

NEWS FROM OUR OUTBOUNDS – MAY 2008



BRITT CALDER
1/2/08
IN THAILAND

Happy Holidays and Happy New Year to everyone!

So this is my second report now, and hopefully (for everyone's sake) it won't be as long as the last one, but I'm not promising anything. I've been here for 5 months now, just as a reference point.

The weather has actually cooled down a little bit over the past couple days, and I'm really surprised because it has been over 90 F everyday since I've been here, but today is actually quite chilly. It's windy, and I was freezing sitting outside this morning, although I just checked and it's actually only 68 F, but that's basically freezing to me now.

Let's see, around Thanksgiving I went to a nearby province called AngThong for the weekend to visit a friend and Rotary had organized an English Camp for Thai students that all of the exchange students here went and helped with. We mostly just went and played games in English to help the Thai students speak more, but it was fun. That weekend there was also a Thai festival called Loi Krathong that is something about giving thanks and whatnot. They have special things called Krathongs made from banana leaves shaped into a little bowl that you put a candle and incense in, and you light it and float it down the river to symbolically show your troubles floating away. It's really beautiful, thought, because it's nighttime and all the candles are floating down the river.

The next week I went with 7 Thai friends of my host parents way up into the North of Thailand just for a general vacation for about 6 days. We stayed in a little touristy town called Pai about 12 hours away from Bangkok (by bus). It was so gorgeous. We stayed in little bungalows by the river in a valley surrounded by mountains and trees, and after living in Bangkok for so long it was heaven. Also, it was cold, like I needed jackets and scarves and I was still shivering cold. It was actually only about 50 F, but I was freezing. And Bangkok doesn't really have blue skies or stars because of the pollution and whatnot, so it was amazing to see that again too. We went up into the hills and saw various hill tribes while we were there, including the one in which the women wear rings around their necks to make them longer (I promise pictures someday). It was a really awesome trip because I hadn't been anywhere north yet, but I got a cold the first day we were there and I got really bad food poisoning towards the end and had to go to the hospital, but other than that it was great.

Also while I was in the north the King had his 80th birthday (December 5th). That evening, EVERYONE in Thailand wore yellow shirts, and in every city in Thailand people gathered together, sang his special song, and lit yellow candles for him before having Thai dance performances. People are really worried though, because he's had 2 strokes in the past couple months and he's getting old. And none of them like the crown Prince because apparently he's not a very nice guy like the current King, so we're all hoping for good health for the King.

At the end of November my school had this thing called Sport Day that every school in Thailand has. Every school is divided into teams of different colors (I was on the blue team) and they

compete in various sports to get points for their team. Then, people get dressed up in various random outfits (they put me in full Thai dress - transvestites came in to do the makeup and everything) and we went about a half mile away from the school and formed a giant parade and marched back to the school down one of the main roads in Bangkok. I still don't really understand why any of this happened, but it was fairly amusing, and my team won.

Most recently I went to the beach for three days with my class from school because I'm in the art class and they go every year to paint the ocean. Except I didn't have to paint, so I just got to lay on the beach and read and relax. It was wonderful. And the water is warm and just the right temperature for swimming so in the afternoons my friends and I would go into the water. There were girls from 10th, 11th, and 12th grade (I'm in the 11th grade class here) and the last night we were there they did this weird ceremony-ish thing for the 12th grade girls who are done with high school now. They set up a big circle of candles and brought all the 10th and 11th grade girls down at about midnight and made us huddle under blankets in the ring of candles. Then they all went around and tied white pieces of string around our wrists for good luck. It was just a really strange experience because they just kinda woke us up in the middle of the night to do this and I had no idea what was going on the whole time.

For Christmas I went with the other exchangers to a friend's house to hang out together because Thailand doesn't really celebrate Christmas at all. Like they have some decorations up some places, but they don't really know what they're for, so we just decided to have a Christmas together. On New Year's Eve I went with some of the exchangers again to downtown Bangkok where they have a big countdown. Apparently about 10,000 people come to this area for it, and I believe it because there were so, so many people it was impossible to walk because it was so crowded. And actually last year there were 4 or 5 bombs that went off in this area for various political reasons, but this year there weren't any so it's all okay. It was actually really awesome and I'm really glad I went.

As for Thai food...it's still amazing, although I did accidentally order noodles in a broth made of pig blood the other day. I didn't know what I was eating, though I knew it was something that really should not be eaten, and I never will again. Ugh. Other than that I love everything and I'm going to miss it so much, although I also found a Subway the other day and that was probably the best BLT of my life.

I think that's about it for now, and again, feel free to write and I'll get back to you as soon as I can, and Happy New Year!



JOHNNY COLLARD
1/9/08
IN MEXICO

Hello ; So far Mexico has been Amazing. I love it here!

