caitlin. That has been my life since I found out about Rotary in February last year.

When I first embarked on t h i adventure, and I don't mean going to the airport and jumping

on a plane, with my life packed into a suitcase weighing only 20kgs. I mean when I was little and we heard about the amazing experiences people have on exchange, and how difficult it is to be accepted onto the programs. I mean when we made friends at school who came from the other side of the world and asked them thousands of questions trying to satisfy our curiosity. I mean in the middle years of high school when the other exchange students came reminding you of something you heard when you were little. For me it was like that. Then one day my mum asked me if student exchange would interest me and within half an hour. I had sent off three application forms and requests for information.



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#### As it

turns out a few months later, after several interviews I was accepted onto some programs and was waiting to hear from Rotary. Subconsciously I had said, if I am not accepted by Rotary I wouldn't go. The program of Rotary is the best out there, with their network of support.

None of the amazing things I have done this year would have been possible without Rotary, so I thank them immensely. This year has really changed my life, and I am sure the lives of everyone I have come in contact with. It is true when they say the friendships you make on exchange last a lifetime.

Caitlin





### ELIZABETH RYAN FINLAND 2011

magine jet setting across the world to a foreign country. Where for the nex<del>t 12 months</del> you shall be eating, breathing and speaking the countries language. Where you don't know what the people are like, or what will happen when you get there. Whilst not knowing what will happen it will an adventure that will be in your mind for a life time.

On the 21st of January I left my home country Australia, to go and live in Finland. It was amazing to get off the plane in Finland because I had already been on 3 planes with a total flying time of 24 hours plus the waiting periods. The best part was when I had to step outside the airport onto the land of Finns and to see and feel for the first time snow. It was then I knew I had nothing to fear in this wonderful country. After we had arrived in Finland we were whisked off to a place called Karku where we had our Language Camp. This was where I had met all of the exchange students who I would spend the rest of my year with. With each day of getting over my jet lag and getting over how cold it was. I was making friends and starting to learn the language that I shall be reading, writing and speaking.

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"This place and everything I feel I

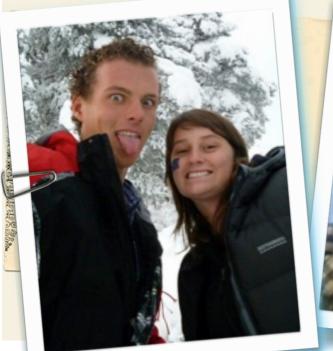
can summarise in one word which is "home"."

Once the camp was over I was sad to leave but I was both excited and scared to meet my new family. When I first and finally met them after emailing each other for a month I was welcomed with a huge hug by my new mum. Which made me feel right at home.

As months floated by with my ups of making new friends and downs of homesickness. I had used my opportunities and was allowed to go on a Euro Trip with 85 other Exchange Students. We travelled to 9 different countries in 19 days. These countries were Sweden, Denmark, Germany, Belgium, Holland, Italy, France, Austria and Monaco. It was such an amazing experience that I will never forget.

As I am writing this letter it is making me both happy and sad to remember all the times and experiences are close to coming to an end. Where I shall never slip in the snow when in a rush not to be late for school or when meeting my newbies and showing them the ropes of this wonderful place. This place and everything I feel I can summarise in one word which is "home".

Elizabeth





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### EMMA PRESTON POLAND 2011





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fter an exhausting number of flights, I first stepped onto the snowy fields of Poland on the 23rd of January. From there, my life had changed. When you go on exchange, nothing seems to be the same to you anymore.

Everything you do is something special, even something as insignificant as being able to buy your own train ticket! Especially for me, after knowing that Polish is (officially, I think) the 5th hardest language to study, for an English speaker. It feels like you are literally doing tongue twisters everyday. Luckily for me, pronunciation wise, I can speak Japanese. So combined, I could actually manage to get my tongue around enough for people to understand me. But the day I tried to read the word brzoskwinia = peach I thought I was doomed. But the funny thing is, EVERYONE around here is so nice, they were willing to teach me Polish "because I was from Australia, the exotic country". It's really interesting to see how your country is thought to be from other people's perspective.

I love my city. I live in Wroclaw, where you can see historical architecture being used as a café. Unique thing about Wroclaw is, we have gnomes in our city. Don't believe? Have a look for yourselves. My American Friend and I actually go around the city, just out for a walk, hunting for them. Another benefit of being a Youth Exchange

Student: The odd things you do here and there can be said to be simply the differences of culture. And it's true, in some ways or another.

