



Liz

From Burlington North

to Finland

*Why Did Rotary Send Me Here?*

Cold, hockey, snow, cold, hard language, cold, shy people, is usually the only things that comes to mind when you think of Finland, or at least that's what I thought when I opened my envelope on announcement day. I remember opening that envelope on that February afternoon and just thinking "Why? I am the complete opposite of Finland. Why did Rotary send me here?" that's all that I could think of. I was so confused as to why Rotary had picked this country for me . Now after being in this beautiful country for three months I understand why.

Let's start from the beginning aka the airport, aka tear central. After the crying and hard goodbyes I made my way through the airport with my bright red blazer. Soon after getting through security I met two other Canadian girls going to Finland! They were on the same plane as me and we stuck together through the stop in Iceland (we almost missed our flight to Helsinki whoops) and we got off the plane together ready to start our adventures. Right after we got off the plane and had gathered our luggage we were greeted by Rotarians and then we were put on a bus with the other exchange students to go to language camp.

Language camp was six days of learning Finnish five hours a day and having lectures about Finnish culture, as well as being fed loads and loads of Finnish food. Finnish is an extremely hard language. People think that since it has basically the same alphabet as the English language that it couldn't be that hard WRONG. The Finnish language has 14 different case endings that change for every word and different context but I am trying very hard to learn the language. At the camp we were only served Finnish dishes which took a while to get used to since Finnish food doesn't have that much flavour and is mostly potatoes. The exchange students also had the chance to learn about Finnish culture, our tutors taught us about sauna, the cold, Finnish personalities and how Finns react to certain things. Speaking of sauna ☺ I went in the Finnish way (Finnish way = naked) even though I said I wasn't going to in Canada. It's actually very weird if you go in the sauna with any bathing suit on and most swimming halls do not let you in the sauna if you are wearing anything. This was very awkward at first but once you realize that everyone is naked and no one cares it's so much better. Also fun fact: sauna is actually pronounced sao-nah not sa-na, 'sana' means 'word' in Finnish so everyone in Canada is basically saying "Hey bud, do you want to go in the word?"

After the language camp I moved to a small city named Järvenpää, I am about 25 minutes away from the capital Helsinki and I am there almost every weekend. I lucked out since I live so close to the capital and I go to Finland's second biggest lukio (high school).

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My school is massive and is very modern, everything is glass and they have brand new everything! Life at school was very hard for me the first month since Finnish people are extremely shy and won't approach you first. Once the school knew I was an exchange student everyone stared at me but only a few people spoke to me for the first month. The second month is where I started approaching people (some may call it attacking Finnish people but whatever) the Finns really opened up after I started the conversation. After I did a presentation to my school about Canada and made them laugh (HUGE ACCOMPLISHMENT TO MAKE FINNS LAUGH) more people started coming up to me and I got nicknames like "That crazy Canadian" and "That funny exchange student". I now have many friends in school and I love Finnish people so much.

I also have joined the magazine at school and I write English articles, this club gave me many friends too. After I had made all these friends at school is the moment I realized why I was sent to Finland. If they had sent a shy person here they would not have made as many friends which I have seen with the other exchange students at my school who are too shy to approach people. I also remember Rotary telling me how positive I was but I didn't really understand until my Finnish friends told me how my positivity makes Finns like me since they are very negative.

After being in Finland for three months I have matured a lot and I have discovered many things about myself that I didn't even know existed. I have gained a lot of confidence and I have learned how to be more patient with people. I have developed many skills also such as organization, time management (Finns are very punctual), and public speaking. I would just like to thank Rotary for sending me to Finland. This country is stunning and I love the people. I have grown so much as a person. I have already had the opportunity to travel to Estonia and around Finland and I am going to Lapland next week! Thank you so much Rotary and I can't wait to tell you more about my adventures in Finland.

*Liz*