I'm improving my Spanish a lot I have a lot more confidence now when I am talking and I don't get hung up on stupid words that I can't pronounce. I think that the most difficult task for me so far has been the pronunciation of some words and the horrible "rr" gosh I absolutely despise this letter. It is so hard to pronounce.

Also I have tried an array of new foods but the biggest one to mind is a tortilla. Buts it's not just any tortilla it called "Tortilla Mata Marido" It's a big name for a BIG tortilla. Well also I have had the

pleasure of eating every type of chiapanecan food coffee and desserts. During the vacations I fell in love with two things Ponche and marquesote, which are absolutely yummy. Also I tried the dessert rompopo it's yummy too.

On to vacations. My Christmas vacation was wonderful as well as my New Year (2008) and Dia de los Reyes Magos. I spent my vacations living out of my suitcase. It was different but very worthwhile. For the holiday vacations I went to Chiapas, Mexico to visit the other part of my extended host family. During this time I visited Tuxtla and Comitán Chiapas. I went to the zoo in Tuxtla the Center Chiapa de Corso and I went on a boat ride on the local river. Also I went to San Cristobal with my host family and to the Lagos de Montebello, and Uninajab in Comitán. It was a blast I enjoyed it so much!

Well when I came back form vacation or as I thought I had another wonderful surprise. My vacations had been extended for 3 more weeks excluding the past 2 weeks that I spent in Chiapas. I guess this will give me some time to get to know my new host family because sometime soon I will be changing houses. So that should be interesting.

I can believe how fast the time has pasted but all I know right now is that the future awaits and I'm going to take advantage of every minute!



CHRISTINE HAWLEY
1/21/08
IN HUNGARY

First off: 5 months down...6 more to go. I can't believe time is flying by this fast. I have already been to several different countries and have had a lot of crazy adventures.

I keep busy during the week by teaching English to a nice Hungarian lady, teaching a hip-hop/cheer class at a high school, attending folk dancing classes, and of course...making foreign foods with the other exchanges.

At the End of November I had my goodbye performance (like an American prom) with my class and the rest of the 12th classes. We performed "the waltz" and a show dance. Within those times of practicing and preparing I got really close with my classmates and created really good relationships. On December 1st our Rotary had a winter ball and we dressed up really fancy and wine tasted till the early morning. We went home around 3 and we were considered the early birds. In the beginning of December, the Rotary exchanges and I took a weekend trip to Austria. We had a rebound exchange give us a tour and lead us to the entertaining places. After we devoured our Austrian pizza we strolled around and shopped at the Christmas shops. The snow was falling lightly around us and we just enjoyed the atmosphere of the country. As we were heading back, a stampede of 30 men dressed up as Santa's came and swarmed us and gave us a shot of Austrian alcohol for free. It was a bit random but definitely a good memory for Austria.

For Christmas I adapted and enjoyed my experience of the Hungarian customs. We decorated the tree on the night before Christmas and opened presents after "baby Jesus" came and dropped off his presents for us. We had a delicious 6-course meal with the immediate family. After, I went to a midnight church service and enjoyed the Christmas spirit.

The day after Christmas I went to Denmark to visit my friend Kristina Kunst (last year's exchange student). I spent my weeks there going on trips there with her family exploring different cities, making new friends, shopping, and learning to live the Danish way. Her mom taught me how to make really good Danish food and gave me the ingredients to make it for when I got back home. I experienced Kristina's school for a day and hung out with her friends till the midnight hours at "my surprise party". It was defiantly a good 2 weeks.

When I arrived back in Hungary we switched host families. Finally this host family is patient with me and is taking time to teach and speak to me in Hungarian so I have a chance to learn.

I am enjoying myself very much and already have memorable moments that will always stay with me.

I thank you Rotary so much for this opportunity.



JOHNNY COLLARD
1/26/08
IN MEXICO

Hey Everyone How are all of you doing? How is Crescent City?

Well my vacations are ending, and I will start the new school semester this Monday so that should be fun since I haven't seen a lot of my school friends since winter break started!

