

News from our Outbound Students

August 2008 – January 2009

August 2008



Jessica Henry
In Denmark

I am doing wonderful here! I love it! It is so beautiful! I love all the wide-open fields; you never get to see that in America before they are interrupted with houses (huse*?) or buildings! I also love my host family. I have been staying with my counselor for the first week, so I just got here Monday. But my counselor took me to Sweden, which was also gorgeous! I have taken so many pictures. I will send some once I resize them and such if you like! But I have gone fishing with my host father (far) and he is a master pro fisher and he taught me the ways! I caught seven fish in about an hour and half. It was so much fun! And he was so kind. He let me know if I ever have any problems or anything to just come to him and talk about it. It meant a lot to me for him to just come out and say that. Also I have already purchased concert tickets to go to a concert with my host sister in December. I can't wait! And today I got to see my new school and talk with the headmaster. He is very nice but a bit boring! Haha I am very excited to start school and meet new people. Will keep you posted!

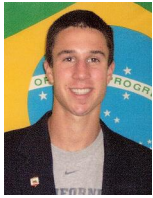
September 2008



Jessica Henry
In Denmark

Hej! I am in Denmark now and it is so beautiful here! I love it. There are so many wide-open green fields, much unlike in America where all the fields are soon interrupted with buildings or houses. Also the clouds are always so huge and fluffy and rolling through the sky, I swear the clouds are happier here! Most people speak almost fluent English here unless they are very young or very old. I have been here since the 3rd, but for the first week I was living with my rotary club counselor. She had 3 kids; Hannah- 17, Peter-13, and Jakob-9. That was fun; she took us on a trip to Sweden! Which is just as beautiful! We were in the middle of a huge forest. The trees went on forever and all the houses that were there were old farm looking houses and they were very spaced out so there was lots of nature! Also I went to a beautiful lake with a small rock island in the middle. It was breathtakingly beautiful. I also really enjoyed spending time with Hannah and Peter. They were both quite nice and very helpful and patient in teaching me Danish words. But I am now moved in with my first host family and they are positively WONDERFUL! I love it here! Helle is my host mother and Finn is my host father and they have 2 children; Michelle-18 and Patrick-15. They also have a foster child they are caring for named Lucas, he is 2. I met Patrick once and he was very friendly and sweet but he is now in Brazil for his year-long foreign exchange. We actually still keep in touch via Facebook and talk about how we are coming along with our exchanges! Finn is very sweet, on the day I arrived Michelle had Drivers Ed and he asked if I would like to come along and go fishing after we dropped her off. I went and he turned out to be a pro master fishermen and he taught me the ways! I caught 7 fish in less than 2 hours! And he was also very kind. On the drive there he told me if I ever needed someone to talk to that I should come to him, he didn't want me trying to solve problems on my own. I also met Patrick once and he was very friendly and sweet but he is now in Brazil for his year-long foreign exchange. Michelle is great! She is sweet, and very beautiful and shares my passion for creativity and music! She loves to sing and play piano. The first day I arrived, her and I purchased concert tickets for a concert in December! I am very excited. Also, I watched her voice lesson on Tuesday. Annes is the name of the man that teaches her. He seemed very funny and playful during her lesson. I am looking forward to beginning my lessons with him on Friday. Today I mostly worked on my Danish. I made a HUMONGOUS list of English words and translated them all and made flash cards. I am learning so quickly! Also I made some little bait hooks that look like insects with Finn today. That was very fun. I have also started school now, which I love! My class is so great and friendly. Everyone in there is so helpful and the ones that cannot speak good English are always just smiling at me in an effort to be friendly without communication! Sometimes, they even speak to me in Danish even though they know I don't understand which I love! It is so fun to just laugh

with people based on body language and tone of voice without really needing to understand what everything is. Also, I am getting fairly good at Danish. I have been working very hard writing words and phrases down in my journal and studying them later. Also, I always am asking what things are in Danish and most people will speak Danish to me, and then repeat what I don't know in English. This is only my 2nd week in school and I was so proud of myself today when I could read a few sentences on a handout our teacher passed out. She had asked me later in a joking way if I understood anything and I read her the few lines and she was so impressed! She told me she was sure I would be a great exchange student and that really meant a lot to me! I am having a wonderful time here. Thanks so much again for sending me here, you are changing my life!



Thomas Rich
In Brazil

Greetings, This will be the first of (hopefully) many emails that I intend to send updating you on how my life in Brazil is going. My trip began with 20 hours of traveling, and I arrived in Brazil tired, hungry, smelly, and feeling overall disgusting. Luckily both my bags came through the roulette wheel of airport luggage transportation, and both my host parents managed to navigate the maze of downtown Sao Paulo to pick me up. We spoke briefly in Por-GLISH and then proceeded to drive back to Fernandopolis, 6 hours away. That first night, my host dad, Ademilson, and brother, Artur, took me to the local club, and they insisted we use the Sauna, I guess to further drain what little energy I had. After a few hours we went back home, and I fell asleep in no time on my new bed. Apparently they attempted several times to wake me up for dinner, but I don't remember any of this. The next day was much better.

I had Honey Bunches of Oats for breakfast, and felt quite refreshed. By twelve, I got up the courage to ask if I could bike around the city and see what it was like. It's very nice, there are some large apartment complexes, but the heart of the city is composed of 3-4 story store/ homes. The economy of Brazil seems to be doing well, and Ademilson was very excited when I started asking questions about sugarcane ethanol and their flex-fuel cars. Everyone in my family is very nice and they treat me much better than my real parents. Only joking, they are very caring though, and have already taken me on my first hospital visit after I fell riding my bike. The food here is great; we eat a bunch of different types of food, many that I have never tried before, along with the lots rice and beans. My family loved the Jelly Belly's I brought them, except for the Root Beer flavor, which they say, tastes like toothpaste. I have already been to a Brazilian concert, by singer Ivete Sangalo and it was loads of fun. The band performed on top of a giant bus that weaved its way through the crowd the whole night. I've been playing lots of soccer, for FFC, the city team, and for a futsal team with my friends from school. Almost everyone here loves soccer and they constantly argue about who the best Brazilian team is and which team I should support. School here is difficult for me, even though I have taken most of the classes once already. I am picking up the language quickly, but it's still tough for me to understand anything in my Brazilian Government and Philosophy classes. I have been doing a lot of Sudoku and am reading Harry Potter in Portuguese to pass the time. I've almost made it to page

18 whoohoo! I have joined Interact and tomorrow we're having a big meeting of all the different groups from around our area. Overall, Brazil is great. I love everything about it and the people are amazingly friendly. I've made lots of new friends and have been invited to eat lunch at nearly everyone in my class's house. I'll write more later, please email me. Ask me about more specific things if you're interested, or I would love to here literally anything about how life is going back at home.



Raquel Figueroa
In France

Hey everyone!

So I've officially been in France for one month. It's been a journey. So my first month has been filled with a lot of "firsts". First time on a plane by myself. First time across the Atlantic. The list could go on for a while. So I guess I'll tell you what I've been up to the past 31 days.

The day before I left was super hectic and I got like an hour's sleep that night. So I slept A LOT on the plane. I slept the 3-hour flight to St. Paul, 7 of the 10 hours to Paris, and the 1-hour flight to Geneva. When I arrived in Geneva I had to wait for my ride. They were a bit late. They way home was interesting. I'd never seen so many little cars. The biggest car I've seen to date is a Nissan Murano. Which I don't consider that big. But then again, I come from America. My first day was pretty calm. I unpacked and then that night we had dinner as a family. They showed me

where I would sit at the table, they have assigned seating. At one end it's me, to my left is Mickaël, then Marie-Ange, my host mom, then at the other is Céline, then Didier, my host dad, and then Valérie to my right. For dinner we had salad, pasta, yogurt, cheese and bread, and dessert. Needless to say, I was full. My host sister Céline, who was an exchange student through Rotary to North Carolina, kinda told me how things around the house work.

The next day I went shopping in Pontarlier with Céline and Valérie. It was fun. The next day I went to Champagne and Céline showed me around my school a bit, then we met up with some of her friends downtown. And that night we had dinner at Didier's brothers house. Didier's parents came over for lunch. That day we also went to Le Bulay. It's at the top of the hill where I live. It's was super pretty. They literally call it "The Paradise", but of course in French. That weekend I gave my family the gifts. They loved them. Especially the Mexican hot chocolate.

