

Farewell Speech

Good Morning Rotary members of the Castlegar Sunrise Club, Good Morning guests! Thank you for coming to the meeting today and thank you very much for giving me the opportunity to speak here today. It has been a wonderful year with you!

Exactly 318 days ago I arrived in Castlegar. Sitting in the small plane from Vancouver was a little bit scary for me especially when we came closer to Castlegar. Looking out of the window, I saw its gorgeous scenery but there was one problem: the river. My little plane was so low when it flew over the river and I could not see an airport. I was afraid we would land in the river. Luckily, we didn't. I was quite happy about that even though it was sunny weather.

When I finally entered the entrance hall of the airport I was cordially received from Kay, David, and some other people. In spite of my jetlag, I was not tired at all. It was so exciting to see all the new faces. My journey had just begun.

After a couple of days, school began for me and that was one of the major differences this year. It took me a little bit of time to adjust. Instead of fourteen I had only four subjects per semester. My choices were Metal Work, English 12, Communication, and P.E. . I was very excited for the first day. First of all, I had to take a school bus which was new for me. At home, I live ten minutes away from school and school buses like that do not exist. These yellow old- fashioned school buses reminded me of old movies.

The first days in school were interesting. Soon I realized that it would be a relaxing semester for me. I understood most of what my teachers taught and did not have problems orienting in school. My classes were twice as long as I was used to. That was hard at the beginning but I got over it quickly. The next difference was lunch. I had never had a lunch break before; we have two fifteen minute breaks after two lessons at home. Lunch was nice to relax and to discover other places in school. After a while, I discovered the library which was also something new for me. Sitting in the library at lunch was fantastic. I loved the atmosphere there and enjoyed skipping through magazines while eating my lunch. From there on, I spent most of my lunch hours in the library.

The school had nice celebrations like Halloween which I really enjoyed. Upon David's recommendation I dressed up as Goldilocks and the three bears which

was pretty successful. In the afternoon I even went trick or treating and got a lot of candy.

Classes were not too challenging for me and I loved my English classes and the teachers. It was great analyzing short stories, books, and poetry. Besides that, I learned some grammar and improved my essay writing. Surprising for me was most student's lack of oral participation. In Germany in most of the subjects, the oral work is worth more than the written work. So, I was sometimes the only one raising my hand and paying attention in class. My Metal Work class was marvellous. I created some great projects like teeth earrings and a Maple leaf hair clip.

The second semester was good as well but I really felt underchallenged. Due to that reason, I dropped one of my classes to have time to study at my own pace. My classes were English 11, Digital Media, and Foods. My English class was again fantastic and I also loved my Digital Media class where we learned to work with Photoshop and to make and edit movies.

All in all, I really enjoyed my year at Stanley Humphries.

Now about some other differences and similarities. The first time I went to a supermarket I was amazed by the sizes. Instead of 250g margarine, for example, I can get a one kilogram package. A two liter milk carton is something rare in German supermarkets and I would never be able to find a box with forty granola bars at home. The fridges are twice if not three times bigger than ours. The food, however, is not very different. My favourite food here became Kraft Dinner. That might sound strange but I had never had it before and I am an absolute noodle fan. I might have to search the supermarkets in Hannover for it. I also love Maple syrup. At the beginning, it was a little bit strange tasting for me but I got used to it very quickly and the good news is that I can even find different variations of it in Hannover's supermarkets. The third food that became one of my favourites is peanut butter. I had had it before but I did not really like it. Somehow, being here made me love it, especially with jam or bananas. But one thing that really is better in Europe is the candy. I am sorry but nothing can top Lindt or Ritter Sport chocolate and Haribo gummy bears.

At home, my family does not have a car because living in a city with subways, busses, trains, and bicycles it is simply not necessary. I can go almost

everywhere by bike and that is what my family does. I love the independence. So it was new for me at the beginning that most places are only reachable by car. Well, you could go by bike but it would take you a long time. Most families own at least two cars as opposed to one in Germany. Most Germans don't have trucks; they own a sports car like a VW or Audi. But of course not everyone does. Steve Ross organized a bike for me at the end of the year which was fantastic. It was surprising how steep some parts of Columbia Avenue are and how spread out places are. It was a good workout, for sure and I loved the independence.

Castlegar's scenery is absolutely gorgeous. I had never seen a place like it before and it was wonderful for me to be able to spend one year here. I enjoyed living in a small town as opposed to a bigger city. Of course, it is different but in my opinion it is nice for an exchange student. Everyone knows each other and it is more personal. Castlegar was the perfect place for me.