This past week there have been a lot of visitors from different Rotary clubs in Canada, and including Rotarians from the United States that my Mexico Rotary Club hosted. This week in Merida and in Progreso they have been having a Free Community Health fair in order to help the individuals that don't have regular medical guidance. Well anyway, I had the opportunity to help with one of the stands, one about Tobacco Prevention and another for breast cancer awareness. It went really well, and I felt really confident with the tobacco prevention, thanks to FNL. I also had the chance to talk with a lot of children about the consequences of using tobacco and help them understand that it's not a healthy way to live especially if you have loved ones who care about you so much. Again I felt very prepared and confident talking with the children about this thanks to all the opportunities that I have had with the Boys & Girls Club of the Redwoods. But most of all I want to point out that, I am very thankful for my Rotary exchange and thankful for all the help and support from the Crescent City Rotary Club, because without this I wouldn't have been or be able to communicate with all the wonderful people who live in Mexico

Anyways... At the health fair we had a demonstration of two pig lungs, one affected by tobacco smoke and the other one not, so I had the privilege of explaining effects of tobacco use, to people of all ages and helping them understand the health problems involved with smoking and second hand smoke. I felt really good about this, like I was helping make a difference and that's awesome. Yesterday and today for a good 6 or 7 hours I helped with this event, and right now I

am pretty tired, but I thought that this would be a nice thing to share seeing how it shows how valuable that Rotary has been in the lives of others to help make a difference.

Also, I am doing really well and I can't believe how fast everything has gone, its already January 26, these months flew by really fast. My Spanish is getting better over time, and I can only hope the best for now!!!!

Everything is PERFECT !!!



KATELYNN WILEY
1/30/08
IN CHILE

OK, I apologize. It has been much too long since I sent out my last big email home. I have a lot of updates to give so I hope I have a lot of time to sit here and write this, haha.

Episode IV

As of today I have officially reached my halfway point. It all went by so fast and I have no doubts that the second half will go by even faster. That's something I'm not going to think about though. Why look at the end? It sucks all the fun out of everything.

Well, let's see. It's been much too long since I've sat down to write one of these. A lot has happened. I suppose I'll start out with my Spanish and everyday life.

Before now, this year has been about adaptation. Now that I have worked hard at that for several months I have now begun to enjoy the fruits of my labor. Conversations come more easily, I can truly find my way around town (at least all the parts that I need), and my bonds to those around me have been strengthening immensely, especially in the last few weeks.

When it comes to my Spanish, at times I am disappointed and at other times I am incredibly proud of myself for having come this far in another language. Looking at my Spanish, I know I could have worked harder in the beginning and somewhat regret that I didn't. Some days when nothing seems to click, I kind of just want to go into my room or the computer room and drown myself in English. However, when I'm in the middle of a perfect conversation, breezing my way through it, I am feeling pretty good. Thus, Spanish has become the biggest factor of my emotional state. If my Spanish is doing well, I'm having a good day but if it's in a slump, I'm right there with it.

As far as finding my way around town, it's actually true. I'm not lying. So everyone who knows how directionally challenged I am should be amazed. However, don't get too excited... it's not like I know street names or something crazy like that. I can just find my

way around using landmarks and I know the right colectivos to take. (Colectivos are like cabs on a fixed route).

My favorite part of the last couple months, however, is how close I've been growing to the people around me, starting with the other exchangers. Ever since the trip to the South of Chile I have truly loved the other students sharing this experience with me. The students of Talca have begun to hang out more and more. Last Friday we had an all night shindig at the host house of a German girl named Charly (Charlotte). We stayed up all night watching movies. By the end of the night we'd knocked our way through 5 and had taken a 4am swimming break as well. We quite truthfully did not sleep that night, or most of us, a couple dozed off a little after sun up. We are going to make Talca sweatshirts!!!

I have also been getting closer to students outside of Talca. Several have come in for a few days. It's always a heavily anticipated event when another town's student is coming in. We always do our best to show them around town and make sure they don't leave thinking Talca is a bore. Haha. I plan on visiting up in a city called Curico, home of the Curicrew. Haha. The kids living in Curico are amazingly fun. It should be a good trip if I ever get around to it.

One student in particular that I'm getting closer with is a girl named Meg, who is from Wisconsin. I had been friends with her before, but I mostly spent my free time with Marleen, from Holland. However, Marleen went on a 2-week family vacation and that just seemed like way too long to sit in the house alone so I contacted Meg and we spent some time together. When Marleen went on a second long vacation, I once more I ran to Meg. The result is that I now have two best friends in the exchange program.

Out of all the bonds I'm happy for, above them all is the bond I have formed with my host brother Diego. I hardly ever actually say host before brother in his case. We are closer than I thought was possible, especially considering our rough start. He is very shy. He doesn't like new people very much and it comes off in an unpleasant way. Now he's my best-est buddy. I love spending time with him, usually. He is my brother so we do have the occasional moments where we annoy each other immensely. I could not have ended up with a better random sibling match if I searched the world over (except for my own sister of course). Today is his 12th birthday. He scammed his dad into buying an \$80 Naruto game for the Wii. I'm stoked. Haha.

As far as actual events go there's been the trip south, Christmas, New Years, and a random party in the mountains.