The day before school started I met this girl named Lucie and her mom Marie-Claude. Lucie spoke a bit of English. I found out that she would be in my class. So the day school started she really helped me out. Who knows what I would've done with out her? She's been my best friend at school; she's in all my classes except for one. The school system is different over here. So I'm with the same kids all day. Lucie introduced me to her friends, so those are the people I hang out with during lunch. They're all nice. They kids in my class are really cool. They make class fun, so being stuck in a room with a bunch of people speaking French isn't that bad. My school day is really long. I catch the bus at 7 in the morning, and make the trip through the windy roads for like 40 minutes. Then school is from 8 to 5:30. But I have an hour and half lunch and I don't have class the whole day, except for Thursdays. Then I take the bus back and get home between 6:20 and 6:45. So I basically have a twelve hour day for school. I usually do my homework at school when I don't have class. I do my English homework and I try to do my French homework. But I usually can't understand it.

Some other things that I've done is look at waterfalls. The Seine River flows through the mountains and make a lot of waterfalls. So the chain of waterfalls is called Gorges de la Langouette. There is this one in particular that I pass everyday on the bus that I love. It's this huge waterfall that only is a waterfall when it rains. And when it's not flowing there is really pretty rocks in between this beautiful green mountain. Last week I went to La Transroller. It's like a marathon on roller skates. It's one of the most well-known of its kind. It goes through Switzerland and France. (I'm really close to Switzerland.)

The weather here feels like the end of fall in Windsor. It's literally freezing in the morning. During the day the sun comes out but it's still chilly. It rains year-round here, even if it is summer. But luckily it hasn't rained the past couple of weeks. When I first arrived all the trees were a beautiful green, and now they're starting to turn orange.

The region where I live is mountainous. There is a lot of skiing in the winter, the roads are windy, and there a lot of hills. There is a lot of cows. If you listen closely you can here cow bells in the mountains. It's really pretty.

The food here is really good. I was worried because I'd never had French food before. It's really balanced. There is a lot of vegetables, a lot of meat, a lot of dairy. So far I've had fondue, it's a made with a special kind of cheese specific to this region. One night we had crêpes...for dinner. I had nearly a dozen, but they were mini ones, smaller than the average pancake. I had clams for the first time at school. I had ratatouille the other day. Not the movie, it's a vegetable dish.

My French is coming along little by little. My family is very pleased with the progress I've made. My French teacher, Madame Vialet, is really nice and assigns me different assignments then the rest of the class that help me learn French. She told me that she understands that one can't learn a language in a month that it has to be learned little by little.

As far as my club goes, I have yet to meet them. I have met my counselor twice, and I have a met a couple of men from the club. My counselor told me that I would probably meet my club next month.

Yesterday, 9/27, I met the other exchange students. There are 17 of us. We all met in Mulhouse. I took two trains, by myself, to Besançon. There I met up with three other exchange students, two girls from the States and a boy from Canada. All the exchange students are really cool. We all hit it off from the start. I was also surprised to see a girl that I had met in St. Paul. (There was a group of like a dozen of us on the plane to Paris from Rotary.) Apparently there is a lot of exchange students in Strasbourg.

Bottom line: S'all good.

My greatest accomplishment this month: I can sing "The Itsy Bitsy Spider" in 3 languages. (English, Spanish and now French)



Maggie Gross
In Argentina

Hola todos!! Everything is still amazing. I've been so busy from the time I get up till one or so in the morning that I haven't had time to be nervous or lonely or sad. Everything has been awesome. I have met six or so friends of Luciana, the daughter of my host parents who is currently taking her year abroad in Colorado. They are a loud, rambunctious crowd that has been both comforting and entirely entertaining the past few days. We've been playing guitar and getting ice cream and making food and hanging out all around.

Yesterday I went to an Expo, (like the Christmas Bizarre for you stogans). It was in my school's gym and there the Rotary was running a booth with all kinds of food. Mostly dulces (sweets) and I must say, you've never had real sweet until you go to Argentina. I've been eating wayyy to many, but they're all so amazing!

Other than that, I met many of the Rotarians including my counselor. He was an exchange student himself when he was in high school to Oregon. He is fluent in English as well as a doctor, and he told me to call him whenever I need anything. He said he knows what the experience is like and is here to make me as comfortable as possible. Its all great.

I also have finally met Antonella, a local who spent the past year in Visailia, California. She recently returned and has been emailing me for the past few weeks before i arrived. Her dad is the Rotary Club Counselor and her mom is a kindergarten teacher at my school. She has one little brother, Federiko, who is 13, (he reminds me a lot of Daniel, an active, energetic boy) and Nico, who is 15 and who also emailed me before I came here. Their family has been welcoming just like everybody else.

This morning was a bit warmer than the past few days and i walked with my host parents to the abuelos house. Where we had a great lunch as well as a tour of the house. I also made good friends with Rocio, una prima (a cousin) who is 12 and was excited to tell me all about life here.

The Grandparents, like many people here, own a business in the front of their house and live in the back. It's a simple lifestyle, which I love the idea of. Yesterday I met Antonellas grandparents, who also have a business in the front of their house. They were so sweet. Hot water on the stove and fresh biscuits for the guests. I went out to a cafe last night with my host parents and we talked about the differences between here and America.

I asked how often divorce was here; they said it is really rare. I noticed the couples, both in high school and los abuelos, are always together, holding hands and so romantic. I told them that in los estados unidos I have many friends whose parents are divorced, that it was extremely common there.. It's another difference, which is really interesting and admirable.

I also love how everyone is greeted with a kiss on the cheek. Whether it be your host mom or someone who have never met before, it's welcoming. The first day I kept sticking my hand out to shake hands when I was introduced to someone, and the person I was meeting would take it not as shaking hands, but as me wanting to give them un abrazo (a hug). haha.

This evening I walked around town with Anto y four amigos mas. We got ice cream and then went to one of the girls house for mate and her mom made toast which we topped with home made dulce de leche....wow...its amazing. haha.. We then played foosball and listened to one of the guy's favorite bands I am now at Antonellas house and after dinner, were going to another friend's house to watch Pasion Y Bailar, a movie we rented yesterday.

So far everything is amazing. The language is coming along. I'm much more used to the Mexican accent, when there's "ll" you make a "yaa" sound, but here you say "sha or jah". It makes the conversation sound entirely different, but it's really pretty. They also say "linda" for beautiful, wonderful and how great. And "feo" for ugly, bad, disgusting etc. I had always thought linda was only beautiful, and feo was only ugly. haha

I'm learning a lot and loving all of it. vos extraño! Besos.



Eliot Classen
In France

Bonjour de France!

Hello everyone, it's me; Eliot! Hope you haven't all forgotten about me yet! I'm doing great so far over here in France with my host family, the Mazerats. I arrived in France on the 27th of August, and it has almost been a month, so here is my monthly update!

When I first arrived in the airport in Nantes, I really didn't know what to expect. Surprisingly, I wasn't too nervous, but I had some serious curiosity and excitement building up in me when the plane touched the ground. A lot of people from my Rotary club showed up to greet me, and everyone was really nice. I had met a couple of other Rotary exchange students on the plane, so pictures were taken of all of us and then we all went our separate ways. My counselor, Vincent, and his daughter were there to take me and the other American exchange student, Haley (who is being sponsored by the same club), to his house (located in Sable' sur Sarthe), where we stayed for a total of 3 days. Haley is from Canton, Connecticut, and shares quite a bit in common with myself. We listen to a lot of the same music, we both enjoy making music, and we really speak each others language (in more than one way!). The big difference between her and I is that she has been studying French for more than 4 years, whereas I have been studying it over a period of 2 months. It was really helpful to have her with me for the first few days, because she acted as a translator if I didn't understand what Vincent's wife was saying to me, and she even taught me a few things about the language.

