



Katharina

From Brampton to Germany

“In Germany all my days are musical”

My arrival in Germany was on August the seventh. A fellow exchange student said to me “They tried so hard to prepare us but words can't even describe the feelings that we're feeling.” Now that may seem a little dramatic, but getting ready to leave for a year makes you realize so much and appreciate things you never took notice of before.

My flight took roughly twelve hours as I had one stop in Dusseldorf where I took the time to write an email home to my family. However first I needed change to use the internet. Now that language barrier that I had tried to ignore and pretended wouldn't occur hit me in my face. I'm not sure what would be more amusing to see, a girl wearing a bright red blazer already partially covered in pins or the confusion of the person when I asked for change. Yet, thankfully I was saved by a multilingual English/German speaker and was able to get on my way! Great, I can talk to my family now, right? Wrong, I struggled with the German keyboard for several minutes attempting to press the “@” symbol. After overcoming that hurdle I was able to speak to my family. I was so happy to communicate with them and it turned out to be a little funny. The “@” symbol was difficult to find but the letters “y” and “z” were also switched, so the I miss you and I love you turned into I love zou and miss zou.

Another one hour flight later I was in Berlin, meeting my first host family of five who were holding a giant banner saying “Willkommen Katharina!” It was quite the relief because I was able to speak fluent English with my host sister Lotti and my host mother Christina. From the airport we took a half hour bus ride and then an hour train ride before arriving to my town of Jüterbog.

My first and still current host family is the Unnerstalls. They have two daughters, one son and are happily married. One of my host sisters moved to Argentina for exchange near the start

of my own. They live an active life style and love music which is quite a different life style from the one I left behind me. So far I've been to two symphonies and three musicals. Every day I listen to my host siblings and my host mother practice instruments. Both my host brother and sister play a half hour of drums and piano each day and my host mother plays saxophone for two hours a day. I decided to begin attending piano lessons myself as well, which is extremely fun for me considering it's not only in German but by a woman with a Russian accent who can't speak a word of English! Though we began with a large language barrier, she now knows me so well she knows when I'm feeling homesick and makes me feel a lot better.

My first host family loves to stay active as well. During my first couple of months here they took me on a one week hiking trip. It was autumn, so it was a very rainy and cold and a little tough for me to handle. But now looking back at it and at the pictures, I really am glad that I agreed to make this trip with my host family. Spending hours walking back to our cabin in the rain, or having lunch sitting under a playground to avoid the rain together; it brought me much closer to my host family.

Another bond that I can't compare anything to is the bond made with the other exchange students. We're all enduring and enjoying the same things. When we all met together at our first orientation we were all instantly friends and we became a family together. Now the first orientation was superb, the next meeting was even better. The first meeting was only one district; the next was nine districts in Paris! We were a group of 90 exchange students traveling together.

We slept in the same hotel, had breakfast together and went sight seeing together. We all suffered from the same sleep deprivation, but we would all agree we wouldn't change a thing. When we did have to leave we didn't want to but we also didn't have any voices left to say otherwise because we talked so much the whole trip!

But none of this would be possible without Rotary, my club pays for a little of each trip, and helps organize and coordinate with other clubs. How they got 90 exchange students to Paris and back, I still am trying to figure out. I love my rotary club. They are very caring and try their best to make my stay here easy for me. They provided me with a German teacher, whom they are paying for and my counselor has also provided me with books and taught me what she could. She meets with me every Thursday before Rotary meetings and they invite me to meetings which they think will interest me. My Rotary club here truly just wants my year to be enjoyable.

I made my first presentation about my life in Canada already and I did it all in German. I revised it many times and practiced it a countless number too! I really wanted to impress them after giving me so much when I first arrived and they all seemed quite full of joy and pride when I finished. It was quite the relief I will admit, I took my host sister with me in case I needed help but by the time I finished my presentation they were all truly satisfied.

An exchange year isn't always full of high moments. There are some low ones which can be tough. When I first arrived my host mom told me that my town I moved into was very

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selective of who they let in personally. Before everyone wanted to talk they seemed to just want to watch how I acted and behaved and boy that was different! I didn't think I smiled a lot till I came to Germany. Most people keep straight faces and when they see me smiling so much they seem confused and frankly, a little scared.

So by this, you know it means that making friends was difficult at first. I am a shy person, so I really had to put myself out there to make friends. I'm in grade ten and eleven classes here and in Canada I'd be in grade twelve but I still manage to get along and now I have made some really good friends!

My teachers at first didn't seem to really know what to do with me but eventually realized I'm staying for a year and began to integrate me. I still had problems with some teachers so I managed to change my schedule a few times to make it work out. I have one teacher that I truly enjoy for three of my classes and she helps me greatly and I left some classes due to teachers who did not seem willing to make the extra effort for me. Even though there are lows on exchange there are a lot more highs. I've made wonderful friends who help me in school and when I'm feeling down I have teachers that truly enjoy having me in their class. They like my crazy "Canadian behavior"? That won't change any time soon! I'm visiting a Canadian friend in the south of Germany this weekend for some KD, some crazy constant smiling and I'm positive a whole lot of fun.

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