The Rotary trip to the south was one week-long block of fantastic-ness spent with 30 of the most amazing people on the face of this planet. We climbed for 4 hours to the top of a mountain to see the Torres del Paine (three giant towers of rock situated around a lake), we spent hours on a bus entertaining ourselves, we slept in tents while it poured rain outside, we swam in the FREEZING LAKE next to our campsite, we walked aimlessly through a giant mall, we hiked a lot, we saw a glacier break in half, we witnessed winds strong enough to move us if we jumped, we saw an active volcano covered in snow, we talked with tourists (I'm pretty sure we all found someone from our own country. I even

found a Californian who told me she loved Petaluma!!!! :D), We saw wild LLAMAS and PENGUINS, and I bought a llama hat :)!!! It was an amazing trip, truly.

I think one of my favorite things about being with all of the exchangers is that they call me by a nickname. It comes from when my friend's host mom couldn't understand my name and the closest she could get was Kiwi. Now, whenever I'm with an exchanger and they hear me trying to teach my name to a Chilean, they pop up behind me, point to me, and say, "Kiwi!" They even did it to the Rotary adults! I am officially Kiwi and I love it.

Anywho.... Christmas. We celebrated all of Christmas on Christmas Eve. I was with my host mom for this particular holiday. We went over to her boyfriend's mom's house. It was a pleasant night. We had a nice dinner and afterwards Juan and the kids went outside while Ana played Santa and snuck presents up into the room. Fran, the only kid under the age of 10, already doesn't believe in Santa. How sad. :(Oh well, she still thought it was funny that we tried so hard to sneak everything up there. One thing I noticed is that they really don't appreciate their gifts like we do in the US, or at least like in my family. There was no stopping to say thank you and jumps for joy over gifts. It was just, Open, Look, Put aside, and On to the next gift. Haha. On actual Christmas day I actually went out with friends. I thought that was weird, but that seems to be the tradition in Chile... So... When in Rome....

New Years.... as opposed to Christmas, you have to spend New Years with the family in Chile. I spent this holiday at my host dad's house. There were lots of people there, not so different from normal. There are always tons of people at my host dad's house. It was just that this time they were dressed up and there were sequins on the table. One of the family friends on my host dad's side is a rebound exchanger named Claudia who went to Canada for a year. Her host sister was in town so it was fun talking to her. She had actually been an exchanger too, although she had gone to Japan. I can't imagine! Spanish is hard enough, but JAPANESE!?!?! I hung out with Claudia and her host sister Sarah for most of the night. We sang karaoke and laughed at our horrible singing voices and we joked around about who was going to save the swimming children if they drowned since none of the adults were completely sober. We doubled over when one adult told us to go watch the pool for the reason that all the adults had had too much pisco.

Right before midnight everybody put on hats and wigs and grabbed silly string and fake snow. We counted down and at zero everybody hugged each other and said "¡Feliz Año!" Then we were all forced to down a spoonful of unseasoned lentils for good financial luck. Then we got a handful to put in our wallets so that we would get rich. haha.

Once that was over, I went with Claudia and Sarah to a party called Media Luna. It was a 5,000-person party held in a Rodeo stadium. There were 2 DJs and a live band. It quite literally ended when the sun came up. That was a fun night. I spent it dancing with the exchangers. Our friend Dani (a Canadian living in Santiago) was in Talca visiting so it was great getting to spend time with her too. Afterwards, I spent the morning and part of

the afternoon sleeping at Meg's house. We made pancakes and then went back to my host dad's house to swim and take naps.

Another party I went to was kind of similar. It was called Open Colbun. It was in a canyon up in the mountains. There was only one DJ but it was still a pretty big party. I'm not sure how many people were there. Alida, a Dutch student living in Rancagua, was in town for the weekend. Her, Meg, and I rented a bus with some of Charly's friends. Meg forgot the tickets at her house and we had to ask everybody to wait for us so that her host dad could bring them. Hahaha. They were nice about it though. When we got there we rendezvoused with the other Talca exchangers. I was surprised and delighted to find out we have a new student in town! Her name is Sophia and she's from New Zealand. We're trying to figure out what her nickname is so that we can put it on the jacket. (We're making Talca hoodies!!! :D)

Well... I really think that's it. I won't be online for a few weeks starting this Saturday. I'm going on a 15-20 day camping trip down to the south of Chile again, only this time with my host family and all the usual family friends. I am very excited. I hope it's a good trip.

I hope you're all doing well in California! I can honestly not fit everything I have to say in an email so I look forward to trapping you all into long one-way conversations when I get back!!! :D



REBECCA HALE

1/31/08

in ITALY

First of all: Forgive my English.

I could go on for a while apologizing for my lack of correspondence with everyone back home but I think you'd all rather hear what I've been doing over here on the other side of the world instead. That was a long sentence.

