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Olivia

From Cambridge North to Switzerland

I am just beginning to realize that I don't get to stay here forever

When I received the email informing me that it was already time to write my last beavertale, everything started becoming real so quickly. I still feel like I am not quite ready for this year to be over, and it is going to be so hard to leave the place that I have worked so hard to make my home. The last few months have just flown by. I have had so many travel opportunities and surprisingly met even more people. In this last beavertale I will talk about some of the best experiences I have had while on exchange, and try to describe the feeling I have knowing that in only two months I will have to leave!

I will start by telling you a bit about my third and current host family. They are an older couple and live in the town of Dussnang which has a population of about 1,000 people. It was a little different moving to such a small town, and also going from a host family with so many kids and always something going on, to a more quiet environment with no more host siblings. But I really have enjoyed the three months that I have already spent here and I have grown really close to my host parents. We get along well and they have been so helpful with everything. My host parents are also determined to learn English in preparation for their upcoming visit to Canada in two years, so I have a lot of fun teaching them English sayings. I also learn German about once a week with my host dad, and I am proud to say my German is immensely better. I won't say that it is perfect but I understand everything, and am able to say just about anything I want to. It is a great feeling of accomplishment and I will continue to learn more in my last few months here, and also hopefully some more Swiss German, which is the dialect people speak here. I am living with my current family only for a couple more weeks, and then will be moving to my fourth and finally host family. I have met them once and am very optimistic that we will also get along great.

Another exciting thing that has happened here is a visit from my dad! We had a really great time together, and I was so glad that he was able to see where I live and go to school, and meet my host families. We got to see a lot together and also went skiing in St.Moritz and Zermatt. We visited Germany and Austria and of course Switzerland's capital city, Bern. It

was such an awesome week and like I said, really nice to see my dad again. After he left I do have to admit it kind of made the exchange a little different. It wasn't that I felt homesick or anything, but it reminded me that I don't get to stay here forever, and eventually I will have to have parents again. I am really glad that he came, but having parents visit definitely changes things a bit.

So the week after my dad was here, I made the trip to Rome and Venice with 40 other exchange students! We were there for six days and had an absolutely amazing time together. Italy is such a beautiful country and we got to see so much during our visit there. My favourite part was visiting Venice because it is such a beautiful city and right on the water. We had so much fun riding on the gondolas, eating pizza and gelato and taking so many beautiful pictures. It was a trip I will never forget! Next week I am off to Paris for the week with Rotary again! I am so excited and I have no doubt it will be just as good as the week in Rome. I am so thankful that I was able to come to Europe because it makes travel so easy.

Otherwise life here is just pretty normal, and I have a nice daily routine. School has gotten a lot better, but I still find it can be a little boring sometimes. I understand pretty much everything in my classes but I find the days can be really long and sometimes it can be tiring to hear everything in German everyday. But I have a really nice group of friends and we have fun eating lunch together and they help me out a lot with the school work. I am also really close with the other exchange student from Brazil who is at my school. It is nice to have someone there to talk to, and who knows how you feel. I know that having exchange students here for me throughout the year has made this year so much easier.

Well I think that just about wraps up the last few months in Switzerland. I can't wait for the adventures to come in my last few months here, and as I said it will be really hard to leave this amazing country. I am a little nervous to go back home in the sense that no one will really understand how important this year has been for me, and that I may have a challenge to relate to my old friends again. I am sure everything will work out, but it is still something I worry about. I guess it is true that no one will ever understand what I have been through, the amazing people I have met and all the things I have learned, but maybe it's a good thing. It is like a little piece of knowledge that only I hold the keys to. I know the memories from the experiences that I have had in the last nine months here are more valuable than anything I could have ever learned in Canada. I am the luckiest person in the world to be able to do this exchange, and I will never be able to thank Rotary enough for all that this year has taught me.

Sincerely,

Olivia