The infinite number of possibilities to have new experiences is just amazing. I believe that experience leads to growth, and there are no boundaries people set for that. I only have a quarter of a year left, but I know I am going to enjoy myself as much as the time I have already spent here. I can't wait to see what I can experience next!

Emma



"The infinite number of possibilities to have new experiences is just amazing. I believe that experience leads to growth . . . "

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LETTERS FROM ABROAD

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• ve been putting off writing this little letter for quite a while now.

For a few reasons... one being, I can't seem to figure out a way to properly illustrate and depict my year so far. It is too difficult a task! Usually I can blab on about anything and turn it into a novel or even a mini series... but now I'm stumped for words... which is really only a slight example of how an Exchange can test and change you, and leave you speechless - all in the best of ways!

The other reason for my procrastination is because I now have to take time to reflect... and that is the last thing I want to do! Reflection suggests the 'coming to an end' of a period in time. And that is simply scary! Exchange life moves far too quickly for my liking... I'm that person who tells everyone 'I've been here 6 months' when really it is 6 months and 29 days ... I'll naively wait until it's actually clicked over before being pushed into crossing off yet another passing month.

I feel unexplainably blessed with the experiences that have come my way ... sometimes I have to pinch myself with the thought of 'Wow, I'm in Denmark right now ... '

Unforgettable memories are attached to every month here... with the Rotary Exchange Euro Bus Tour, host family holidays, music festivals, school celebrations, ski holidays, Exchange student get-togethers, day trips to new and exciting places and all the simple little moments that make slight, but significant, impact.

Over the past 6 (yeah okay, almost 7) months I have felt new colours paint their way into my life. They've illustrated new ideas, passions, truths, meanings, even a new language! They've helped give a forever changing shape to my life. Although I avoided making any expectations for my year overseas, all the ones I did construct in the very corner of my mind backfire and accomplished the complete opposite. I think about it now and smile, as I remember the swirling emotions and complexity of it all.



"... thank you Exchange Experience – you've changed my life."







PAGE 1



Column 1 in the

LETTERS FROM ABROAD



It is difficult to imagine where I would be right now if I hadn't come on exchange. I feel as if Denmark is a part of me now - if it's not too airy fairy to say. Life here has become familiar, but is still always fresh and exciting. I even consider myself part honorary Dane, and feel I could easily return to this country and adapt to the culture again at any point in my life. When I think about the future I see myself taking values and little traditions from my second home and applying them to my Australian life.

After becoming an exchange student I feel as if I have more a sense 'wanting to be something'. I no longer drift along, but have stronger ambitions and aspirations. I believe I have a better relationship with gravity, and my feet have found their place on this earth.

I feel as if my, what I thought were, already open eyes have been widened. This has caused an addiction to the unfamiliar and greater world and I have already made plans to stretch my eyes further.

I have been in the company of many influential people, situations and environments that have all guided me along the way. However, I think the most important was how thoroughly amazed I was at how strong the relationship with my host families could be. I haven't felt like a guest occupying a bedroom, but instead an actual part of the family. It is easy to feel that way when your host mum introduces you to her friends as 'my daughter....from Australia', or the complete comfort in walking around in your PJ's and putting your feet on the couch as you argue in Danish over what movie to pick, or even experiencing that 'coming home' content feeling after being away for a couple of days – the one where you make a cup of tea and lounge about chatting about nothing all that important.

I really do feel like the 'Australian Daughter' that has family from every corner of the world.

The friendships I have made are inexplicably significant, and I can't express enough my thanks to them all, and hope that they will be life-long.



I hope over this year I have inspired at least one person to become an exchange student or begin to take the first steps into the leap of the unfamiliar.

I would like to express a gigantic mammoth thank you to everyone who has helped me along the way - even if you don't know you have. Thank you to Rotary, to Denmark, to my friends and family - both Australian and Danish (and wherever else!), and finally thank you Exchange Experience – you've changed my life.

Eva

### MEGAN BROOKS GERMANY 2011

and the second

LETTERS FROM ABROAD



his year has really been by far the best that I have ever had! Nearly seven months ago I left my country, family, friends and everything I knew for a new experience of life in Germany. The picture above is of me, experiencing my first snow while living in my first host family. Germany's winter is so different to the Australian, and I was so happy at that moment, it was like a dream becoming a reality!