I've been here almost five months now and things have been constantly changing, including my living situation. On the 5th of January I moved from a town called Villasanta of about the size of Arcata to a place called Brugherio, which is less of a neighborhood and more of an afterthought of Milan. The underground station is about two steps away from my house and for the first time since I've been here I've finally realized how much of a city this is. As much as I love it here, it will be nice to come home and breathe fresh Humboldt air again.

My new host family is named Bono. There's my host dad (Luca), my host mom (Daniela), my little host sister (Noemi) and the little ankle-biting-indoor-non potty

trained- two-month-old puppy (Macchia, which means "Spot" in Italian). We live in an apartment building owned by my host dad's father so consequently all of the other apartments are filled with Bono's too. The Bono's also have a daughter my age living in Arcata right now named Jessica. I met her for about two seconds when she first arrived at the airport when her English was almost none and my Italian was definitely none. I'm certain we've both learned a bunch since then.

It's weird how much of the language is learned just by hanging out around it. Sometime I'll spend hours just sitting in the kitchen with my host mom letting her talk and asking questions. Because the best thing about learning Italian in Italy: Italians never stop talking and they're always in the kitchen. The kitchen has definitely become my favorite room in the house it's almost more like a living room here, than a food preparation center (is that what it is to us? I don't know).

I'm sure everyone is curious about the food I've been eating but to me it's just become normal. The Italian kitchen has just become normal to me and I know that when I come home I'll need to get used to not having pasta every day. I've been eating a lot and my host family still makes fun of me for not being able to eat as much as them. The Italian stereotype consists of long drawn out meals filled with laughter, wine and good company. But in reality they scarf (is that the correct spelling of scarf in this context? I only have an Italian spellchecker on this computer) down their food in the first ten minutes then the other parts come after.

People really are sweet here but in a different way than we are with our exchange students. I remember at Arcata High the school was always getting the exchange students involved in things. The teachers always paid special attention to them and always asked them to share with us their culture. I remember a girl from Thailand giving a presentation in one of my math classes, the Italian guy talking to us about musical terms in orchestra, but here there's not a lot of time for socialization within the class periods. All of the classes (of a set schedule for everyone) always seem like AP classes the week before the test. The principal actually forbid some classes to take trips because she thinks they can't afford to miss any school. Hopefully I'll be taking a trip in March to Salzburg!

This Sunday Rotary is taking us to Venice for Carnivale. Everyone tells me that it's amazing and the most crowded time of the year. My first host family took me to Venice for the day during the Christmas Vacations, it was the first and only day it's snowed since I've been here. Everyone says that Venice is one of the saddest cities in the world, but I felt nothing but happiness when I was there. My host father got us lost and we found our way to a bookstore owned by a man with five cats. Venice is one of those places that although now it's set up almost only for tourism, when you're there you know you're in the presence of something that used to be great. Like an old beautiful woman.

On that random note, I'll leave you all.

ps. Rotary people: Thank You

ps. Family people: Thank you



EMILY MORRELL-NYOKKA

1/31/08

IN BELGIUM

Hey there Rotary home,

Comment ca va? Tout va bien ici et je peux parler en français un peu! oui!

But now the report in English for all to read.

So I think I have written since I changed families but if not YAY!!! I love my new family and we get on really well. It's just one woman and we are more like friends than anything else. Her daughter is there in our district, Ornella in Crescent City. The last family was a good experience for me and I got through it, but we were just too different and I was not very happy. I think it is not the greatest rule that, here in Belgium if you have a kid go out you have to host, but I love so many other things.

It is pretty cold right now but not as bad as you might think, our winters could fight theirs any day. It hasn't snowed yet but it is supposed to in the next few days. I hope it snows! It is really funny because when ever I say I am from Cali everyone first says "ou la la" and then comments how I must be dying of cold here. When I tell them that there is, in fact, copious amounts of snow in certain parts they can't believe it. Newport Beach and just So Cal in general is just so different from home, you know that, I forget that that is where I am from sometimes.

School has been good these days and I have been making new friends. I can have a conversation in French and when I am doing it I am always just amazed that the words are coming out of my mouth. I am thrilled about the French most of the time because when I talk to people they always say that I speak really well and that I have a wonderful accent, but there are other times. There is one man in my Rotary club here who should not be allowed to have anything to do with the students because all he does is makes us feel bad. I sent out an email asking about some traveling I would like to do and he sent me one back saying that there were some errors and I needed to redo it and send it again, in the beginning he told me that French was not hard and I should have been speaking at a month and a half. He also likes to tell the students that they are fat and if they eat dessert they will be gaining another kilo. Sorry bit of a rant there, but it bothers me.