Anyways, the first few days at Vincent's were pleasant. I spent my time watching American cartoons (over dubbed in French) with Vincent's two sons and daughter (11, 10, 9), riding bikes, and just hanging out with Haley in the yard. The house was very nice and very different from American homes. As almost all the houses here in France, it's exterior was covered with stones, and the stairs were ridiculously steep (the stairs here can kill!). While staying at Vincent's, I attended my first Rotary "thing." We had a buffet style dinner behind a very nice hotel in a very nice courtyard. The food was great (except for the RAW meat I accidently put on my plate...yes, of course I ate it!) I was inevitably given a glass of wine and taught to taste it by Vincent (little did he know that I am a wine connoisseur (sp)... my father taught me everything I know! :)) Everyone was really nice, and made sure to talk to me very slowly. I was overwhelmed with offers for more food and drink (typically French), and made sure to do a lot of toothy smiling and nodding.

On Saturday I was taken by Vincent to my first host family; the Mazerats. The night I arrived, my host mom was working and my host brother was on a trip to the south of France with a few friends. My host father, Patrick, is an investor, my host mom, Chantal, is a night time nurse 3 or 4 days a week, and I have two host brothers. Pierre, 19, went on exchange last year to America (somewhere in the Mid-West), so he speaks fairly fluent English, which he tries to avoid to use at all times! He is in a transition period right now, but he is considering joining the French Air Force. My other host brother, Quentin, 15, goes to the same school as me, but is in his first year, so I don't really see him too much except at home. They are a really nice family that are very close. They are comfortable to be around, and are extremely encouraging. They've had exchange students in the past, so they know what to expect and what not to expect, which I really like.

My first house is amazing! I live directly on the Sarthe River in a two-story, 5 bedroom, 3 bath home. I have my own room, which about two times larger than my room in the U.S., with my own bathroom. I have a huge yard, a pool (freezing!), a soccer goal, and a basketball hoop. I spent my entire first week outside! Here's an interesting fact: I live on the same street as the current French Prime Minister! My first house is in a small town outside of Sable by about 10 minutes called Solesmes (sall-em). The town is really small, but there is a huge abbey here, which is incredibly old and beautiful, and flowers literally line the streets.

Sable has a population of about 14,000, so it isn't too much of a shock for me coming from Arcata (15,700). The downtown area is really neat with plenty of shops and restaurants, but the rest of the city is really spread out. My school is really close to downtown, so if I have some extra time in between classes I'll walk into town with a few of my buddies. Sable is also home to a chateau (I have forgotten the name) that has been converted into the National Library. Vincent's wife explained to Haley and I that many old books are sent to the chateau for restoration. The Sarthe River runs directly through the city and right by the chateau. Looking from a bridge over the Sarthe connecting the two different downtown areas you can see the castle on the one side of the river and a huge cathedral on the other. It's amazing how old everything here is! All in all, the city is fairly charming, but not very exciting. :)

School is alright so far...I have been placed in a class that focuses mainly on language and art...yes! Unlike in the U.S., I travel from class to class with the same 18 people and have different classes every day. In my class there are 16 girls and 3 boys including myself. :) On Mondays, Thursdays, and Fridays I go to school from 8:30 to 4:00 with 2 hour lunches, and on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, I go to school from 8:30 to 12:00. I ride the bus everyday in the mornings and evenings, but get picked up by a member of my host family on my short days. I am taking French literature, English, Physics/Chemistry, Spanish, History/Geography, and Math. At the moment I find school to be a fairly easy, except for my French literature and history classes. I was expecting math to be extremely challenging, but percentages are pretty easy for me after Trigonometry! :) I haven't been given much homework yet (knock on wood!), and I heard rumors that my first semester of French will not be counted on my grades. I've become friends with both the boys in my class (Anthony and Anthony) and have generally gone to lunch with them and their friends. Of course, on my first day I went to lunch with 9 girls and still occasionally go with a group of them. The school itself looks like a prison and is twice the size of Arcata High, but the interior of the classrooms is pretty nice. All my teachers are really nice and patient with me, and all the students do their best to communicate with me using choppy English and really simple French. Another thing I would like to say about France: it really pays to be from California and look like a surfer! I get a lot of the same questions (Do you surf? Do you skate? Do you know this? Do you know that? Does it rain in California?), but I'm glad everyone over here likes California so much! The

upcoming election in the U.S. is also a fairly common subject that is talked about...Obama is definitely the French favorite!

My language is...coming along! Considering I came here knowing only the very basics, I really do feel that I have immensely improved. At first I didn't understand a lot and it was really hard for me to talk to people, but I can understand almost everything that is being said to me now. Of course, that's probably because people make sure to use simple words and speak slowly when they are talking to me. I write a summary of my day every evening, and my host mom goes over it with me every night and corrects my spelling and grammar. Everyone is telling me that I'm getting a lot better, so I think in a couple of months I'll be at a conversational level.

The food here is great! Everything is really rich and creamy, but man does it taste good! Meals are a lot different here: even in the most casual of dinners, you start with a salad or something light, then move onto the main course. After the main course, cheese is ALWAYS served, then a small dessert like apple sauce, yogurt, or pudding. Luckily, my family buys really good, mild cheese, so I surprisingly enjoy the cheese course (my dad has tried to get me to eat all those gourmet cheeses, but I've never really liked strong cheeses). Of course, I have tried many, many, many different kinds of cheese already, and I'd say that I liked most of them. The one I really can't eat is that crumbly white stuff with the blue in it...it has a really strong smell and is covered in this kind of "cheese juice"...ugh! :) Wine is also big here, as I had anticipated. My family doesn't have wine every night, but a few times a week they'll have it with dinner and let me have a "taster glass." The Rotarians I've had dinner with are really generous with their wine though! Haley and I are always given a glass of champagne or wine at meals with them, and we once even had three glasses of wine at one dinner! The people here, especially the men, take a really long time at meals. Even when the eating is done they talk and smoke at the table for a really long time. The French really know how to enjoy their food!

I've had quite a bit of free time after school, but my weekends have all been really full of activity with the Rotarians so far. Over the course of 2 weekends with the Rotarians I have eaten dinner in a boat on the Sarthe River, given a presentation (in French) about myself at a meeting, visited a local cookie factory, gone to a service at the abbey in Solesmes (incredible), gone to the local shooting range, eaten dinner at a golf country club, gone to a horse race, and participated in an archery tournament (I didn't have to qualify). I actually got my picture in the paper for the archery, but not because I did good; I probably got dead last! The Mazerats have also taken me to Le Mans to see a car race, and to an air show about an hour away. I just started basketball through the city three days a week for an hour, and after playing two original numbers on the piano for the Rotarians at the golf club am told that I will be enrolled in the local music school soon...whoo hoo!

Well, I think I covered pretty much everything, but if you have any questions or just want to chat feel free to email me. Also, If you want to forward this to anyone please do! I miss all of you, but I've only got 9 months left over here!

October 2008



Maggie Gross
In Argentina

I'm definitely starting to settle in. I just got back from (my first) lovely hour long bike ride around the city on my host parents old red cruiser with a big black basket in front :) At first i just went on my street as far as I could, then over five blocks, then back to the house. (All the streets in this city go the same direction, or rather, my street Ascuenga, for example, goes the length of the entire city and all of the traffic goes the same direction, no exceptions. then the next parallel street goes the opposite direction. it simplifies and complicates everything. its easier to ride a bike because you don't need to worry about on coming traffic, but its harder because you can't take the same street back) anyways, it was really nice. I got to see all the lively city scene. with the stylish women in their stilettos and skinny jeans, and guys with their scarves and aviator glasses. I passed the beautiful old church with children running all around it. I went down quieter dirt roads with old couples walking, holding hands, and kids racing around on bikes with their loyal dogs running alongside. This city really is so beautiful!

For the past week I have been working on a dance with the other 15 girls in my class, choreographed by one of my friends, Antonella. It's been incredibly fun. We're doing it to Candyman, by Christina Aguilera (not sure how to spell her name. haha) which is an upbeat, 50s style song. It's coming along really well, considering dancing is as easy as breathing so most people here. haha. There is one part where we're walking to the back of the stage then two girls and I walk up the middle, I slide into the splits as they're doing round offs on both sides of me :O So I've been stretching everyday excessively and pretty sore! We have bruises on our knees from another one of the moves, but barely notice it cause were having an awesome time. We will be performing the dance, complete with ringlets, red

lipstick and black and white attire, for the school event on Saturday, once in the morning, and once again in the evening. I'm really excited!