I cannot believe I have done everything I have in this

"This year has really been by far the best that I have ever had!"

Except for a few things, school life here is quite different from in Australia. For example, school starts in Germany more than an hour before my school in Australia. We have no uniform here, and normally we finish school at about midday because in Germany quite often families have big lunches.

At school I have a lot of nice German friends. They want to make me feel welcome and are always excited and interested to know things about my

country and life back in Australia. I have also met a lot of

students.

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my German

friends from my

host siblings and other exchange

Through this

year I have had

different feelings

and experiences

that I will always

many

PAGE 2

gone on two tours: one skiing in the Austrian Alps and the other travelling around Europe. These amazing experiences I shared with other exchange students from all over the world. We also had Rotex weekends together and other meetings we organised by ourselves. We

half year. I have



became so close, and now I have family in so many different countries that I can visit in the future!

At the start of my year I was shocked to find that it really was hard to learn another language. German friends and my host families really helped me with this and now it's quite natural and I can communicate with everyone!

All my host families are absolutely great and I am lucky that I have had no problems with any of them. They help me, not just with the language, but by making me feel like I am at home and that I fit in. remember. The tough times of starting at a new school, making new friends, changing lifestyles and saying goodbye has made me become a stronger and more mature person. In less than five months I will go home with a new language, new families, life-long friends from all over the world, and amazing experiences that I will never forget!

Thank you Rotary for this opportunity!

Megan



name is Nina, and I'm sixteen. I've been in Norway for almost seven months now. It's been an incredible, almost surreal journey through which I have experienced so much more than I ever would have been able to without it. I came as a normal Aussie girl, slightly on the shy side, and never once thinking I'd learn half as much as what I have. Now, I am a very confident, bilingual girl, and I feel I am just as much Norwegian as I am Australian. I have so many more goals for life than I had when I came, and despite not knowing exactly what I want to study or what I will choose as a career, I do know what I want out of life. I want to be happy, challenged, and I don't want to stop learning for a second. I want to travel the world, learn a few more languages. I also have amazing friends who I'll keep for life, in Norway, obviously, but also from Argentina, England, Canada, USA, Ecuador, Finland, Poland, Estonia, France and Italy.

I arrived on the island of Nøtterøy in the middle of January, in the freezing cold and pitch blackness at about 4pm. The darkness was one of the strangest things about Norway in the first few weeks, and once I started school I barely saw the light of day, as I walked to school at 'night' and came home as the last rays of sun were setting. It sounds a bit depressing, actually, but I was just too excited about how different everything was to care for the lack of light. But I must have noticed a little bit, because I remember the day a street light turned off while I was walking to school, and how I yelled for joy because of it. Spring was on its (very slow) way.

The strangest thing, when I look back to the beginning of the year, is that I was almost mono-lingual, apart from a little bit of German that I learned at school. Norwegian is now so natural to me, it seems to fit a lot of situations far better than English does. I think learning Norwegian has been the key to an amazing exchange too. I am lucky to have an ear for languages, and learned it much faster than the other exchange students, and as a result got to know my Norwegian friends in a different way. They are all fluent in English, but they're not entirely themselves when they speak it; they don't joke as much, and they're much more reserved. Learning the language is an endlessly important part of exchange.

I have experienced so much this year that I never would have otherwise. I've become a good skier, both cross country and downhill, and I hope to represent Bendigo in the Victorian Schools Ski Championships next year. I have travelled much of Norway and of Europe, gained an extra two families (soon to be three) and friends from all over the world. And who would have thought I'd

## Nina Robertson

Norway 2011

"People ask me all the time if I miss home, and my honest answer is no, I don't . . "



### **DECEMBER 2011**



be eating dried fish, fish jelly, fermented fish, fish liver and brown cheese? Norwegian food is rather interesting, to say the least.

I remember my first day of school as though it was yesterday. I was glad that my first class was German-I would understand what was going on, and would be able to talk to everyone. Unfortunately it was cancelled, so I was left to sit in the library, too scared to randomly go up and start speaking English to someone, and too terrible at



Norwegian to even contemplate a one minute conversation. The first class that ran was Social Studies. I made up my mind to go in and say something, so I spoke to the girl closest to the door when I came in. Her name was Ada; she had amazing



English, was very nice and is still one of my best friends.