The weekends have been spent out and about. I go to Brussels a lot and I have been trying to explore the other villes as well. I love them they are just so classic Europe. Sometimes on the train or when I am walking to the bus or whatever it hits me. I am in Europe and I am learning French! I am brave and I am lucky and.... I can't really explain the feeling, but it is crazy.

Well, I guess that is all I have right now but I will report in a while and say hey again. Thank you soo much for this chance and this life I am living right now. it is hard and frustrating and sad but it is also happy, thrilling, and just purely wonderful Breaking up the word wonderful and you have wonder full, full of wonder, that is exchange.



JULIA BRANDL

2/11/08

IN GERMANY

Hello!

I have now been in Germany about five and a half months. It is great here. I love it so much. I have many friends and the language is no longer such a struggle. However school is still quit boring. I still do not take any test or do any homework. For the next two weeks I have "praktikum". Instead of going to school I have to work for free in a business, and then write an essay about my experience. I am doing mine at a radio station that my first host father is the boss of. Today was my first day and it was a lot of fun so far.

After my praktikum I have two more weeks of school and then Easter break! I am very excited for that because then I am going on my Europa Tour. It lasts about three weeks and it is going to be amazing. We are going to be seeing such amazing cities, and all of the other exchange students are so nice.

I changed my host families the first week in January. It was very sad for me to leave my first host family, but my second host family is also very nice. They have two daughters, one is 17 and the other is two. They older daughter takes me to many parties and has introduced me to many new friends, and the younger daughter is really entertaining. The father is a Veterinarian, and the practice is connected to the house. It is so interesting. He said that he is going to take me one day soon with him to work. I am very excited for that. I am also still able to see my first host family regularly. I am still going to school with my first host sister so I see her every morning on the train.

This last weekend the sun finally came out. It was for the first time this winter, kind of warm. My host mom took me on Sunday to Hannover to a castle with a big garden. We walked around in the sunshine and had a great time. Next weekend they want to take me swimming. I am so excited for that. It will be great, but we are really hoping for good weather.

Not too much else has changed. Everyone continuing to be very nice, and i am enjoying my exchange more than ever. Thank you so much for this amazing opportunity!



SARAH SCUDDER

2/19/08

IN ARGENTINA

Wow so I am the worst exchange student ever for not writing. So here I will update you on my life:

I had a wonderful "summer" (Dec. Jan. Feb) just living the life and speaking the language. Travelled to Buenos Aires in December which was really cool to see but I prefer my city Cordoba that is a little more calm and less expensive. After Christmas my host parents went a little crazy strict with all four of us kids because my host sister Trini was leaving for Austria on Jan 23. So my parents were really nervous and we all had to walk very softly to stay out of trouble, but we made it through and Trini went to Austria and everyone is adjusted now including her (she's loving it of course and already working on the weight gain with chocolates that her host grandma makes haha) On Feb. 2nd I went on vacation with my host family (still my first family), we went to Mar Chiquita which is a tiny town next to a big city in the province of Buenos Aires. It's a beautiful calm beach town where we rented a house 3 blocks from the beach. It was super relaxing and I hung out with my host sister Sofi who is almost 17 the whole time we were there. We met some really cool people (locals and other vacationers) and didn't want to return to Cordoba at all by the time it came time to leave. I had my nineteenth birthday in the beach town and it was really calm, just me and my family eating cake on my birthday and my host parents found a bread store that made donuts so we had donuts a few times while we were there too. And they were like real American donuts, so that was pretty cool! We got back to Cordoba on Saturday evening. I haven't been doing much but studying since I got back because I broke my cell phone somehow so I haven't been able to talk to my friends to get together with them yet. But I started a German class that is taught in Spanish, so I'm learning German while still practicing Spanish, it's pretty cool. I'm the youngest person in the class; we are about 15 total students. With one older couple in their 50s and the majority of the class around 25-ish. I've already made friends with a girl named Lorena so I'm loving it already. German is amazingly similar to English, so I understand a lot more than I thought I would. I have to find some other classes to take, maybe Salsa or Tango and also a Spanish class so that I occupy my time because Rotary here lets the over 18 exchange students not go to high school if we can make our own schedule for at least 4 hours a day of some type of activity. So maybe I will also look into a sport. There is a horseback riding place near my house so that would be awesome. We'll see in the next week or two because school starts again in early march so I have to get it all figured out soon!

Thanks for sending those flags, the next Rotary meeting here is in March because they go on summer vacation, so I'll take a flag or two and trade it for one from my host club. I can't remember exactly what the flags are for minus that I am supposed to bring one from my host club back to our club. I'm trying to remember if I can trade them with other exchange students...or if they are more in case I go to a Rotary meeting of a different club...hmm, let me know because I want to do it right!

