



Sarah  
From Burlington  
To  
Finland

*My new friends and families, the celebrations, I will miss it all*

I am going to be honest, writing this Beaver Tale is slightly depressing, as I know it will be the last one. I am sitting here looking out my bedroom window over a big lake with the flowers all bloomed and the sun shining and the birds chirping. I honestly could have never imagined myself in such a beautiful place this time last year. I have come to love Finland to my hearts content. I may even call it my home. When I leave here I feel like I will have gained three more mothers, three more fathers, two more sisters and three more brothers.

I have moved to my last host family now where I have two host brothers, one a year older and one who is my age and a host mom and host dad. I really enjoy living with them because they live right in the center of my city, so I only have a five minute bike ride to school, so I finally get to sleep in a little bit! All of my host families have been absolutely wonderful, they have all taken me many places and given me new experiences. I couldn't have asked for better people to be with!

I have also started my last term at school where I have really easy classes since it's the end of the year so they don't offer so much then. I have two gym classes, Art, Finnish and Latin. Yesterday (23<sup>rd</sup>) was my last Finnish Gym class in my entire life and it was really funny/sad because we played beach volleyball and my first ever Finnish gym class was also playing volleyball.

After the class my friend Rosa, who is also a Rotary exchange student from Austria, went and thanked the gym teacher because she had taught us all year. The teacher had tolerated us for being late because we didn't know where the classes were,

lent us her shoes when we forgot ours, and was patient as we tried to learn Finnish. As we walked back through the water on the beach on our way to the change rooms we both couldn't help but shed a few tears knowing that it was all over now. I never thought I would be sad that a school year would be over. Also, I am going to greatly miss my first Finnish English teacher, who would lend me books that were classics and pushing me to actually read them. Letting me do a "word of the day" in her classes and just being there when I needed advice or somebody to talk to. I will also miss my Latin teacher, "the cat man," as is he obsessed with his cats. He has taught me for three periods this year, always helping me out when I didn't understand something and also being patient with me as I tried to learn the languages. Also, I am going to greatly miss my school counselor, Johanna, who has helped me choosing my classes, telling me when we have a special day off school and also just being there when I needed some advice or anything. In Finland we call our teachers by their first names, and also I could text my teachers when I wouldn't be in class that day. My first English teacher was actually British, so at the beginning I would always be calling her "Mrs. Bradley" but she would always say "JUST CALL ME SANNA!" It took awhile to get used to that. Overall, I have really loved school in Finland. It's hard to imagine going back to Canada where it's all very different.

In Finland they have a lot of the same holidays as we do in Canada but they celebrate them differently. At Easter, for example, instead of collecting Easter eggs, the little children dress up as witches and go door to door in the morning and sing songs and they give the people answering the door wooden sticks decorated with feathers and then they get chocolate in return. What was really strange for me was how the Easter holiday worked. I was used to a lot of bunnies and chocolate and green grass and sun and flowers blooming but during the actual Easter day I was in Lapland, skiing, with a bunch of snow around me. I was maybe a bit homesick on that day.

Also in Finland they have a holiday called "Vappu." (vawp-poo) It's on the first of May where we get to dress up at school the day before the holiday in whatever we like and then the next day is a day off where a lot of people travel to the big cities and party and the people that have graduated from Lukio wear their graduation caps and sing and dance. I went to Helsinki the day before Vappu and it was crowded with people EVERYWHERE! I had never seen so many Finns in one place at the same time. The city just sort of came alive. Vappu is one of the most important Finnish holidays.

May 2012

Since I have been in my third host family we went skiing at their winter cottage in Levi, which is in Lapland. I was also on a snow mobile for the first time in my life and it was fantastic!!! I actually got to ski here more than I did at home, even if the hills are not that big it was still a really good time.

Now that it's the end of May it's starting to finally be warm. Temperatures are at about +20 everyday and I am slowly getting a tan! In my city there is a beach so a lot of the Lukio teenagers spend their time playing volleyball or just lying around and sometimes swimming. Yesterday the 15<sup>th</sup> was actually the first time you could jump in the water without it making you scream and feel like your heart was going to stop. My friends and I actually jumped off the dock without getting out right away and swam around for a bit.

Now that it's getting to be the end of my exchange I am no longer homesick, but rather dreading the thought of returning home on July 27<sup>th</sup>. I really have made friends for a lifetime here and I think I have really done a good job of "being here now". I simply don't want to leave. I am apprehensive about my return back to Canadian high school and old friends.

This has honestly been the year of my life and I couldn't imagine myself being anywhere else but in Finland. I am even thinking of returning here to attend University. I think Finland is an excellent country to come to on exchange. It is a challenge, but in the end, all the hardships are definitely worth it. Thank you Rotary and thank you to everybody that has put their time and effort into making this wonderful journey possible for me!

*Sarah*