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People ask me all the time if I miss

home, and my honest answer is no, I don't, and haven't done so at all in the last four months or so. I do love Australia, my family, friends, music and sport, but I don't miss them. I'm having too good a time here to miss anything at all, except maybe for chai tea and eggplant.

This really has been the best year of my life. Thank you so much, Rotary, for the opportunity.

Med vennlig hilsen,

Nina



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### **DECEMBER 2011**

### Shelby McKeown Denmark 2011

"This year will always be a part of me and I am certain that I will never forget my life and the memories that were held here in Denmark."

oday I am sitting in my kitchen in Denmark, talking with my Danish host mother and wafting in the delicious scents of the mushrooms stewing on the stove, which my host mother and I had just picked from the forest about an hour ago. Whilst this is all going on I am thinking back to the past 6 months I have been living here in Denmark. I started off my year in Denmark as a little, excited Australian, off on a big adventure. I was in quite a daze, everything was so different and I just left my mind open for all the craziness that I experienced. A different language, family, friends, food, school, weather, just everything. Of course it was difficult to adjust in the first few months; coming into a country knowing no one at all and making these people my family and friends for a whole year was quite a big challenge. However the friends and family that I have made here in Denmark, also from all around the world, are so amazing and it now scares me to think that if I never took that step of applying for Exchange, I would have never met these wonderful people I now call 'friends and family'.

The mushrooms are now being stewed with some fresh apples. The scents are



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delicious and so different to anything I have ever smelt before; it starts to make me think how all these little moments are so special to me. The first months were just a whirlwind of excitement and now I am more settled into my Danish life I can take in the smaller cultural differences and for me these are the most memorable ones, the memories I will take home and share back in Australia.

I look outside the window and see the dark grey sky and the rain



#### **DECEMBER 2011**



droplets running down the window. I think to myself 'Oh...Typical Denmark weather and

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we're in the middle of summer!' the change in weather does actually surprise me. Though whilst on Exchange all you experience are surprises. I came to Denmark with no expectations and I think as an Exchange Student that that is the best way to go. Every one of us on Exchange will have a year filled with challenges, achievements and lots of

excitement but all of us will come home with so many different experiences and memories, it cannot be expected what a year abroad will hold for you. I have travelled to so many different countries and places, met so many amazing people and I am enjoying it so much. As an Exchange Student you do need an open mind to whatever encounters lay ahead, because you appreciate them a lot more when they happen.

The most amazing thing I have realised whilst on my Exchange is that no matter what nationality a person is they can always get along if they want to, despite religious beliefs, looks, wealth, language, personality etc. That for me is the experience I love the most, I have friends from all around the world now and we all get along tremendously, even though we are all a little bit different.

My past 6 months have been indescribable and I am so glad I had applied for the 'Once in a life time opportunity' because these 6 months have changed me so much for the better. I am more confident, accepting myself, mature, proud, understanding and especially happy person. If I could think of one word in the English dictionary from the top of my head that would describe how I am feeling right about now, I guess it would



have to be 'Ecstatic' I am often told I am one of the happiest people living in Denmark. Sometimes I believe this is true.

Hanne turns to me, smiles and says 'vi skal have aftensmad nu', it is dinner time and I am especially excited tonight because we are having a fresh and delicious mushroom sauce, with barbequed deer. This year will always be a part of me and I am certain that I will never forget my life and the memories that were held here in Denmark. I smile at the food and 'Dig in'.

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**DECEMBER 2011** 

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Sheridan Hollo Brazil 2011

My name is Sheridan Hollo and my host country is Brazil.

I've been in Brazil for just over six months so far and I can honestly say they have been the best six months of my life. When people say that you learn so much by doing an exchange, they aren't lying. During your exchange, you will learn things that reach far beyond the classroom. Being in Brazil has made me think about completely new things and has made me re-think most aspects of my life. Travelling and living away from home opens up so many doors and has made me a much more independent person.

Before I left to embark on the journey of a life-time, many friends of mine were sceptical that I was too young to go. When I left Australia for Brazil, I was fourteen years old, and even though it has only been six months I feel so much more mature and aware of the world going around me. I now know that I can function independently and I have so much more confidence in myself. I don't think my age has been a disadvantage to me in the slightest.

