

# A little resume of my year in Brockville

**Since I haven't had a chance to come to a meeting after my trip through your lovely Country I have asked Mary Ellen to read this letter to everybody:**

The decision of going on an exchange for a year is probably a big step for anybody. Leaving home for a whole year without seeing your parents and friends is not easy at all. There are probably many different reasons why young people decide to take on this adventure but most of them had this dream already for a long time. Going to another Country to meet new people and to learn about their culture and different lifestyles is something to get very excited about, especially when you think that the country that you live in is the most boring place compared to all other parts of the world (One thing the person will think totally different about, after being away a year.)

However, this topic came to my mind only 3 years ago, when my sister filled out her forms to go to Australia for a year. People asked me if I wanted to do the same thing and I started to think about it on and off over the next little while. Could that be something for me, for the girl who was homesick even if she only visited her cousin for a weekend? Living in a strange family far far away for 365 days?? It just sounded unrealistic to me; I could never do that. But because of my sister I heard more about the Rotary exchange and I listened to reports from people who were away during that time. Everybody talked about what an interesting and wonderful experience that would be, something you would never lose or forget in your whole life. Should it be possible to miss that only for fear of leaving my parents? After my sister left in July of the following year I had exactly 2 months to decide before I had to fill out the papers. I said to myself that I would never get this chance again and that there are so many other people who "survived" it before me that it can't be impossible.

Half a year later my documents arrived here in Brockville and in the middle of August I was on my way to Canada without knowing what to expect.

Now this great year is already over. Don't ask me how that could have happened, it is unbelievable. It seems like yesterday, when Mary Ellen and Ian picked me up at the Airport in Ottawa and brought me home to their apartment right next to the river. Fortunately my English was already good enough so that I could understand the important things they had to tell me. I was probably still very tired and confused because I still couldn't believe that I really did what I did. You are in Canada now, just by yourself with strange people, get that in your head and don't think about home! The good thing was that they kept me busy right away, which made it a lot easier. I spent the last days of Pina's exchange year with her and I got the opportunity to meet John LeClair's big family in Gananoque.

I was glad to meet so many nice people who welcomed me in their country. I still remember sitting on the balcony at Mary Ellen and Ian's place watching the Poker Run on

the mighty St Lawrence River, which I fell in love with immediately. I found the huge ocean liners just amazing.

Then on the first Monday I was introduced to my first host family the Dwojak's that I was to live with for 3 months. On the first day they took me out with their boat and I couldn't believe what a nice area I was going to live in for a whole year. I was feeling much more positive about my future. We spent many weekends on the islands with camping, bonfires and even canoeing. I felt like in paradise. That's probably why the first 3 weeks flew by like it was only one day and suddenly school started. To be honest I was pretty worried about going to a new school where I didn't know anybody and where I was supposed to spend most of my time during this year. On the first day I found some nice people who showed me around and helped me to get used to everything. I was really happy about that and after I joined the basketball team I was kept busy almost every day so that I usually came home late, and since I took school pretty serious at the beginning I still had to do homework and I always went to bed exhausted.

That was why the time at the beginning went by pretty quickly and suddenly I experienced the nicest Fall in my entire life. While I was on my way to Lake Placid for a Rotary weekend I couldn't take my eyes from the beautiful colourful maple trees all around me. During the holidays of Thanksgiving I couldn't stop eating the delicious roast turkey meal and at Halloween I couldn't believe that people decorate their houses that nicely. I enjoyed every day.

In November my first change of host families was scheduled. It's always hard to leave, but I knew another adventure would await me. It was a totally new experience to come to the Whites with 3 very active young girls in a truly historical home on King Street. After I came back from my New York trip at the beginning of November I really settled down in this family and enjoyed the busy lifetime of everybody, which reminded me very much of my own home. Even if you are in another country some things will never change in a family and especially the mother has some sentences that you can find all over the world in all languages. Here is a little example: "If you take something out to play with you have to put it back where it belongs!"

And finally the winter came, one of the reasons I chose Canada as my country. When we went on a little road trip in December to visit Ginette's sister in Wakefield, I got my first taste of really cold weather with temperatures hovering around -30 degrees and I loved it. I went snowshoeing in the woods and later that winter I had an opportunity to go skiing close to Ottawa, which was great, since I love skiing!

The Christmas holidays will always be in my mind as a wonderful time even if it was different from what I was used to, but at least I had snow not like my sister in Australia. It was pretty hard for me to wait until the morning to unwrap my presents, but it was definitely worth it.

In February of the year 2005 the Whites decided to take me to Quebec City for the Carnival, since relatives live close by. I got to know another beautiful province of Canada which gave me a little impression of what it would be like on my cross

Canada tour in July. Driving for 12 hours just for a weekend seems kind of weird in Europe but we had a great time!