I was out at lunch with Anto's family (she was last years exchange student and her family hosted last years exchange student from Denmark) when her father asked how I liked Asado, (A style of bbq-ing meat in Argentina that they are known for) I told him that I hadn't yet had any, he was appalled. So this Saturday, after the dance, I'm going to their house with my host parents (who are best friends. My host mom and Anto's mom were roommates in college, as were my host dad and her dad. haha) so I will be having a very Argentine day on Saturday, ended with panquecas (crepes with dulce de leche :D)

The Rotary is also having a fashion show for a local designer. It's going to be a formal, dinner and show, showing everything from sportswear to evening gowns to shoes. They needed three younger models and my friend Anto, invited me to be one of the models with her, along with another one of my friends Marina. Tomorrow we are going to get fitted to the clothes and Sunday we'll be arriving early to get our hair and makeup done by professionals! It should be really fun! The three of us are really excited.

My host mom's birthday was on Monday. I had some friends over and we played guitar (as they do for every one of my host mom's birthdays apparently, cause they are friends with her daughter who is currently in Colorado on exchange) So I had made some brownies and they loved them. (There aren't brownies or chocolate chip cookies here!) After everyone left, I jumped in the shower and put on some sweats, then walked into the dining room and surprise!, 20 plus of my new extended family. haha. But it was really fun. I met many, many people who were all incredibly patient with my language struggles and we had an excellent evening. They left around 12:30 and I was exhausted!

Other than that, everything is going really smoothly. I'm really starting to settle in which is really nice. The experience of total change is unexplainable. One day I get on a plane and the next, bam, everything is completely different. New house, new land, new language, new food, new family, new music, new opportunities, new struggles, new friends and new conversations. I was yearning for familiarity in general. And now I am becoming familiar and settling into life. It's becoming second nature and its an awesome feeling. 'Im loving it all and so thankful for this opportunity! Sending my love! Hope all's well.



Maggie Gross
In Argentina

Hello everybody! It's Monday and I am currently uploading even more pictures from yet another awesome weekend. On Friday I went out dancing with the girls and afterwards, around 6 am, we went to one of the girls houses and had torta (chocolate with dulce de leche) and a small cup of coffee as we laid back, gave our tired feet a rest and talked about all the odds and ends teenage girls tend to talk about. I then took a taxi back to my house. Even though it was chilly, the sky was bright blue and scattered with beautiful pink clouds. I finally fell asleep a little before seven and slept for a few hours.

Then on Saturday, around 11am, my host sister, Valentina, who was back from college for the weekend, called. She invited me to a day at the beach with her friends. I was exhausted, but not enough to turn down a day in Claremecco (the town I was at for spring break). I ran into my room, grabbed a swimsuit and flip-flops and ran out the door to meet my host sister in the driveway. We then picked up 3 more girls, one acoustic guitar, one volleyball, a cooler full of all kinds of good foods and of course, matte, and we were off. We arrived at the beautiful beach about 20 minutes later and were luckily greeted by lovely weather. The sky was blue; the beach was long and inviting with no one there but us. We eagerly ran into the water, and within a few moments were running out screaming and laughing at the surprisingly low temperature. Then we played volleyball for a while and guitar while drinking matte. Next we went to a natural park, which was filled with a thick forest as well as beautiful, green meadows (its spring here!). We made a bbq in the fire pit and had burgers followed by more guitar. Then back to the beach for a few more hours. Two of the girls are currently studying to become gym teachers, and for all of them, sports is a very central part of life, so one of them asked me if i was familiar with the rules and positions of softball, because she had an exam coming up on it in her English class. Soon we had split a piece of bread into four pieces as i was explaining the bases, and positions and they were eagerly asking questions and getting excited when they understood the reason behind the rules or plays. It was really fun. After a while we all fell asleep in the sun (random fact: in Argentina the saying for being outside in the sunshine is "tomando el sol" or "drinking the sun") Around seven we headed back to tres arroyos, exhausted, content and falling asleep to teh radio in the car.

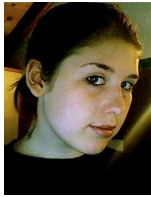
Sunday was Mothers Day, and yet again, I had no idea what to expect. I was thinking it was going to be the family, as in my hspot parents and host sister, but when i walked into the kitchen that morning, my host mom handed me 13 plates, "13?" I asked and she replied, "ya, its going to be a bit smaller than ususal". haha. Soon everyone arrived and for those of you who have never been to a gathering like this, I'll help you picture it. It was close to My Big Fat

Greek Wedding in that there were two long tables together steaming with food and filled with people. Then a few men and women bring out more asado every ten or fifteen minutes and put it on your plate. There's no reason to try to turn it away when you're full, I'm starting to think "full" is an English word, nonexistent in Argentina. If you do say no, they look at you all concerned as to "why isn't she eating, what's wrong with her" haha. Then they brought out 3 different kinds of torta and and fruit salad. Afterwards, I went into the back patio and at first played catch with my host dad, sister and cousin, but soon a football was brought out and I stood back in amazement and I watched my 11 year old cousin make the ball dance effortlessly. It was amazing!

Today I went to they gym for the first time with 3 of the girls. 6 of us have signed up to go three times a week, and im really excited, i had an awesome time on the exercise bikes, weight machines and whatnot, with the girls. Today they had a trainer lead us through all the different exercises for what muscles, how many times is recommended and then the stretching to do afterwards. It was really fun.

Life is going really well and I still think it's passing much to quickly. I have my 1st exchange student gathering this weekend in Mar Del Plata which I'm really excited for!

December 2008



Hanna Nelson
In Germany

I've gotten to travel to Triberg once (a wander week in the black forest), to Sigmaringen once (on my own time during fall break), and to Ulm twice (once during my fall break, and then just recently with Rotary to go to their Christmas market). Ulm is the home of the tallest church tower in the world (pretty cool).

In January, there is a Rotary trip to go skiing! And then we have a three-week trip in May/June that circles Germany. In school, I have thirteen classes. English, French, German, Physics, NWT (a mix of the science classes), Biology, Chemistry, History, Politics, PE (called Sport in German), Ethics, Music, and Math. Although I have a ton of classes, there isn't really homework, so the workload evens out.

A lot of the food is similar, although new things I haven't had before would be boiled Chestnuts, Schnitzel(pork), Spätzle(noodles), Spätüie (Fanta mixed with Coca-Cola), Black Forest Cake, and I'm not sure what else...

I'm not in a sport, but every Tuesday and Thursday I go with a friend of mine from school to a comic book shop where people meet up and draw together. I take the tram pretty much everywhere in town, and if I go out of town I take the train. I'm in District 1930, and the people here are pretty cool.



Eliot Classen
In France

Monsieurs, madames, amies, oncles, tantes, cousins, et tout le monde, Bonjour de France!

Well, here I am again, giving you a quick update on events of the past month here in the wonderful country of France. And, comme toujours, I remain at a loss for intelligible words regarding the hospitality being shown to me by the people of Sablé sur Sarthe (and surrounding villages). :)

Life here in my little, rainy French town is as quiet as ever, but I find that every day holds new and exciting cultural experiences for me. School remains as dreary as it ever was back in America, but, being exempt from much of the work in most of my classes, I really don't have anything to complain about. Studying my basic French vocabulary sheet while my French literature teachers rants on about the novel everyone else is reading sure beats staying up until 5 in the morning trying to finish that huge book report for English. I have a firmly established group of friends now of about 15 people (most of whom are in my class), but I still find that I'm expanding through the "friend of a friend" method. A big challenge for me is reaching out to people and trying to show them that I'm a nice guy...I don't think I've ever been so intimidating in my life. :) I feel a bit stagnant in terms of my education due to the fact that I have already learned what is currently being covered in my science and math classes, French literature is out of the question, and my English teacher asks me for advice, but I feel overwhelmed at the same time by this new language I'm so desperately trying to learn. :)

