

February 2012

Emily



From Burlington North to Brazil

Summers over and unfortunately I have the sunburn to prove it!

Even after 7 months in this amazing country I still find myself thinking, 'I can't believe I'm in Brazil'. It astonishes me how normal this life has become to me; wearing shorts in January, the endless palm trees, speaking Portuguese, rice and beans each day, and even the scorching heat! Looking back on these last seven months I can't believe how fast they've flown by but also by the amount of wonderful things I have experienced in so short a time. Even just the last 3 months since my last beaver tale have flown by. I shall do my best to explain what has happened to me in the next few pages.

The end of November marked the start of summer holidays here in Brazil. I have many wonderful memories of summer holidays here and unfortunately the sunburn to prove it. School started back up at the start of February. My class from the last year had graduated and sadly many of my friends have moved away to start university in other towns. I began back in the equivalent of grade 12 here, however I have switched schools. My choice to move schools was a personal one.

I really enjoyed my last school and all the people there but I was not able to practice my Portuguese there as much as I would have liked. My new school, Colegio Alpha de Rancharia is great and gives me more opportunity to practice my language skills. I love my class. All 28 of them are very close friends and full of energy. The classes are much more interesting now that I am able to understand what my teacher is saying.

With the majority of Brazilians being Catholic we also celebrated Christmas here. In the days leading up to Christmas I couldn't believe it was actually that time of year. My host sister even told me I lacked the Christmas spirit. The lack of snow, cold weather, and my family not being around with the usual traditions just made Christmas feel false. Decorating

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palm trees just doesn't count as Christmas to me. However a couple nights before Christmas I was asked to help out my Aunt at her church. They had been collecting donations of toys and gifts for children. We loaded them into the back of a truck and drove through the *favelas* handing out the gifts to the kids. It was an experience I know I will never forget. The children were just so excited to see us, and knowing that these families don't have very much was an amazing experience and opportunity to help out. As lame as this may sound I had been warned Christmas is a hard time to be away from your family but I was lucky to pass the holiday without any homesickness by just remembering the expressions of the kids that night.

As for Christmas day the celebrations began the night of the 24th. It seemed as though I had 3 Christmas's over the 2 days. The first began with my second host family. We stayed at home with my host Mom's side of the family, as this family's children are grown up with some married so it was a very calm night.

We made a big dinner with rice and beans of course, but with no turkey however, and opened presents afterwards. After dinner I was picked up by my first host family to start Christmas number two. We went to my first host family's *chácara*, which is sort of a country house with two sections. The first area is like a farm and then it has another nice area to host parties with a pool. My first host family has a large of extended family and many friends so the *chácara* was jammed full of people!

We had another big dinner before opening gifts. Sometimes it seems all we do is eat! Opening gifts with this family was very special. We had drawn secret Santa names a few days prior. I picked my host Grandfather and bought him a cologne and a bottle of maple syrup. Each person had to go up to the microphone and say a little bit about the person they had bought for until someone guessed who. When it was my turn to go up I was a bit nervous to speak in front of everybody. I talked about how grateful I was to have been welcomed into this family so well and how thankful I was to be spending Christmas with them. I gave hints about my secret Santa until my aunt guessed it. After I sat down it was my grandfather's turn to do his secret Santa. He said he enjoyed how as one of the oldest people in the family he got to watch and see how his family grew and changed. He said his secret Santa was a very new member and felt so proud to have added this person to his family. When he called me up I was surprised we had managed to both pull each other's names. He gave me a beautiful pair of *Havaianas* with the Brazilian flag on the straps. Finally Christmas number three was the hour I spent on Skype with my family in Canada on the 25th. Christmas 2011 was by far the strangest Christmas I've ever had but it is one to remember.

The reason this Beaver Tale is a bit late is because I've just gotten back from a week long trip to Rio de Janeiro. It was a great trip to an amazing city. I couldn't believe the contrast between the busy metropolitan centre and the relaxed beaches of Copacabana and

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Ipanema. The other contrast is the areas of the rich to the areas of the poor in the favelas and even in the architecture

from the shiny, new glass skyscrapers to the old historic buildings and churches. We visited the classic tourist sights including the Christ Statue, the Sugar Loaf Gondola, the Maracana Stadium (where the 2012 World Cup will be held) and Copacabana Beach. We also went to the final show of the Champions of Carnaval. This years winner was Tijuca, however all the finalists had outstanding performances. The floats, dancing, the outfits, music and atmosphere of the show was all phenomenal. I still can't believe I've been to Carnaval in Rio!

This really has just been a tiny bit about everything that I have experienced over these past few months. While I do love the travelling and holidays, probably the favourite part of my exchange is just my day-to-day life here. I've moved to my third host family and established a wonderful routine here with school, spending time with family and friends, guitar lessons, Rotary, and so much more.

The next months have many more events planned including a trip to the Foz do Iguacu, the final Rotary Exchange Conference for my district, my town's annual rodeo, my birthday, and finally a flight back home. Of course this is all due to the wonderful people of Rotary District's 7080 & 4510 and the members of Rotary Clubs of Rancharia and Burlington North.

Obrigada!

Beijos,

Emily