Four host families... First of all, I am very happy that I had more than one host family. I think it would not have been possible for me to stay with only one family the entire year. No family in the world will be like my real family and therefore it would be hard for me to live with another one for too long. Every family is different and it is great to see different perspectives and get to know new people. Every one of them might have some things I like and others I don't, so it is nice to have the change. Thank you to the ones who made me feel at home and let me be part of their family. Not just a guest. It is hard to be a guest for a year and I think it should not be the case. It feels wrong. Some families took me to places and that was wonderful. I had the chance to see Vancouver, Cranbrook, Calgary, Spokane, and even Mexico. Thank you!

Throughout the year I did many different sports. In fall I played volleyball in school followed by being on the basketball team. In winter I skied at Red Mountain and I had an amazing time there. I also cross country skied a little bit but I prefer downhill skiing. Then I had the opportunity to try curling- a sport that was totally new for me. It was quite an experience. Later on, David introduced me to golfing which I had never done before. I realized that it is quite exhausting. Before I had tried it, I always joked about it saying it wasn't a sport at all. Due to a bet, I had to caddy for David and it was not too bad. I even got my picture taken to promote a campaign for caddies.

In May I started swimming with the Aquanauts and it is just wonderful. At the beginning, it was hard for me who had never swum competitively before. Everyone is so nice and helps. The swim meets are also fun. By the way, thank you to all of you who sponsored me for the swim-a-thon. I swam a mile in 26:08 minutes and almost two miles in an hour. I got first in my group. Next week, we have the Survivor's week with extra hard practices. I am looking forward to that. Thank you for making it possible for me to do all these different sports.

Rotary was an eye opening experience for me even though I might not have realized it at the beginning or at some days of the year. I enjoyed attending the meetings and did not want to miss many. It was wonderful to get to know all of you, to listen to different guest speakers, and to hear interesting stories. Throughout the year, I had a few weekends with the other exchange students of this District. Meeting so many young people from different countries was marvellous.

Of course, there were days when I would have preferred to be someplace else. There were some situations I felt uncomfortable and there were some days when I asked myself why I decided to come here. But I am very thankful for these experiences as well as the good ones. It showed me that life is not always easy. To my mind, these experiences might even be more precious because you learn from them. I realized that it is not a matter of course to have the opportunity to go on exchange. I realized how thankful I should be for the life I have. There are thousands of other people who could never imagine a life like mine. They suffer from poverty, injuries, illnesses and many other terrible things. When I came I think I was maybe a little bit arrogant and pessimistic. Throughout the year that changed. In most situations you can see a positive side. You learn from bad experiences and why not make the best of every situation? Life becomes so much more enjoyable. Through Rotary I learned about volunteering. I had never really done it before and was a little bit skeptic. But I tried it. I helped backstage at the Rossland Light Opera, I helped with the make-up for Les Miserable's, and I am volunteer swim coaching. Those experiences showed me that every smile and "thank you" you earn from helping others is far more precious than money. It shows that we can make a difference. One day, a woman came up to me and told me that I had totally inspired her daughter and opened her eyes. I had done a presentation about

Germany in her class and came a couple of times for a visit. These are the things that make you realize that you do something right. Just with that presentation I was able to make a little girl happy. I almost had tears in my eyes.

At the beginning of June I attended the Rotary District Conference in the Tri Cities and I must say that it was one of the highlights of my year. I had the chance to meet incredible people and listen to amazing speeches. It gave me a lot of hope. Yes, hope that everyone, who wants, can help make this world a better place. This single word jumped into my mind on the last day when we did a résumé on our experiences throughout the conference. There was another quote that came into my mind while I was running the marathon for Polio. It is a quote by Konfuzius that my mum wrote in a book of mine a long time ago. "Wherever you go, go with your whole heart". This quote also described my experiences at the conference. There are so many Rotarians who give all their energy to make a difference. And they go there whole-heartedly. It does not work if you do it just with half of it. The Conference taught me about Rotary and its impact. It opened my eyes and I am very honored to be a part of this change. Thank you to all of you and the ones who made it possible for me to experience that.

When I return home, I have to attend school for two more years. I am planning to join the leadership group and tell other students about volunteering. I want to organize events like my school here did to support other children and help them to a better life. Projects like Christmas Child or my Origami Project are just ideas.

When I finished school, I am going to go to university to become an orthodontist. I want to make people, especially children, smile. Nobody should be afraid to smile because of his or her teeth. I might even become a professor at a university to teach young people about orthodontics. I want to focus on cleft palate. One of my dreams is to go on at least one Rotaplast mission as the orthodontist to change children's lives forever. I am also planning to join Rotary as soon as I am old enough and maybe help with the Youth Exchange Program because it is wonderful. Having talked to people from other exchange programs, I would even say that it is one of the best programs existing. It builds

good will and better friendship and brings the countries in this world a little bit closer.

Thank you for welcoming me so friendlily, accepting me, helping me, hosting me and letting me be part of your club and Rotary International. Thank you!

Milena Gramann from Hannover, Germany