In the middle of January I was on my way to the little cute town Lyn outside of Brockville to live at Melcher's Manor. Two boys (since the oldest went to university at that time), a little bird, a young hyper dog, Rene, who I hope everybody has heard of before, and a mother who never had a girl living with her before (probably one reason why we both got pretty close to each other. I will never forget sitting together with her at the kitchen table talking) It was quite a change between these two families. There is one aspect that might make that pretty clear: The kinds of movies I watched with each family during that time were very different. It changed from typical girly movies like Cinderella to historical War movies, where I could offer myself as a good translator from time to time.

Since the boys were my age it didn't take long until I was introduced to their friends, with whom I experienced my first Canadian youth parties. Thank you for that! Another great thing was the trip to Ottawa during March break to visit the oldest son Charles in his residence. I got the opportunity to see most of the campus and I got an impression of what it would be like as a university student, since there is a lot of fun guaranteed besides studying, that's for sure. I went to my first Canadian hockey game which is much rougher than soccer in Europe. It is really too bad that I have 2 more years in "High School" in Germany.

Easter was another occasion during the year that showed me how fast the time went by. The snow melted pretty quickly, when we went for a walk on Charleston Lake, another beautiful place that I had no idea even existed. I remember how clear the air was to that time in spring, way out in the Canadian countryside.

Last but not least I moved to Donna Mc Murtry's house at the end of April. Being with only one other person in a house was something I had to get used to at first, but I realized how many nice advantages it can have, after living with 3 families. It was for both of us a new situation to deal with, since she also had to get used to having a teenager in the house. However it probably couldn't have turned out better than it did. We both had a great time together. I learned a lot from the "wicked stepmother", who has the exact opposite personality and values of what the name implies. We both decided on that "nickname".

Since she volunteered to work in one the of the "Open houses" in Brockville during a weekend in June, I got a chance to see some of the beautiful houses in this area, like the cabin from the famous Fulford house on King street. We also went to the cute little town Merrickville, where we enjoyed the music of a Jerry Lee Luis impersonator on his piano. Since Donna was the last place I stayed at, she organized a wonderful lunch party in her backyard where all of my families were invited, although she didn't know any of the people who came. We spent a beautiful afternoon outside. I really hope that the next exchange student, who comes to Brockville, gets the chance to live at her place.

I also got the opportunity of going sailing on the St Lawrence River, which was just amazing; and as if suddenly everything moved on the water I was invited by Fred Gilbert to go water skiing as well, which I had never done before. Fred, this is especially for you: There was really only one thing I disliked about water skiing, and that was waking up at 6 o'clock in the morning to get ready, but it was definitely worth it! Thank you again.

The cross Canada tour in July was definitely a high light of the year.

I still can't believe how huge this Country is, even if I felt it well during the long hours on the bus. I just want to tell you about the places we stayed at during the tour: Cornwall, Quebec city (we stopped in Montreal for lunch), Ottawa (for Canada Day), Sault Ste. Marie, Nipigon, Winnipeg, Regina (in the middle of the Prairies), Medicine Hat, Calgary (for the first day of the Stampede), Kamloops, Squamish (we spent a day in Whistler), Victoria (we went Whale watching), Vancouver (it became my favorite big city), Kelowna, Invermere (where we swam in the hot springs), Edmonton (for the huge mall), Lloydminster, Saskatoon (we slept in a Saloon), Winnipeg, Thunder Bay, Wawa (I put my feet in the largest fresh water Lake in the world), Sturgeon Falls and back to Cornwall. The only thing I missed on this tour was enough sleep. It was one of the greatest times of my life.

In the end it really doesn't seem like a year at all, although so many things have happened during that time. I haven't only learned about Canada, the Country, the people who live here and the language that they speak, but also about myself as a person. I got to know myself so much better during this year and I think I changed quite a lot, because of the wonderful people I was living with. I learned to handle difficult situations and not to give up on myself; it made me stronger in many different ways. For all of that I want to thank you all as members of the Rotary Club who made that year possible for me.

I am going home now to my country that I also see in a totally different perspective as I mentioned earlier. I never would have thought of Europe of being such an interesting and great place to be, but after meeting so many people who would love to go there some day, I realized that I am pretty lucky to call Germany my home even though I will miss Canada and all my friends here a lot.

Since I kept a journal every day, I will never forget even one day of this amazing year and I hope that I will come back one day. No I don't only hope that, I will make it possible somehow I promise!

Until then I wish everybody the best,

Sincerely,

*Henriette Reinke*

Henriette Reinke, better known as Henni the exchange student from Germany