



Ainsley  
From Ingersoll  
To Austria

*The Most Treasurable Year of my Life*

My last beaver tale reminds me of the fact that exchange is a temporary thing and is soon coming to an end. Although this has been extremely apparent to me in the last few months I now look at the calendar everyday and count the time I have left in beautiful Austria, the country that I now consider my home.

But as I have realized there is no need to dwell on such a horrifying thought. To think how this contrasts with when I was leaving Canada, it comes with a whole different kind of feeling. Leaving Canada was exciting and a little nerve-racking thinking about making it through a year on your own and starting anew.

As sad as it was to leave friends family and comfort the excitement and determination for adventure had certainly overrode that. You know you will be back, and you know you will always have those people in your life. In contrast leaving now for me is the thought that now what has become your new life and your new home will end and not ever be the same again. You aren't the same as when you had left and there is apprehension about returning and how different it will feel.

Leaving friends and family here is another story. You have had one year or eleven months in my case to put together everything that can be called a home. Making new friends and getting comfortable with new families is hard with the obstacles of language barrier, culture differences, climate and getting accepted.

All this work and effort adapting to your new environment and now you have to just up and leave it. You don't know when you will be back or if you will be back, and even if you did return it would never be the same situation. The family, friends and people you have met are irreplaceable. The things you have learned and the experiences you have had have more of an affect on you than you could ever describe.

I will always have an undying appreciation to my host families and friends in Austria. They have all made me feel extremely welcome and always were there to help me out.

The days are going by exceedingly fast now, and I make sure I use every last one of them to the fullest. It's exhausting trying to balance your time evenly with all the people you want to share it with. it is important to learn how to organize you time so that you don't lose out on any opportunities.

Now I will recount just a few of the most memorable things I experienced this year, a bittersweet flashback if you will:

1. Hiking up mountains; I've had the chance to climb some of the most beautiful mountains in Austria with my friends and family. The mountains are a very important symbol for Austria's culture. Climbing up and standing on the top of a mountain is one of those moments where all you feel is utter peace and you are utterly dumbfounded with the beauty of our world and appreciation of Austria.
2. Music and Dance; Music and dance here is an extremely important part of the culture. I have learned that it is not just about the show or looking pretty but the dances are a part of an ancient tradition in Austria. I for one find it incredible how they have managed to keep these traditions going. With traditional dress the young and old both join in on the dance and music. Many countries have lost traditions or do not practice them anymore due to the fact that it doesn't interest the young generation. Seeing everyone take part is a success for which tradition triumphs!

3. Respect; Respect is surely a worldwide thing, but there surprisingly is a large difference in how they show it. With certain greetings and small gestures respect is always conducted between friends and teachers and strangers. It will be great to pass these on in Canada.
4. German; One of my favourite accomplishments from this year is learning German. The thought is daunting and even at times unbelievable that one can learn a language in one year. Although at the beginning it seemed impossible most of the exchange students and I have successfully learned German. The confidence I have gained with it is a proud accomplishment for me. The introduction to the language from this exchange has brought me to the conclusion that I would like to study German further next year in University.
5. Friends and Family gained; Saving the best for last the people I have met have shown me more than anything. I have learned alongside them all this year and they have all opened up and given me their time to show me things about their culture or just taught me lessons I know I will have for a life time. I have a lot of appreciation and respect for what has been done for me and I try to give back even though I don't think I could give enough to show the extreme amount of thanks and respect I have for all my new friends and family.

There is an endless amount of things I could write about my exchange but its impossible to show and tell how much this has effected myself and all the other exchange students. I know that former exchange students and current ones understand this completely. An exchange year is a climax point in your life to this point and you learn and see more than anything you can expect. I do not believe that there is any comparable experience to an exchange. The culture and people change you, and the good and even bad experiences can only help you grow and learn in a positive way.

I hate to say that this has to all come to an end and that it is almost time to come back home. We have a responsibility now to come home and pass on what we have learned, to help other individuals gain the opportunity to have a similar experience. This is what we can do to contribute and make a difference on an international basis. We bring the world closer together in friendship by gaining just a little bit more knowledge of our neighbouring

countries. Understanding and appreciating other cultures is what will make all the difference.

I would really like to just say thank you. It seems a small thing to do for all that I have received this year , but I hope to give in return by passing down and sharing my experiences with others. So thank you Rotary. It is beyond my capability to describe in words what you have given me. This has been the most treasurable year of my life. Thank you to my friends and family back in Canada for the never ending support and help, and thank you to everyone I have met on my exchange for making the incredible difference in my life.

*Ainsley*