I also just have to say thank you, thank you, thank you, thank you! Because everyday I am here I realize what an amazing opportunity it was to be able to come here and experience this. There is absolutely no downside to Rotary youth exchange, it is all wonderful. If you could send huge Thanks you's at the next Rotary meeting that would be awesome, because I really am having the time of my life. Thanks a ton. I hope everything is going well in your life and that the sun is shining in Arcata.



ELENO NUNEZ

3/10/08

IN GERMANY

Life is going good. I am loving Germany right as it starts getting better.....yeah...I have four months left in my exchange it's really hard to believe that I have already been gone for 7 months and I am having the time of my life over here. I have done a lot of new things since I last wrote. Well for Christmas my German family and I had a very "traditional" Christmas and it was great! Really interesting to see how the Germans celebrate Christmas.....we even went to church and everything. After Christmas comes New Years now for me New Years isn't that exciting but this year was great because my host family took me to Vienna! I went to Austria which was a great time I saw a lot of the city and it was great we even went to go watch a typical opera! (talk about being European) anyways I didn't understand a word but no one understands the German from Austria it's different than the German from Germany but its still nice.

After New Years life sped up and then down and now it's just shooting upwards and it's getting so much better! I am having a great time here. School' well school is school' still boring as ever but its fun sometimes. It snowed over here and me and my art class built snow men.....it was my first snow man I have ever built so it was good day. My German is coming along great (I'd say) seeing how I understand everything and I can actually answer back and it will be correct! (Grammar and everything) although my English has gotten a bit worse but I am sure it will come back all too quickly. I have done a lot of new things. Ich liebe Deutschland! I can't wait to be able to come back (and I am still in the country) I am right now looking forward to the German tour that my district offers! We are even going to France and Belgium then in April my school and me are going to Paris/Versailles for a field trip!!!(never done that in America) and then in May my host family and me are going camping by Holland and then we are going to go to Luxembourg later in the year! So I am having a wonderful time I am happy to say that I have found good friends that I think are friends for life! Things are getting better and I am enjoying my life now. I hope everyone is having a good time like mine or even better than mine!

Viele grüsse aus Deutschland!!!!



ASHLIN GARBOCCI

3/21/08

IN GERMANY

Hey everyone, I don't have much time but I want you to know that I'm having such a great time right now. We are in Venice right now and tomorrow we leave for Rome. I have seen lots of cool things that I didn't think I would see and took tons of pictures. Did you know that Budapest is actually 2 different cities, Buda and Pest, which are joined together now. And that Venice has over 160 canals and about 120 different islands within the city... all the buildings are very beautiful... plus the pizza and gelato are the best :)... that's it for now...



EMILY MORRELL-NYOKKA

3/24/08

IN BELGIUM

hey there home rotary!

I hope that all is well in your lives and the lives of your loved ones. My life is quite good. I have just been here in Belgium seeing what I can see trying to meet friends along the way. For the past month I have been pretty mellow but I have been doing what I can to help my newbies feel comfy in this new world. Newbies are great! If you are not sure what I am talking about, newbies are the students that arrive in January instead of August and we act as their older siblings. It is so strange to see them in that stage that I was in not so long ago, all lost and sad and excited all together. I have a girl from Brazil and one from Australia, Livia and Lauren.

So now what have I done? I went to the Antonym, the balls of Belgium, they are quite cool and I wanted to go inside but that whole Euro dollar thing is killing me so I was satisfied with the outside. I have been hanging out in Brussels a fair bit and it is really nice just walking around basking in the Europe-ness of it all. I was there the other day for a really cool thing called free hugs. Basically you stand on the street with a sign that says free hugs and anyone that has the desire for one can get one. People are so shy and nervous when it comes to hugging, it's sad; clearly they have not had enough of them.

All is pretty good with host families right now and school is bearable now that I can understand what is going on. I have a few friends at school but the Belg youth is not a very open crowd at all so that can be a bit difficult, the friends I have are great though.

Well that is life I think and if I think of anything else I will let you know. Thank you soooooooooooooooooooooo much for sending me in to this whirlpool I am loving it!!!!



BRITT CALDER

5/8/08

IN THAILAND

Hi everybody!

Sorry for the long delay between emails, but things have been pretty hectic, which is actually quite a good thing. It's so nice to finally feel busy and at home and I always have things to do. I'm going to try to just briefly describe the highlights of my last few months, but I'm sorry if this gets really long....

I got out of school for good on February 15, and I was really happy to not have to wear my uniform anymore, or wake up at 5:30 every morning, but I am looking forward to going and visiting my friends and teachers when school opens again in June. At the same time I also left my third host family for good, which was also really sad because my host mom there was really sweet to me. I am now back with my second host family, which is the same family I stayed with last October, in which I have two young host sisters and my host mom is Japanese. Although I don't spend too much time at home because I'm always going somewhere, I have baked cookies with my sisters a couple times, and they are just so adorable.