My French...well, it still needs work. I've reached the magic three-month mark where I'm supposed to be able to really understand everything, but this is only semi-true for me. I can almost always understand things being said directly to me or if I know the context of what is being said, but it would be difficult for me to do something like

eavesdrop on a conversation. Most of the time, the rapid speaking on the TV is hard for me to catch, but I do a little better if I'm watching the news (no slang). :) I still go to my private French lessons every Wednesday afternoon, and I continue to believe that these lessons help me a lot. Where else would I learn phrases like "it's raining buckets?" :) I'm at a level where I can have a fairly simple conversation without a major goof-up or confusion and can walk away feeling good about myself...of course, this good feeling was quickly replaced by panic after being told by my host mom that it was time I started picking up the home phone. "Don't worry," she told me, "you just have to say two things; nobody is here at the moment and I'm American." :)

Other than school, orchestra, and basketball, I hang out at chez moi, where I spend my time talking with my host family, watching TV, or playing guitar. Weekends usually consist of lots of those things and the occasional dinner party. Every Saturday I have a basketball game (I think our record is at 1-5 now...), and Sundays I usually go for a run, if the weather permits. The French country side remains breathtaking even with the weather worsening, as rain and winter bring with them leafless trees and greener grass. It rains almost every day, and gets as low as -2 degrees Celsius in the mornings and nights. Even my triple layer (including gloves and a scarf) can't protect me from the crisp morning air as I impatiently wait for the bus. Each morning brings with it a fresh batch of French curse words from my also cold-stricken host brother who waits with me. :)

That just about sums up my life at the moment in general, but I did do a few particularly fun things last month. For one, I had my first orchestra concert on the 23rd in a small village about an hour away from Sablé called Connéré. My orchestra was a co-performer with the local orchestra in the small community center venue. I'm not sure exactly how many people attended, but my estimate would be about 200 (or less). :) Anyhow, there was an hour long power outage just before the concert was due to begin and an unexpected dinner of pâté, rilette, fromage, and countless desserts after the performances...I was told that I would be home by 3 O'clock in the afternoon, but, in fact, returned home around 11 at night. Leave it to the French, right? :) The music itself was pretty good, and I can honestly say that I wasn't nervous at all. There's a big difference between a 50 person orchestra concert and the 12 person jazz band concerts I had to play in last year. :) I had another concert 2 days ago in Parcé, a neighboring city of Sablé. We were the only act in the show, but, surprisingly, more people turned up for this concert than the last. I guess it wouldn't be too far off if I said about 300 (or more), showed up in the city's community center (better known as the "salle des fêtes" over here. That literally translates to "the room of parties"). :) This concert was also pretty good musically, but it was the last performance with our current conductor. Needless to say, I heard quite a few sobs through the music during our last song. :)

Being in France, I thought that Thanksgiving was out of my reach...how wrong I was. :) The day after Thanksgiving on Friday evening Haley came to my house and, with the help of my host mom and my moral support, made a delicious Thanksgiving feast! We had a turkey (bien sûr), stuffing, sweet potatoes, mashed potatoes, green beans, apple pie, and pumpkin pie. My only complaint: no cranberry sauce. :(Haley's host family came to my house to share our American holiday, which we gave a quick summary and history of for everyone. Some helpful vocab: pèlerin, de dinde, de reconnaissance. And here's a helpful tip: the next time you make a Thanksgiving dinner for a French person, it would probably not be best to serve sweet potatoes or pumpkin pie, unless you want a lot of leftovers... :) It was great that we got to introduce our foreign custom to our host families, and it really made me recognize how many things I have to be thankful for. I mean, authentic French cuisine for lunch and comfort American food for dinner? Does it get any better? :)

Although feasting wasn't in the cards for me on the actual day of Thanksgiving, I did get to do something almost as fun. My friend Benoit from my basketball team took me to go with him and his father to a professional European basketball game. When I was first invited, I thought that I would be going to a small, local match, but I got to experience the real deal! We went to the stadium in Le Mans (a larger city about an hour away from Sablé) that holds about 2 to 3 thousand people. It's not quite to the level of the NBA, but it was impressive none the less. The match was between Le Mans and Athens, Greece. The neat thing about this is that ex-NBA star, Josh Childress, plays for Athens. Our seats were in the 15th row (approximately), so I got to see some up close slam dunk action (in warm-ups at least). Even though the stadium wasn't as big as the basketball stadiums in the US, the professionally was evident through the quality of the playing. The game went into overtime, but Athens, the expected winner, pulled through in the end and won by a margin of 5 points (to the despair of my ears). Quel Dommage!

Other than those things, my weekends have been filled with many dinner parties and surprise birthday parties (2 in 2 weeks!). The cheese is still smelly, the wine is still in abundance, the people are still patient and nice, I still have my own bathroom (I'm still happy about that), and France hasn't declared war on America because of me yet.

Hope you are all en forme! If you want to write please feel free to do so...I'll try to pull myself away from the food long enough to give you a response. :) Oh, and Joyeux Noël! Bonne fêtes tout le monde!



Keith Kinman
In Germany

I am in Germany. I will now tell you what I have done, accomplished, and thoughts for the future. I arrived on September 14, after the grueling 10 and half hour flight. Actually the flight wasn't too

bad, just boring, and full of anticipation. I got to the Frankfurt airport at 9:30, got picked up by a Mercedes Bus, right after I got off the plane...It felt very luxurious. My host parents met me right outside of the terminal. They were holding signs welcoming me, and smiling. It made me feel right at home. We greeted each other with hugs, and began our journey back "home". We went by car (New Mercedes), to Alzenau, which is about 15 minutes by car from Frankfurt. It isn't actually that close to Frankfurt, but since there is no speed limit on the German high way system (Autobahn), it makes everything much faster. We were going about an average speed of 165 kph, which I think is about 130 mph....really fast!!!!

When we got to my new home, they showed me my room, and showed me around the house. The house has an older look, but inside it is new and modern. It has four stories, and is huge, compared to what I am used to. My room is very nice, much bigger than my room at home. We ate Lunch after I had unpacked...the food was excellent. After Lunch I met a couple of Rotarians, and got some info about what is to come throughout this upcoming year. Everyone is really nice, and very blunt. When I say very blunt, that is good, it is like me. I like blunt people; it makes things easier if there is a problem.

I got there on Sunday, and started school on Tuesday. That was very overwhelming, especially because I did not speak German. The school system in Germany is totally different then what I am used to. It is the most confusing and unorganized thing ever, which is odd to me, because the German people as a whole are very organized and precise. I have way more classes then I have had in the past, and most of the classes I have, I have never taken before.

Here is My schedule...it is quite confusing!

Monday:	Tuesday:	Wednesday:	Thursday:	Friday:
English	English	Art	German	Math
Physics	Math	Art	Physics	Chemistry
Geography	Math	English	Math	French
French	Religion	Physics	Religion	History
Chemistry	German	French	French	German
Math	German	Break	Chemistry	English
		Geography	Break	
		History	Sport	
		Music	Sport	

So this schedule might not look that bad, but you have to realize that they have had these classes for five years...this means Physics, Chemistry, Religion, and French for five years....I have not had any of these classes, and on top of all that they are taught in German. Though my schedule and classes are hard, I am surviving. I don't do much for school, but anything that I can do, I do. Everyone has been very nice at school, which is great. I excel in my English class, because I am a native speaker.

I have been to, too many places in Germany. My main traveling period will be in December when I go for a week on a tour of Germany, with all the other exchange students. I have been to Rothenburg ob der Tauber...It is one of the original towns/cities in Germany; I believe it was founded officially in 1100, so it is pretty old. It is a very nice and traditional German city, with many tourist attractions. I was there for three days. I was there because that's where the first Rotary Youth Exchange orientation was. It is a required orientation (we have three throughout the year) where all of the inbounds from our district, Rebounds, and the Rotex, and all of the Rotarians who are involved with the Youth Exchange program.

In Rothenburg we went out to dinner, on the first night, and we all got to get to know each other. Then the next day, we took a day, and night tour of the city, looking at numerous historical monuments/significant things of and pertaining to the city of Rothenburg. It was very nice, the night tour was a little corny, but still nice, and interesting. On the last day, we looked around the town again, and went on a tour of the famous gigantic church. We tried a traditionally chugging of wine, from an enormous goblet. That was fun, and we all felt very good after. Then to end the orientation we toured the old torture chamber. That was interesting and a little gross, but still interesting. We said are good byes, and then headed home....I went right to sleep when I got home at 2:00 in the afternoon.