The "exchange" experience dramatically changes from person to person and country to country. Everyone has a completely different experience, but I think one thing is universal; it is the best year of your life. With youth exchange, the more effort you put into the language and friendships, the more you will get out of it. There are days, when you will hate your host country because it's different from everything you have ever known, but they are few compared to the great memories and days that you do have. My exchange year has been hard work! There is no doubt about it, because it's not standard nine to three learning, I was learning all the time and sometimes in the weirdest ways.

Life for me was unpredictable to say to the least. Some of my best memories come from simple things like soccer training and "even though it has only been six months I feel so much more mature and aware of the world going around me. I now know that I can function independently and I have so much more confidence in myself."





LETTERS FROM ABROAD

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lunch breaks! But I can say, so far, the best experience for me was the Amazon tour. In the Amazon, I got to hold a sloth that literally fell into our little boat and there is nowhere else in the world that I would be able to do that. The tour was fantastic,

ten days with eighty-seven odd exchange students exploring the biggest rainforest in the world; I honestly don't think it gets much better than that. Exchange students really are special people, in general, we accept everyone and nobody cares what country each other are from or background. I think because I didn't hang around very many exchange students that when I did it was much more special. There was one day I was at a soccer match in Rio De Janiero and as I was buying tickets, I found a group of exchange students from a completely different part of Brazil. Sometimes the world is an extremely small place given its grandeur.

Exchange really is the best experiences of my life, there are parts that have been hard but it has been worth it so far. It will be really hard for me to come back home to Australia and return to my normal life. Even so, I know when the time comes; it will get to be back home and taking advantage of the opportunities that my year

abroad has already opened up. By the time I return to Australia I will be fifteen and have had the best time of my life. I love Rotary and the opportunity they have given me.

Sheridan



Samantha Hellesley

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### **DECEMBER 2011**

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"my exchange year . . . has been one of the most challenging years of my entire life. However, I can honestly say that it has been the best thing I have ever done."



n the past 6 months my life has changed dramatically, but definitely for the better. The skills and life long lessons I have learnt, the friends I have made and the people I have met have helped me to expand my thinking, become more independent, and ultimately grow into a person who I like to be. What I have gained from my exchange experience so far is more than I ever imagined, and without this amazing year there is no way I would be the same person as I am today.

In the first three months of my exchange I think I learnt the most; to be kind, to be patient, to deal with an array of emotions and to be flexible.



Not only did I have to be kind and patient with those around me, but also to myself and those back in Australia.

The affect of jet-lag really took its toll on me and I was constantly tired for around the first 6 weeks of my exchange. This teamed with parents and family at home wanting updates of how I was and me becoming homesick, made for a dangerous combination. I found that sometimes being kind to yourself and to others means letting go. For a year I would be in America and if I did not learn to let go from those at home early on, I was setting myself up to not benefit as much from my exchange as I could.

Another thing I think was important in my self-growth was learning to be flexible. A lot of the time things did not go exactly the way I







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would have liked them to, and prior to my exchange I would have contemplated the situation for hours or even days letting it get me down. This year however I discovered that it is a lot easier to let things that are out of your hands go, and move on towards a positive future.

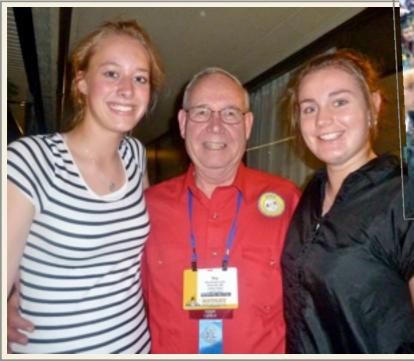
This year so far has been full of fantastic experiences, big and small. I feel blessed to have stayed with wonderful host families, who were so diverse and so generous in all that they do and did for me. I feel fortunate to have such a lovely host Rotary Club, whose members I can talk to anything about. I feel lucky to have made such close friends, whom I will be sure to come back and visit. I feel so lucky to have had the opportunity to participate in American graduation and prom. And I feel privileged to have been to a Rotary International Convention, to RYLA and to have visited Mexico, and the East Coast of America.



Overall my exchange year has been one of ups and downs. It has been one of the most challenging years of my entire life. However, I can honestly say that it has been the best thing I have ever done.

