



# Colleen

## From Burlington Lakeshore to Australia

*"On Safari from Sydney Harbour to Uluru Australia has it all"*

G'day, G'day! How ya going!

Writing my beaver tale now for the last time seem so surreal. Here I am sitting in my school library with just six weeks left wondering where my time has gone and hoping that my computer has the date wrong and that it is not May but only December.

These last few months have been anything but boring. I have seen more of this beautiful country than ever imaginable, shown my mum and her boyfriend around my school and introduced them to my host families, gone to my first surf contest and been to my very first debutant ball and spent time with the people here who have become my life.

Shortly after my last beaver tale in February my mum, Lise, and her boyfriend, Dean, came to visit me and we toured around Sydney and a great part of Victoria- my state. While I stood at the airport waiting for my mum to arrive in Sydney I didn't know what to expect from my reaction but after what seemed like hours but was only a few short minutes, I saw her running down the runway to greet me. It was amazing to see her and didn't feel like it was real. We both cried tears of joy and I knew that the next two weeks with her were going to be unforgettable. We stayed for a few days in Sydney where we visited the many famous beaches including Manly and Bondi beach, enjoyed touring the city seeing the beautiful harbours, Sydney Opera house and we all climbed the Sydney Harbour Bridge. The best part of Sydney was the bridge climb and although I was scared at times, climbing to 260 meters above street level was an experience that I will never forget.

For the next week and a half we travelled in my state of Victoria where I showed them around Melbourne, showing them where the football ground was- of course the most important aspect. We also went down to Phillip Island where there is a penguin colony and as we sat on the beach watching the little penguins come up I couldn't help but to be so happy to be able to share such a special moment with my mum. We continued to

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another place called Sorrento where we spent the day swimming with wild dolphins and seals. I didn't know about this until we got there, my mum wanted to surprise me and it was amazing, something so unique and unexpected.

The last week consisted of my mum meeting my host families and travelling up the Great Ocean Road and exploring the little towns on the way. I took her to my favourite places and showed her some of the beauty that Australia has to offer and like normal it was looking its very best. The weeks went by so quickly and it was time to say goodbye to mum and Dean. After many laughs, nearly 1500 pictures and countless memories later I was left waving goodbye from my host families house remembering that it was just a short four months until I would see them again.

After they left I was back in school, into regular routine but not for too long as I had a three week trip ahead of me where I was going to travel around Australia with 39 other exchange students.

We started the trip in southern Victoria picking up students in three different venues then we were off. The bus was not once silent, there was always someone laughing, singing and playing pranks on other students. Out of the 40 I only knew about 18 before the trip, as it was two districts plus a few extras from other programs, but by the end of the trip I felt like I had known them all for a life time. Of the 40 student the ratio of people from each country was a little off. I was the only one there representing Canada and I took that mission on with great pride for my country which was a drastic contrast to the 12 German students that were there. The great thing about our group was that there were no cliques, everyone got along and we were like a great big family.

The trip took us from Melbourne area to Adelaide, up through to Alice Springs and Uluru, all on a coach bus, then flew to Cairns and bussed from there back down to Sydney and then flew home. Through the trip there was a lot of driving through the outback but it gave us an opportunity to get to sit with different people on the bus and gain relationships with so many people.

We slept in many different caravan parks, staying no more than two nights in a place so to say I am very good at putting up and taking down tents in an understatement, I think I could now do it with my eyes shut. We were told who to sleep with each night which was fine with me because I got the opportunity to talk to people who I normally wouldn't have and this way made sure to meet everyone from the other district.

Through the trip the experiences we had were incredible, something that I will always have close to my heart. We got to sleep underground, hold snakes, alligators and lizards, sleep in a gaol, go snorkelling in the Whitsundays, visit Uluru, go kayaking in the ocean, hike in one of the most beautiful places I have ever seen, experience the Australian outback in a state which hasn't been seen in centuries and meet the most

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amazing people. Though on the day we went to climb Uluru it was closed because of high winds and when we went to snorkel in the great barrier reef the day was way too rough for us to go, the things that we did made instead made up for those two disappointments. The leaders from my district did everything they could to make up for the huge and though it wasn't anything comparable, I still am so happy with everything that we did get to do.

By far those three weeks have been the best of my year so far. This is not because I got to see most of Australia- however that is a large contributing factor- but because the people that I met and the relationships that grew with the exchange students I already knew are irreplaceable. The friends here that I have made will be for life and I can't imagine leaving them.

Shortly after getting back from the trip and catching up on sleep I was off to my next host family which was out of Geelong. I was on my way 20 minutes down the coast to the surfing capital of Australia, Torquay. I love living there! The beach is a three minute walk from my house, the town is small and just the perfect coastal town with little restaurants, boutiques and the best walking tracks. Lucky for me I arrived just in time to see the Bells Beach surf competition where surfers from all over the world came and competed for the "Bell". I went and was fascinated by the event, there was so much excitement by the crowd and the surf was overwhelming! I didn't know how they could catch the waves they did, some being 8 feet high. I watched and wondered to myself how I could be so lucky there watching a surf contest! The day that I went was said to have the best sets so I was very happy to get the opportunity to view something so Australian.

Weeks after the trip I was starting to really miss my girls from the exchange group so I was so keen to get to Charlton to watch my close friend from America, Alli, do her debutant ball. The whole night was so much fun, watching her get introduced into society with another exchange student who had been to America the year before. She looked amazing and myself and two other friends sat there so proud of her. The weekend was so much fun, eating too much, laughing all the time and meeting all of Alli's friends was awesome!

With less than six weeks left in Australia and countless plans I know that this time is going to go by so quickly but I will make the best of the end of my year. I cannot believe that the end is really here, things are now coming to a close and I can't imagine being back home. This year has been the most memorable of my life and Rotary is to thank for that. So many people have made this possible for me and it has been without a doubt been the most incredible, unforgettable, eye opening, unbelievable time of my life.

See you in a few short weeks Canada,

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*Colleen*  
Australia