I have been to many surrounding cities of Alzenau, that I have experienced, and do not want to take the time to explain...sorry.

The next big place I went to was Frankfurt. That was awesome; it was the first real city I went to. It has many attractions. I went by train with a friend. She showed me some of the bigger attractions in Frankfurt: Shopping, Market Place, Very tall Tower where you can see the whole city, and lots of random things. We ended the amazing day, with dinner, at an Italian restaurant, where we ate amazing Italian food.

The next of my trips was going to the very historical, and very desired tourist attraction of Heidelberg. This trip I took with my host family. It as about an hour and a half drive from Alzenau. The city is very famous for its castle. It is on a very big hill, where you have to walk 330 steps to get to the castle. The castle is perfect in the means of an attack. It is an impenetrable fortress. It is huge, and has a very gothic theme. One sort of funny fact about it that it has the biggest wine barrel in Germany. A wine barrel that can hold about 230,000 liters. It was quite ridiculous. After seeing the castle, we took a very long and famous walk called the " The Philosophers Walk"...so of course we

talked about our philosophies during the walk. After the walk we headed back, it took quite some time to get back to the car, because we were at the other end of the town/city. On our way back we stopped in a very old little town, and walked around, and then had a very good traditionally German dinner.

I have taken numerous trips to Aschaffenburg (A big city, but smaller than Frankfurt). Aschaffenburg is about 15 minutes away by bus, and then train. It has numerous attractions; I mostly go there for shopping or to hang out with my friends on weekends. Also I have gone back to Frankfurt about three times, and each time has been great.

My next big trip, and one of my favorites, was Berlin! It is funny to me, you hear so much about a place, and never truly understand its significance until you are there. It was amazing. There was/is so much history there, every street, corner, and building has some history behind it. And not the common history like for example...it was built.

I went to Berlin with my host parents. We stayed there for Friday, Saturday, and left on Sunday afternoon. We went to the usual tourist attractions; Checkpoint Charlie, U.S. embassy, the last remaining parts of the Berlin wall, the Sony Center, and the great shopping there, etc. For me to explain Berlin is a little silly in my mind because it is something that needs to be experienced and not heard, from others experiences. All I can say, is that if you ever have a chance in your life to visit it, do it; you will cherish that experience for the rest of your life.

My last trip took place from December 7 to December 14. The trip was a sightseeing tour of Germany. Of course you cannot see all of Germany in one week, but we did see many places. It was organized by the Rotary District 1950. There were 21 exchange students on the trip; 5 long terms (myself, 1 Canadian, 2 Mexicans, and 1 Venezuelan) The 15 were from South Africa, which was very interesting for me, because I had never met anyone from South Africa, let alone Africa. I really got to see what they stood for, and how South Africans were as a people, what their culture was like, and how they were raised. The last person was from Australia. Everyone got along very well, which is always a little nerve racking at first, because if you put so many different cultures together, you kind of expect some disagreements. But the disagreements were not there, everyone was very understanding of each other's cultures, and I believe we all clarified the many mislead stereotypes.

I think it is truly amazing that young adults can overcome cultural difference, and see the people as people, not as South Africans, Americans, Canadians, Mexicans, or Australians. That is something, that in my opinion many adults have failed to achieve. Although the majority (in my opinion), of adults have not overcome cultural differences, there are still some organizations, and people who look past the color, or difference between someone and themselves, and learn to except them as human beings. This, I think, is Rotary's goal, and I think I can finally understand it.

Anyways back to the trip; I will tell you a very broad oversight of what we did the past week. On Sunday we arrived in Wuerzberg. We got a guided tour of the city, and then took a bus to Karlstadt. In Karlstadt we took part in the official reception by the town mayor and by members of the Rotary/Rotex club. Then we saw the traditional march in of Santa Claus. After this we had a traditional Franconian Dinner, at a Rotarians house...they were very nice, and the food was excellent. After dinner we took, the tour bus back to Wuerzberg, and we all hung out for a couple of hours and then headed to bed. On Monday we took a bus ride to Weimar, on the way we stopped at the very historical town of Bamberg. We stayed in Weimar for 3 days, seeing numerous historical things, and just embedding ourselves in the Weimar culture.

On Thursday we set out for Nuremberg, on the way we stopped in Herzogenaurach where we took a very exclusive tour of the Adidas headquarters. We were told that very few people get to take that tour, but because the President of their Rotary club works there, they made it happen. It was very interesting, never really wanted to know that much about Adidas but still interesting. We ended the tour at their five-star restaurant, on the Adidas headquarters premises. They let us eat whatever and as much as we wanted. After that we went to the Adidas Factory outlet where we had 44% off of anything and could use that percentage off on as much stuff as we wanted. After shopping, we sent out for a 25 minute bus ride to Nuremberg, where we unpacked, ate dinner, and then got to see the most famous Christmas Market in Germany; Almost every town/city in Germany has a Christmas Market, starting on the last weekend of November, and ending on the 24th, it is really cool, they sell lots of Christmas stuff, have great food, and the most famous is the "gluhwein" its a heated sweet wine, the point is it tastes very sweet and good, and warms you up from the cold. The next day (Friday) we had 6 hours of free time, to do what we wanted in Nuremberg, most of the people went shopping, because Nuremberg is known for the excellent shops. Then we had dinner, and went to a karaoke bar, and then went to bed. On Saturday, we took a guided tour of Nuremberg, then had more free time, and ended the night all hanging out together at the Youth Hostel. Overall the trip was great, there were a few dull parts, but that is to be expected in my opinion.

As for traveling, that is it for now. I expect more in the future.

I would say the biggest difference between Germany and the U.S. is the way they eat. For breakfast, we have bread with meat and/or cheese, or Nutella, whichever we prefer, coffee, and orange juice. For Lunch it is totally different. Lunch is the big meal of the day, not dinner. So dinner is lunch in Germany, it was very hard to get used to it, but I am now. For dinner, we have whatever is left over from lunch, and bread, meat, and cheese. The next biggest difference is the people's mentality, the Germans are not necessarily nice when you first meet them, they are a somewhat seldom people; once you get to know them, they are your best friends. They are also very blunt, they believe in honestly more than being nice, which in my opinion is very smart. Other than that, Germany is very similar to America, I mean everything is in German, but there are a lot of similarities.

As for what has changed in my thinking. I am still the same person, but have totally changed my perceptions on a

lot of stuff. I do not just perceive negative things about certain situations, and/or people. I am systematically removing what I know, and replacing it with more knowledgeable experiences, and ideas. I am defying the reality that I know and love. It is difficult at times, but I continue because I know that it is making a very positive outcome. I am learning a new language, and am submerged in an unknown culture, and honestly I am loving every minute of it.



Maggie Gross
In Argentina

I'm not really sure when I'm supposed to fill these out, but if I wait any longer I'm going to have to write a novel :) So this weekend I returned from a two week to "El Fin Del Mundo" or "the end of the world". The 36 other exchange students and I passed the time dancing tango in the middle of streets, walking with penguins, hiking on glaciers, clubbing in the farthest southern city in the world, learning new salsa and tango steps at three am in hotel lobbies, waking up to watch the sunrise over snow capped mountains, learning new languages and making friendships with interesting people that will last a lifetime. Guess you could say I am living the high life at the moment! Life really couldn't get any better.

Other than that, summer starts on the 21st of December. For Christmas I'm going to Mendoza, the wine province of Argentina, famous for its beauty and vineyards. I will be going with my host parents, sister and her boyfriend, which will be really fun! Then we get back on the 31st and on the 1st I'm heading to Claremeo, a little beach town about 40 minutes away which all of my friends spend their summers at. I'm lucky enough to bring Christie, a new good friend from Carmel, California, for a week or so of beach days and dancing nights. We'll be staying at my counselor's house which I'm really excited for. They're like another family to me, their daughter, Anto, is a year older than me and just returned from her year of exchange in California, she's helped a lot through everything. Her two younger brothers are amazing. Nico (15) has officially taken on the "brother" role for me and gets protective whenever I'm talking to a boy or talking about going somewhere, its really funny, but sweet. !

