

## *Sephora*

### *from Tillsonburg to Australia*



### *You Scratch My Back and I'll Scratch Yours?*

WOW! I have been in Australia for exactly three months. Before leaving, I didn't know what to feel and I definitely didn't know what to expect!

I remember hearing the news that it was a for sure that I was accepted into the exchange program. It feels like that was yesterday but it was actually in early March! Time has flown by so quickly!

My journey began when I left Pearson International Airport in Toronto, Ontario at 8:30pm on August 10<sup>th</sup>. I arrived in Australia at 1:15pm on August 12<sup>th</sup>. I had an interesting journey after a flight delay in

Vancouver and then a layover at the Sydney International Airport. I eventually made it safely to Melbourne! When I got off of the plane, my counsellor and first host dad were waiting for me with a huge banner. The banner said "Welcome to Australia, Sephora". We drove home from the airport and I spent the first night at my counsellor's house. I wasn't really jet-legged because I was so excited but I remember being incredibly tired and being really upset that Robin Williams had just died! My first dinner in Australia was roast lamb and sweet potatoes. That was the first time I had eaten lamb and the first time I actually enjoyed eating sweet potatoes.

I moved to my first host family on my second day and I settled in. I got to tour around Ballarat a bit and I got to see my school and meet some kids in my grade and class. They were all really excited and super friendly. They all seemed very eager to have a Canadian at their school for a whole 11 months! My host parents then took me to the Ballarat Wildlife Park which is a huge animal place where you can pet and look at all different Australian animals. They have massive areas of land inhabited with tame kangaroos. We got to walk around and feed the fuzzy kangaroos. It was absolutely amazing and from there I knew that I was in the right country!

My first full day of school was rather interesting. We went to a yoga ash ram where we did different types of meditation and gardening activities. It was a great first day to get to meet people and actually get to know my classmates. The whole bus ride up, our conversations consisted of "Oh my goodness! You don't have that in Canada!" or "Wow, those are so popular in Canada and I haven't seen any here!" Exchange is all about learning about a new country and that is exactly what I began to do on my first day! So many kids asked me if we actually had yellow school buses or if we actually had our milk in bags. Those simple things in life that we just assume are normal are completely foreign to people here! I find that the most wonderful thing about exchange!

On my first weekend, I went to a small town, about 2 hours North of Ballarat, called Horsham for the first inbound briefing. I got to meet all of the other exchange kids that are in my Rotary district here. It was a lot of fun to meet new people and trade pins for our blazers. We have our next meeting this weekend!

The city that I am in has a population of about 100 000. It is called Ballarat and is located about 1.5 hours from Melbourne. It is in the state of Victoria in the lower west side. Ballarat has five private high school and four government public schools. I go to one of the private schools called Ballarat Queens and Anglican Grammar. There are a lot of touristy things to do in Ballarat because it used to be an old gold mining town in the 1850's. It is really cool to tour around the city and see all of the different old buildings and the history behind it all. There is one place called Sovereign Hill which is a huge area dedicated to teaching people about the history of Ballarat. I went with my third host family and I got to learn more about the city that I have been living in! All of the workers dress up in old fashion clothes and they pretend that they are still in the gold rush era. It is quite marvelous!

My school here is quite different to school in Canada. Their school year runs from February to December because their seasons are opposite to ours. Therefore their summer holidays are in December and January. I am 15 so I was put into year 9. Even though I have already completed grade 9, they decided to put me there so that I wouldn't be in year 11 (in January) when things get serious. The curriculum is similar but also different. There are many things that I have learned that they haven't but then there are things that they have learned that I haven't so it is really hard to compare the two.

The grade 9 year here is based around independents and resourcefulness. We will be living in Melbourne for the next three weeks so that we learn to be independent and learn how to be resourceful! That will be fun!

Overall, the timetable is different as well. Instead of having four subjects each semester, they have the same nine subjects all year. We have five, fifty minute periods a day. The layout of the schools is a little bit similar to ours. They have primary schools that are prep (kindergarten) to year 6. Then they have schools that are year 7 to year 12. My school has a primary and a junior school attached to it on the same campus. So although the school is all on one big campus, we don't really interact with the little kids because they are on the opposite side of the oval (Aussie Rules Football field). My school is a boarding school so there are boarding houses on campus as well. Since I have a friend that boards, I got to have a tour of her boarding house. Most of the boarders are from various places around Australia but a few are international boarders from places like Bali, Papua New Guinea, Thailand and other Asian countries.

The other cool thing about Ballarat Grammar is that we have different houses like in Harry Potter! There are boy houses and girl houses. I am in Cuthbert and the brother house is Robin. All siblings are in the same house as each other and the brothers are in the brothering house! It is a really cool system! We actually use them for sport days, competitions and we have a certain amount of time set aside each day for us to meet with our house and do different activities as a house.

I have travelled a little bit just around Victoria but nowhere too far. I went to my host sister's house who lives in Ocean Grove. It is a small town south of Melbourne that is right on the beach! It was a lovely weekend and I got to go to her friend's Alpaca farm. It was really warm and the weather was great! I have also been to Melbourne a lot. The public transportation here is really good so it makes it really convenient to travel around the state. Melbourne is a little bit smaller than Toronto population wise but seems a lot smaller space wise. There are a lot of things to do there. I went up for a weekend with my current host family! We went to the museum of Melbourne, the State Library Les Miserables exhibition, many shopping malls, the Melbourne Zoo and many other cool places. Melbourne has a big Ferris wheel called the Melbourne Star and it is like the London Eye in England. It is super cool and I got to look out over Melbourne! It was amazing.

So far I am at my third host family out of the five that I will have. I was only at my first one for about six weeks and then at my next one for three weeks. I have been at my current family for almost 8 weeks and I will be with them until New Years. My first family lived in a suburb of Ballarat called Alfredton. It was just me, my host mum and host dad. They have three kids that all went on a Rotary Youth Exchange within the last five years. None of them lived at home while I was there though we did visit them quite a bit. My second family lived about 45 minutes out of Ballarat in a small area called Blampied. It was very pretty there and I participated in a leadership camp whilst there. It was a youth development camp run by the CFA (Country Fire Authority). I got to meet kids from all over the state. They were all very nice and we worked on leadership skills. We did a lot of team building activities and leadership games.

It was four days long but very action packed with a lot of missions! My current host family lives about 15 minutes out of Ballarat. I have three host sisters. One lives in Ballarat, one goes to university in Geelong and the other one lives at home and is in year 10. It is a lot of fun having host sisters because it is like they are your real siblings. It is really cool how I went on exchange and gained family members.

My whole exchange has been a great experience and I have loved every minute of it! It is such a great opportunity to be able to live in Australia for 11 months while I am still only 15! I can't wait to see what my future brings me and how much this exchange will positively impact on my life! I would like to thank my sponsor club; The Rotary Club of Tillsonburg, my two host clubs; The Rotary Club of Wendouree Breakfast and The Rotary Club of Alfredton and my parents who have supported and funded my trip! I am very grateful for this amazing experience!

Live, Laugh, Love

*Sephora*