As for my travels....

I have had both the Rotary organized bus trips, one in March and one in April. The first one was to the south of Thailand, around the islands and gorgeous beaches and all that. Most of the time it just felt unreal, and I just kept wondering how I ended up in an ad for a tropical paradise vacation. I mean, crystal blue water, white sand, palm trees, the whole nine yards. At one point we stayed on a little non-touristy island, in bungalows right on the beach, and the tide went so far out that you could walk all the way out to other islands nearby. So, so amazing and beautiful. I wish I could send pictures with this, but I don't have them right now. If you're lucky I'll send them later.

As amazing as all of that was, I really enjoyed the northern trip a lot more. There are just a lot more interesting cultures in the north, and beautiful mountains and trees and all that, and a lot less tourists. On the first trip it was only about 26 of us exchange student inbounds, but on this trip all of the Thai students who will be exchangers next year joined us too, and it was really fun getting to know them too. We actually even got to go into Laos for part of a day, which was awesome, and taste snake whiskey, which is just what it sounds like: a bottle of whiskey with a big dead snake in it. Creepy. And we stayed at one really nice resort on the top of a mountain with a tea plantation that probably had the best view I have ever seen. Again, I wish I had pictures.

But probably the highlight of that trip (and definitely even one of the highlights of my year) was the Thai New Year festival (called Songkran). It's April 13-15, although it kinda extends a few days on both sides. We went on the main day, the 13, and here is basically what happens: everybody, and I mean EVERYBODY, is on the streets with

buckets or squirt guns, then there are giant buckets of water places, and everyone just kinda throws water on each other all day. The road is a total traffic jam, and people sit in the back of pickup trucks with buckets of water and pour it on people from there, and everyone is just laughing and having fun. It's crazy. Then some people put giant cubes of ice in their buckets, so the water is freezing cold, and after you're soaking wet it doesn't feel good anymore even though it's 100 degrees out. But it's awesome, and was the most fun I have ever had. I wish I could describe it better, because it was the most amazing day ever. But for those few days there you can't go anywhere without getting wet, because people just stand on the street with water everywhere you go. But it's all good fun.

My most recent adventure was going on a weekend Buddhist meditation retreat, which I am really glad I did, but it was a bit more painful than I expected. Here's a sample day: wake up 3am, chanting and meditation starts at 3:45 am, breakfast 6:30am, 8am second round of meditation, lunch 11am, meditation, rest for one hour around 4pm (you're not allowed to eat after noon), meditation and chanting, and bed around 10:30pm. It's a long day, which wouldn't have been that bad if all the meditation didn't take place on your knees or cross-legged on a hard, wooden floor. Seriously, after the first few hours I couldn't bend my knees or ankles anymore because they were so stiff and sore, and I still have bruises on them. I guess that's part of the point though. You also have to dress in special white clothes, and you're only supposed to speak when necessary. I went with one of my exchange student friends, and we were the only two white people in the whole group of about 400 people. I'm fairly used to that by now, but it was a mighty interesting weekend, although I did learn a lot.

I think this is enough info for now, so hopefully I'll send another one out before I have to go home (ahhh!). Please feel free to write, and I hope everyone is doing well!



ELENO NUNEZ

5/22/08

IN GERMANY

This year has been my best year of my life. This year has changed me so much you guys have no idea how much I am going to miss waking up in the morning and hearing Guten morgen....I am going to go through some serious withdrawal when I get back. I love Germany, my host family, my friends, my school, the language, I love German so much I can't even believe this is the last report, it's not fair! I want to live in Germany. Germany is so wonderful! So let's see what is new with me? Well I have become fluent in German I have found wonderful friends I am in love with my host family. German in every way wonderful! I want to marry my host sister in order to be able to become a member of my host family and live in Germany. I have been traveling more. I have recently been to Paris, Austria, Belgium and Holland and other cities all over Germany, like Aachen and Koblenz and Munich and Dresden and Berlin and well, basically all over Germany. Rotary club, I love you guys so much. You guys gave me this opportunity and it has really opened my eyes to the world to what's really out there and that's the best part. There will always be more out there! I have a lifetime to come back and visit my German

friends and travel all over the world and one lifetime won't be enough it just won't!
Before I left I saw the world through my American eyes and now I see the world through
the eyes of the world! I have met so many people from all over the world. I have done
things I thought I would never be able to do! I love this exchange I love Rotary! Rotary
thank you so much! I can't wait to come back and be Rotex!!! I don't want to go home
but I can't wait for the rafting trip! Rotary weekends rock they really do. I wish the world
was a giant Rotary weekend and then there would be no more international problems
because everyone would be friends!! So I will see you all in August!