And Fede (13) is like my younger brother in California. The family is amazing and I'm really close with all of them. Then in the end of January I'm going to another city on the beach with another friend's family and a few more of friends from my group of 8 girls. Then February I'm going with my family to yet another beach city, which will be fun, cause Christie's family is going there for the same two weeks! Summer is amazing here!

Other than that, I'm really close with my family, from my host parents to grandparents to cousins and aunts and cousins twice removed, the whole family is really close and i love them all. I think its really funny when I look back at how nervous I was before I came here. I have not yet had a "low" period and really lucked out getting such an amazing city, family and group of friends that are here whenever I need them and are helping me evolve into someone new, but eager to hear about my life in California as well. I'm going to miss them terribly but i know I'll be back here as soon as I can save up the money!

Food here is amazing!! I'm eating so much its ridiculous, but at the same time my metabolism has gone up significantly thanks to nights dancing till the sun comes up, walking around the whole city all day long (none of my friends have cars here) were always doing something so it all evens out.

School is over till March and the beginning....well...let's just say I was a bit lost. They are 9 months ahead of me here (school year is march until December) and I can now understand and speak Castellano, but when it comes to writing and reading it's been a lot harder. As a result, at the end of the day my notes came out somewhat impossible to understand. haha. But I really like the teachers and the material is really interesting, so beginning in March I'm sure it will be a lot easier.

I am not participating in sports at the moment but will be taking up tango and salsa classes after the summer. Everything here is really amazing beyond words. I'm so lucky to have been given this opportunity. Thank you Rotary! I can't get over how amazing every moment is. Exchange student get-togethers are always amazing because they're all interesting people with a passion for traveling, a yearning to help the world and with interesting hobbies. These people are real, with real conversation and I can talk the night away talking about world philosophies and struggles and hopes and dreams. I currently have invitations to go to France to see a good friend who is a techno DJ, and after hours of music talk, he wants to show me how clubbing is in France and take me to the clubs he DJ's at. I'm really good friends with an outdoor loving Canadian, and we are currently planning out a month long, canoeing & backbacking trip through Canada. 3 of my best friends happen to live in California, Nevada and Oregon, so we are planning camping trips in Canada when we get back, complete with Empenadas, asado, dulce de leche, matte, tango music and a good Argentine-loving trip.

It's also an amazing experience to get so close with my friends here. Yesterday I was at my friend, Antil's, house. His dad is a pastor and a photographer, and the entire family is really interesting. He and I talked through music before I could understand the language, so now we are really close. We play guitar together and show each other new bands. We were hanging out on his patio on his roof and I taught him two basic steps of tango. :) And my 8

girlfriends are so amazing! They came over at midnight the night after I got back from the trip for coffee and to listen to all the stories. I find myself easily slipping into serious conversations that my friends in California just don't fully understand at the moment. It really is an eye opening experience. I know I will never be the same person that I was before I came here. I remember walking through Security, stepping away from all I knew with tears and a heart anxious but for what I had no idea. Now I am more anxious to travel than you know and I am currently talking with a few volunteer programs across the world.

If you're looking into the exchange program, beware; it truly is only the beginning to a very dangerous addiction to traveling the world and making a difference. You'll never be satisfied staying still for too long after you experience living in another country. Thank you so much Rotary!



Jamie Carroll
In Chile

Wow.. Where can I even start? In three months I have already experienced so much more than I really thought possible. The week after I arrived in Brazil I began surfing and have continued going almost every weekend. I spend a lot of time at the beach with my friends that I have made here. I have also done a lot of traveling around the state of Serigipe, which is where I live. I have gone to the largest beer factory in all of South America, and I have been to Xingá³, the second largest canyon in the world.

As for school? I am out for the summer but when I was going a typical day included going from 7:30 in the morning until 12. I had six classes but they were different classes everyday. There were also classes in the afternoon, two hours long each, and there were usually two of them, but they were not mandatory. The classes that I took were mathematics, biology, chemistry, anatomy, Portuguese, literature, geography, philosophy, history, and physics. I have participated in two sports clubs that take place after school: swimming and soccer. Both of which we competed against other schools. I also participated in Gencana, which is a really big festival that takes place right before school lets out for the summer. It includes the classes competing against each other with games such as relays, and songs and dancing. I sang a song in Portuguese and won that part of the competition for our class. That was really fun.

I have tried every new food that someone has offered me at least once which has turned out to be a good thing and a bad thing. I have tried a lot of delicious fruits since they grow amazingly in Brazil but one fruit I tried, which happens to be the new super food of the world and grows only in the Amazon, "acaá", was the best tasting one by far, but it turned out that I was allergic to it. I ended up spending the next two days throwing it up. I was only upset because of the fact that I could never eat this amazing fruit ever again. Other foods that I have tried are chicken heart, which I didn't have too much enjoyment from, feijão, which is a type of bean that I love eating, sorvete, which is basically ice cream, beiju, farinha, and many many new desserts. Actually everything that I have eaten here is something new because Brazilian food is so different from American food.

And here are just a couple of other things that I have done lately. I participated in a running marathon and got third place out of over one hundred people. I went to a costume party with more than 27,000 people at it. I sang on stage with an English rock band. I was on TV for the highlights of a Brazilian soccer game, and was on TV again for an interview. Oh and as for speaking the language, I speak it better than all the other exchange students in my district and I have been here almost two months less than they have. I read books in Portuguese, and watch Portuguese novellas.

Anyway, needless to say, I am really enjoying myself down here. It's turned out to be quite the experience. I'm loving every minute of it and learning something new everyday. I can't tell you how grateful I am to be here. Muito obrigada para esse oportunidade. Voce não sabe como esse experiencia esta mudando minha vida. Beijjos.

January 2009



Eliot Classen
In France

Bonjour de France! J'espere que vous avez passé un joyeux Noël et des bonnes fêtes!
What a month! December proved itself to be one of the most busy, hectic, challenging, and fun yet!

From being blocked out of school by a student protest, to drinking champagne while marveling at the enormity of the French Alps, the past 31 days have been full of new experiences and unforgettable memories.

School trundles along in tedious hours of semi-comprehensible lectures on geopolitics and exciting developments in the soap opera-like social world of French teenagers. Not much has changed educationally, and my social life remains contained to the classroom as I live by the French policy of "weekends for the family." This is not to say I don't have fun with my peers at school; we have a great time hanging out in between classes, at lunch, or during an exceptionally drawling lecture (guilty!). :) We spend our free time sitting on the steps of the amphitheater (to the discontent of my body temperature), sitting in the library, or just pass the minutes receiving angry looks from students in the school restaurant carrying lunch trays who would very much like to take the table we have been sitting at for a lot longer than necessary. Although this doesn't sound much like the exciting life of an exchange student, I'm more than happy that school has become somewhat of a routine; I really am becoming comfortable in this culture.

One of the more interesting occurrences at school thus far took place on the third Wednesday of the month. Approaching the entrance to my high school at the usual 8 O'clock, I noticed that a larger number of students seemed to be standing near the gate. Getting closer to the group, I wondered why they all seemed to be arranging themselves directly in front of the open gate. "Hey," I thought to myself, "what are those wooden crates doing right in front of the passage into the school?" And, as I was gently prevented from entering the school by a line of hand-in-hand students, I finally remembered where I was. France; where strikes are more common than bakeries. The students were striking the educational reform proposed by the French government that would add an hour to the school day, and change the 3-trimester system to a 2 semester system. I'm sure there is a lot more to the reform than that, but I think you can figure out which factor caused such a reaction from teenagers across the country. Anyhow, I waited at the gate with a growing number of protesters and witnesses alike until I ran into my fellow American, Haley. We both felt like such rebels standing amidst the cacophony of chanting and Bob Marley. After over an hour of this, we gave up our extremely feeble attempt at entering the campus and headed out for a free afternoon downtown at the local pizzeria with a few other friends. Why aren't there more controversial educational reforms? I could get used to this!