Thanks Rotary 🕅

Samantha





Sam is pictured at left with Immediate Past Rotary International President Ray Kling<mark>i</mark>nsmith (2010-2011)

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Jack Marozzi France 2011

TAXABLE PARTY NAMES

### **DECEMBER 2011**

"I have learned so many lessons this year. Not only lessons learned in a class room at my local high school here, but life lessons which are indispensable"

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even months ago, I was in the comfort and safety of my own home, preparing my bags to get ready to go to France. It is something I had been nagging away at Mum and Dad to do for at least two years. I chose to come to France, because at the age of 14 when I started my French lessons I was captivated by the exquisiteness of the French language. I remained oblivious to the true profoundness of this adventure until my third month in France. I woke up one day completely dumbfounded, and I realized that at the mere age of 16, I was here for another nine months. I was without my real family, without my old friends, and it all sunk in!

Thus far, I have experienced a myriad of emotions, every one of them under the sun I think! This year has been like a Rollercoaster, it goes up and down, but not slowly and gently like the tranquil waves of the ocean, ferociously, unexpectedly, and sometimes shockingly like the French Alps (by which I am surrounded). There are times that you rapidly plummet to the bottom of the ocean and all of a sudden you start to soar again, you are on top of the world! But one of the many things I have learned this year, is that it is necessary to experience low periods in your life, so that you can appreciate and really comprehend the real altitude of the heights. Without the hard times, there are no good times; everything would just be normal, boring and monotonous.

already learned a lifetime of lesson, and I have forged life long friendships. To be thrown in to a completely new environment, including a new language, new people and a foreign culture has forced me to adapt; whilst adapting, one learns social skills, and one becomes more observant because we are no longer blinded

Socially, I find that I have

observant because we are no longer blinded by the monotony and comfort of familiarity. We no longer have the luxury of comfort; thus one is forced to observe the way in which one speaks, the way in which one acts nearly scientifically; in doing so, we better our social and analysis skills. These skills are useful in a wide range of situations. That is part of the reason why I have found life long friends here. I have found friends that I



PAGE 3

could trust with anything, friends that go out of their way to help me. Given that I have only been here 7 months, it is incredible.

Perhaps the biggest lesson I have learned, is that normality is undefinable. What is normal in Australia, is not definitively normal in another part of the world. So now my outlook on things is that everything is different. Nothing is weird or bizarre, it is just different than back at home! Apart from learning French, I had the opportunity to become quite good at Italian also.

I was lucky enough to spend 1 month in Italy with my Italian relatives! I stayed in Rome for a week and then in Castel di Lama for the other 3 weeks. Over that one month, I picked up Italian quite quickly, because it is very similar to French ( on a grammatical level) ! Probably the most rewarding experience this year, was being able to call up my Italian grandma (who lives in Australia) and have a long conversation about Italy – in Italian. This was incredible, because my grandma doesn't speak fantastic English, so we have never really been able to share stories together. But we could discuss her home country and where she grew up, that was the highlight of my year so far!

I have had some great experiences here in France as well. For example the Bus Trip which took us to Germany, Austria, Italy, Monaco, Switzerland and back to France again. It was absolutely incredible to see so much of the world! Furthermore I was with some other Australians, some New Zealanders and Argentineans, so we had so much fun! I have also had the opportunity to travel to Barcelona in Spain , Brittany (in the north of France), Torino (in Italy) and of course in my region in France I have visited a lot. Living in the middle of the Alps I have had the chance to learn how to ski! Where I live in Australia, I'd never seen snow before so that was pretty amazing!

The most difficult thing for me to adapt to, was the rigidness of the French culture. There are copious social rules that form their society. These rules have been constructed throughout France's long history of war, royalty and revolution! For example, in French, there are two manners of saying "you". One is a casual "you" -tu-, that you use around people your own age and friends, and the other vous- more formal, used for people that you don't know, or people older than you (a sign of respect). I find that it creates distance between people, and it makes it harder to become friends with them.

However, the BIGGEST social

customs they have surround the cuisine. Eating is extremely important for the French! The very idea of eating in front of the television makes them wince! Each meal is prepared with care and love, and the manner in which you eat is vital! Moreover, appearance is a deal breaker over here! I was quite laid back in regards to my personal appearance before I came over here. But over here, one always looks nice in public. So bye bye trackies! The look on my host mum's face when I was about to go down to the supermarket with trackies and a T-shirt was price less! I immediately realized that I should reserve my track pants for bed!

