



Nick

From Burlington Central to Switzerland

“..... and watched as the Swiss Air Force did strafing runs eye level to us”

I've been here in Switzerland for three months now, and I can't believe how fast it has gone by! It seems like yesterday I landed in Zurich Airport on a warm and sunny summer morning, but right now I am looking out my window at the beautiful fall colours of the forests surrounding, and I'm planning my ski season already.

My host dad and my rotary councilor greeted me at the airport; I was relieved when I found out that they spoke very good English. We talked a little as we drove to my new home, which was about one and half hours from the airport. They told me about the things I saw as I looked out the windows at my first look of Switzerland. We arrived at home just in time for lunch, which we ate outside in the beautiful weather. I live in small town called Krauchthal, surrounded by farmland, forests and a hilly landscape. Across the way from me there is a chicken farm, and then there is the main road weaving its way through the hills. It is not uncommon to be woken up by roosters here.

In my first week here I spoke very little German, but my host family did a wonderful job speaking first in German and then in English with me as they showed me around. After lunch on the first day we all put on our muddy shoes and set out to climb the big limestone point overlooking the town. The view from the top was spectacular, one can see the neighboring villages, and when there is no haze, all the way to the mountains. By the time we got back it was time for diner, consisting of traditional Swiss cheese and bread, here my lack of sleep finally caught up with me. After diner I went down to my new bedroom and fell asleep as soon as I had lain down. That week they took me to tour the capital city Bern, and when the weather was bad we would play board games to help me learn German. The week went by very fast, and before I knew it I would be heading out to Bern every day to attend my language class.

The end of my first week was also the end of summer holidays for most of Switzerland. Up until that point I hadn't met any other exchange students, so I was very

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excited to meet them all in the language course. We had lots of fun in the course, it was our first real taste of independence in Switzerland, because afterwards we would go out and explore Bern and get accustomed to our trains and buses. By the end of my second week there I had already learnt a lot of German, and was beginning to see the difference between when my host family was speaking Swiss German or not (me not understanding). That weekend we had our first inbound meeting from rotary Switzerland. There were a ton of other exchange students, so many business cards and pins were exchanged it was hard to keep track.

In the last few weeks of language course we would go traveling a lot after class. One day we went Luzern and up mount Pilatus. I had been hiking up mountains previously with my host family, but nothing as cool as Pilatus. We had to take a gondola up the mountain, which gave us an amazing view of the Alps and the Lake of Luzern. The view from the top of the mountain was also amazing, and we were able to walk through some tunnels at the top to get better views. We also found some snow at the top, and managed to have a snowball fight in August!

In September School began for me and the other exchange students. To get to and from school I have to commute to Bern with a bus and a train everyday, which is very typical for Swiss students. School starts at 8:10, 9:10 or 10:00 depending on the day and can go till 6:00 in the evening! It took some time to get used to this schedule and long days during the first week. In my second week of school we didn't have our normal schedule, and instead I went hiking through some smaller mountains with my class, and then rode scooters down the steep roads back to the train station. It was lots of fun and a good way to get to know them. By the end of the week we were all excited for our three weeks of fall vacation to start, even though I'd only been to two weeks of school.

For the first week of vacation I went with my host family to a little ski village in the Alps called St.Morgins, home of many famous Swiss skiers. The village was mostly deserted, because it was the off-season. Never the less there was still lots to do. The hiking there was really awesome. On the first day we circled the village from the side of a cliff face. Then on the second day we took a special train from Lausanne half way up a mountain, then hiked the rest of the way to the top, where we had a spectacular view of all the Alps. Finally, on our last day we took a long hike that lead us just over the French border and then back into Switzerland. We also managed to see some of the local sights, such as a large salt mine that has been running for hundreds of years, and the Olympic museum in Lausanne. It was a really fun week!

For the remainder of my Holidays I tried to go out and see as much of Switzerland as possible. We organized short day trips with other exchange students to many large cities. We went down to Geneva and saw the UN buildings, explored the city and bought a massive 4.5Kg Toblerone bar. One day I also went back to Lausanne to try to find some famous boats, though they are still eluding me. Near the end of our last

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week my host brother and I packed up our hiking gear and headed out with his Grandpa and our neighbor to go to an air show. The show was located right up in the mountains, where we sat at the top of a valley with thousands of other people and watched as the Swiss Air Force did strafing runs eye level to us. Afterwards we set up a little fondue set and ate chocolate fondue and watched the others start the hike down. It was one of the coolest experiences I've had so far. It was hard to have to get back to school on the following Monday, but I went back knowing a lot more German than before the break, as I had been speaking it constantly with my host family and others.

The last four weeks I have spent really getting into the swing of things at my school and learning a lot of German. I have been making the most of my weekends because there often isn't a lot of time after school to do much. I went with my host family on one last hike before the weather gets really cold. We went into a large granite mountain range and hiked up and around a glacial lake, all the while surrounded by awesome fall colours. On other weekends I have continued to make day trips to other parts of the country, going all the way to Scoul, Basel and Olten. In Olten I participated in a Rotary Country Fair, promoting Canada to potential Swiss exchange students for next year. A couple of rebound students who I had been with in Canada also came to the event. It was a lot of work but also a lot of fun.

The last few months have been absolutely amazing, and have exceeded all of my expectations! I really enjoy the Swiss way of life, everything I am able to do here and everyone I have already met. I know that the next few months will also be filled with awesome adventures and even better people. Vielen Dank Rotary for this amazing opportunity!

Liebe Grüsse und bis bald

Nick

Switzerland