My Christmas in France was...filling. I believe I might have spent more hours at the table than I ever have over the course of one week. How can one resist the calling of homemade foie gras, sausages, applesauce, cheese, and delicious bread? It seems only just that we allot over 2 hours to each of the 4 courses. Besides, one must take food a bit slowly when consuming wine so quickly. Unlike back home, the family of my host dad and I opened all our presents at midnight on Christmas Eve at Uncle Xavier's house (after a wonderful dinner, of course). Although insisting that opening their home to me was gift enough, my host family gave me a stylish new jacket, awesome dress-shirt, and USB drive for the photos I have stored on their computer. Not quite the haul I usually receive Christmas morning back in Arcata, but who would complain in my place? I felt luckier this year than I ever have in my life. Christmas day, I accompanied my host family to the reunion of my host mom's family. It was here, among over 50 people of all ages, that I enjoyed a Christmas feast lasting from 3 in the afternoon to midnight, leaving my seat only to use the bathroom and play a few games of fuzball with the cousins. To my initial dismay and pleasant surprise, among the dishes served were oysters, lobster, shrimp, and two different varieties of sea snail. I have long been prejudice towards seafood, but found that it really wasn't too bad...that's not to say I ate more than one of each type of sea snail; a bit chewy for my liking, and lacking the promised garlic and butter of traditional escargot. All in all, Christmas was a wonderful time spent sharing the good will and generosity of the season with my adopted family and my stomach.

The day after Christmas on the 26th, I began the long journey south with my host family to the French Alps. After an 8-hour drive, one night at a small hotel, and lots of unpacking of food, we were finally settled in our small apartment at the foot of the Montalbert ski lift. We were met by two friends of my host family, who came equipped with more wine and champagne than I thought possible. There was so much wine that the bathroom was converted into our personal wine cellar...I have pictures to prove it. :) The apartment was quite small, but all 8 of us had a bed, and I enjoyed the intimacy of the place. It was great to spend time just hanging out with my host family in our tiny living room trying to answer French Brain Teasers. Our game times, translated, usually sounded something like this: "Okay everyone, what is Einstein's famous equation? E equals MC squared, that's right. Okay...oh, this one is for you Eliot; what sound does a dog make?" Yes, game time did not see me at my best. :)

The mountains themselves were incredible! All the pictures that I took could not capture the feeling I had while gazing at the snowy peaks from the ski lifts. My breath was taken away by the size of the Alps and the extreme force with which my behind struck the icy snow on the slopes. The snow, or rather, lack thereof, was laced with ice patches just waiting to knock me off balance. It didn't help things that there seemed to be another snowboarder or skier constantly in my path making me swerve (and in some cases crash). I guess that's the price you've got to pay for skiing in some of the most beautiful mountains in the world; overused snow and a surplus of people. Despite my petty complaints, I really did have a great time getting some time on the snowboard. New Years found our little troop eating loads of appetizers and drinking champagne in our apartment. That evening, we went to see a little show put on by the ski park that consisted of skiers with torches and a great fireworks show. Other than that, the only really special thing we did was wake everyone up by screaming "bonne année" at the top of

our lungs off our balcony. Luckily, our shouts were met by my cheery replies of "bonne année" and not a grumpy chorus of "maird!"

We returned a few days ago on the 4th of January, and I attended my first day of school following the vacation today. Tomorrow I do not have class because, for the first time in my life, I've got a snow day. It snowed about an inch today, and the school buses announced that the risk of an accident is too high on the icy roads. This is especially good for me, because it gives me more time to pack up all of my things for my big move. I change host families on Wednesday afternoon...let the new adventure begin!

Hope you have all had a great holiday season! Happy New Year all the way from France!



Maggie Gross
In Argentina

Hello all! Well here I am, 4 months into my year on exchange, still wishing time would just slow down for once but making the most of every moment. This has been a really interesting part of the experience as my family here is becoming my family and some of my friends here know me better than people who have watched me grow up. I'm starting off 2009 enjoying my life this summer in Argentina. I can't believe how much I've changed during these past 12 months. 2008 was an intense year, not in a good or bad way, but in that I've learned so much and been introduced to another world I could have never imagined before. The opportunities I've been presented with are once in a lifetime and I'm running with them all.

My mind is evolving every second and I'm finding myself anxious to learn anything and everything. One of the strange side effects to this is the new knowledge of people and the observance of ignorance that I wouldn't have noticed before. It's really interesting to be involved in dinner conversations and hear a remark from someone that isn't meant to be racist or offensive what-so-ever but it's just the fact that they don't know any other way of thinking, they just don't really understand. But that understanding isn't something that can be explained to someone, it needs to be experienced. I've been learning how ignorant I was before by experiencing new things, and being forced to open my mind in situations I never gave a thought to before. It's kind of hard to start noticing these things, if you point them out it tends to just take the conversation to a defensive state, "no, I'm not racist at all, really. It's just that they really are all like this". It's also strange to start noticing how much things like that come up because I noticed it before, but never to this extent, which means I used to be like that. I was sheltered to Napa Valley life. I loved learning about other cultures and ways of living, but it usually came down to my books or classes, only the information I was presented with, not the small details that tend to go un-noticed.

Other than that, I'm already doing math for how I can save up money and when I want to come back. I love the feeling of coming home after I've been away for a few days. I can take off my shoes, through on some pjs, listen to the radio and drink some mate, completely at ease and feeling as comfortable as at my home in California.

The Holidays were interesting. For Christmas, the family came over around 10pm on Christmas Eve and we sat down for a giant dinner (we were 13 or 14 people). I ate wayyy too much as happens at most family gatherings, but the food was delicious! Then at midnight we walked outside as everyone in the city participated in letting off giant fireworks. The whole city was booming and the sky was lit up with many different colors. Then we came back in and opened presents as Papa Noel (my uncle who had on a Santa mask handed out presents to each person). Then we had arroz con leche (rice with milk), which is a cold dish that tastes a lot like Horchata (Mexican drink). It's really good! Anyways, it's a Danish tradition (my host mom is from Denmark) to put an almond in someone's rice and then the person who gets the almond wins a present! It was really fun. Then around 3am I went over to a friend's house, met up with the girls and we headed to the club to go dancing till 7 am! The same thing happened New Years! I ended up getting sick from the combination of way too many sweets and not sleeping at all, but it was really worth it! haha.

As well as my friends from Argentina, I'm becoming really close with a few exchange students. Some of my best friends now are from Sweden, France, Canada and so many more countries. I can't wait to run into them someday while traveling the world and being able to share a cup of coffee with someone who I would have never met had it not been for this program, but someone who I have so much in common with. When exchange students are together we don't sleep, we don't have the time. We can wake up at 7am and stay up till 4 or 5 talking about everything from world philosophies to goals and ambitions to plans to get together in some other country, conversations are never boring. I love being with a group of people 16 to 19 years old and instead of listening to conversations about celebrities or ridiculous drama, every conversation matters. We're talking about how we want to impact the world and how I'm sure we will end up making changes.

As for specifics, the trip to Tierra del Fuego was by far, the most amazing one of my life and I can't wait to go back someday. I then went to Mendoza (the wine region of Argentina) with my host family and my sister's boyfriend. I just got back from a week at the beach with my friend Antonella (my counselor's daughter who was in California

last year) and my friend Christie from California, along with the whole family. Days were spent on the beach, playing guitars and drinking mate. Christie and I started playing catch with his two baseball mitts and a ball, soon we had attracted a good amount of attention and had carved a baseball diamond into the sand. He had a team of 5 or 6 kids and I had the other team as they eagerly wanted to learn to play the exotic, American baseball. We had a blast, "run now. No wait, you have to stop. para para!!" haha. After about half an hour, exhausted, we took a rest as the kids kept on playing.

I'll be going to Mar del Plata (a city on the coast about 2 hours away) for my friend (from France)'s birthday party with a bunch of exchange students which should be really cool. Then to another beach town with my family for two weeks. Then I believe a trip to Cordoba for 5 days with Rotary. Then school starts in March. I can't believe how fast time is passing.

The language is getting a lot better. I love being able to understand things I couldn't before and my friends and family have been so patient with me through the whole process, they've made it so much easier.

I also have been learning to make more Argentine foods and can't wait to teach my friends back home about Empenadas, Asado, Mate, as well as all the different types of dancing.

Saying life is good is an understatement. I'm loving every moment and trying to make the most of every second.

Sending my best to all! Besos y abrazos.