I guess what I am really trying to say, is that this experience has not always and will not always be good. But I know it will always be beneficial. I have learned so many lessons this year. Not only lessons learned in a class room at my local high school here, but life lessons which are indispensable. I have grown up so much, I have learned two languages, and I have made friends from all the four corners of the world: from USA, Canada, Brazil, Mexico, Argentina, Chile, Columbia, Peru, Ecuador, Spain, Germany, Sweden, Norway, Finland, France, Italy Japan, India, South Africa and Taiwan These past 7 months have been the best of my life. I am excited to see what will come up in the next 5 months but I don't want them to go by too quickly!

Jack

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LETTERS FROM ABROAD



**DECEMBER 2011** 

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"there is nothing about this year I would change, except maybe staying for longer! I hope everyone else has had a year as good as mine. Good luck to all next years **Exchange Students.**"

Oscar Clift

Sweden 2011

ith only 2 months left in Sweden, I have begun to think about all my favourite travels and experiences here. I have done so many amazing things in my time here, I will never forget my exchange year and the people I have met. In this year I have grown up so much and experienced so much more than other people my age, because of this year I have become a lot more independent and mature. Just like every other exchange student I have faced challenges that I have had to solve myself, and others that my counsellor and friends could help me with. But despite these problems this has by far been the best year of my life. In the months leading up to my departure, I experienced so many emotions, apprehension, of leaving my family and friends behind and sadness, but most of all I was excited, excited to go half way across the world, by myself to experience a new culture and learn a new language. I was excited about everything, even school. School is a huge part of exchange, it is the best way to meet friends and learn the language, and in the first months it may seem hard to go, because you don't understand anything, and you can spend hours sitting there doing nothing and understanding nothing, but as long as you make friends there, it will be fun, they can help you through these times.

One of the biggest problems people face on exchange is homesickness, I did not get so much homesickness but a lot of my friends did, and the best way to get rid of this is to go out and spend time with your friends, you may feel depressed and want to sit at home and talk to your friends and family back home, but that will not help. If you get homesickness you need to remember that the other exchangers will be feeling the same and they will try to help you. The worst thing you can do is sit at home, skyping to people back home.

I have made friends that I will never forget and been to some of the most interesting places in the world, like Berlin, Poland and Czech Republic. I never thought that I would get to visit these sort of places, but exchange can take you to some amazing places! Hopefully I will come back to Sweden in a few years and visit all of my friends again, I feel sad now about leaving them, and knowing that I might not see them ever again. Looking back on my year, I am so happy with how it has turned out, I will never forget this year, and the things I have done or the people I have met, it has been the most fun I have ever had, there is nothing about this year I would change, except maybe staying for longer! I hope everyone else has had a year as good as mine. Good luck to all next years exchange students.

Oscar

Student	Country	Sponsor - RC of
Strath Barton.	Brazil	Kyneton_
Megan Brooks	Germany	Brighton.
Oscar Clift.	Sweden.	Central Melbourne/Sunrise
Anton Conos	Germany	Kew on Yarra
Caitlin Cornaggia	France	Brighton.
Eva Crebbin-Holman.	Denmark	Castlemaine
Billie Harris	France	Keilor
Samantha Hellesley	USA	Toorak
Sheridan Hollo	Brazil	Laverton/Point Cook
Emma Preston.	Poland	Chadstone/East Malvern.
Kimberley Konisberry	Finland	Glen Eira
Zac Lennon.	Sweden_	Williamstown.
Shelby McKeown.	Denmark	Kew
Jack Marozzi	France	Footscray
Brett Riley	Germany	North Melbourne
Nina Robertson.	Norway	Bendigo
Elizabeth Ryan.	Finland	Keilor
Abigail Trewartha	Brazil	Bendigo



Letters from Abroad . . designed and published as a Service to Rotary by Dr Barry Mullen

### What an amazing year . . .

I trust that you have enjoyed reading 'Letters From Abroad' as it is a snapshot of 12 months in the lives of our Rotary Youth Exchange Students.

Grateful thanks to D9800 Youth Exchange Chairman Graeme Bird for his outstanding leadership of our enthusiastic and dedicated D9800 Youth Exchange committee; much appreciation to everyone.

To all involved in Youth Exchange, including students and their families, you are now part of our Family of Rotary and I urge you to stay connected with Rotary International as we all strive to promote friendship, peace and understanding in our world.

Best wishes with your future studies and opportunities that will be available to you and thank you for your keen participation in this exceptional Rotary program.

Vanda Mullen D9800 Director New Generations