



Sudu

from Milton
to
Switzerland

“Can you pronounce “Chuchichäschtli?”

It has been over 14 weeks since I have arrived in Switzerland. It just feels like yesterday as I watched my family wave goodbye to me while I made my way through security check all alone. To think that a quarter of my exchange is now over leaves me speechless. The day I arrived in Zurich, is still such a clear memory. I remember the nervousness I felt as I tried to find my way through the airport. The fact that my phone wouldn't connect to the internet made it even worse. Thankfully, I had memorized the appearance of my host family and in an instance, I was greeted with a warm embrace and kind words.

Everyday has been some sort of an adventure. Even the moments when there was nothing planned. The easy access to transportation when you have a GA (Swiss travel card), gives you the chance to feel a sense of independence as you get to travel all around the country. Everything is so close by, there's no need to even drive! In Bern, you can easily get around by tramway, bus, and on foot, but cycling is faster. It seems to be a method of transportation that everyone of all ages love.

I live in a suburb area called Wabern, a town located on the outskirts of Switzerland's capital, Bern. Nearby, there is the Gurten, local mountain of Bern, with a cable-car for the ride up as well as a splendid view for sketching and enjoying the scenery. I cannot forget the Aare, Switzerland's longest flowing river. The Bernese have a special love for it. Even if it's freezing outside, there's the occasional swimmer who is willing to endure the cold currents. Each day, I see the view of the Bundeshaus (House of Parliament) and the well-known church, Münster, as I bike towards school.



I attend an academic level school called Gymnasium Kirchenfeld. Some of my days start before the sun rises and sometimes ends around the time for supper. Most classes, I sit there trying to stay awake. It's difficult to follow the lesson when you don't understand a single word. Even with my prior participation in a four-week German course, it definitely did not prepare me for what I was going to face on a daily basis with education. Despite that, I make the effort to at least pay attention. However, it's sometimes a bit tricky to not doze off. Thankfully, My classmates always make sure that I am aware of what is going on. Having a rebound RYE and as well as previous exchange students in my classes are quite helpful during those moments.

Learning a new language can be tough. Most times, I end up going to bed with a headache after hearing German 24/7. Slowly, I am starting to understand, expect when someone speaks to me in "Swiss German." Yes, Switzerland has their own version of German. Not only that but as well as the numerous dialects all over the cantons. One word Swiss kids seem to be obsessed with is "Chuchichäschtli," or rather kitchen cupboard. It's usually the first thing they ask if I know how to pronounce it. With its three hard 'ch' sounds, this word is almost impossible for foreigners like me -- including High German speakers. Luckily, it's not a word that often comes up in conversations.

I have been told by many that I am courageous for learning German as it's a complicated language with many strict rules. Hopefully, as time goes on, it will easily flow right out of my mouth. Till then, I will continue to use expressions as I fumble over my words.



In the span of time I have been here, I have created countless memories. One of my favourite experiences to look back on is the day off from my intensive German course during the first part of September. The day after, us exchange students had a final performance test, but we didn't let that ruin our time. So, we planned a mini trip to Kandersteg where we rode the rodelbahn. That, I have to say was one crazy adventure. Riding on an Alpine Slide, going full speed, hair in my face - I wish to relive that moment. However, that wasn't the only highlight of that trip. Us North-American RYE students thought it was better if we saved a little bit of cash and hiked down the mountain instead of taking the cable-car. The thing was, we didn't expect the level of steepness and numerous falls. At one point, we just gave up and slid down the hill into a herd of sheep. Despite our grass-stained jeans, painful blisters, and sweat-soaked clothes, we laughed it off. This moment made me realize how unexpected times can create such wonderful memories. I still chuckle every so often whenever I think back to that day.

Each morning, I wake up with the view of Chalet-style homes. As I open my window for a fresh breath of air, I feel a sense of content. Some of my days here I wish for the chance to redo them. Not to change the outcome, but to experience it once more.

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Every single second of my time here, I thank those who have made it possible. What I am currently doing is something that most teenagers my age don't think of. Each day, my friends remind me of how lucky I am for having the chance to live my best life. However, this wouldn't have occurred without the wonderful support I have received from everyone, especially my family and Rotary. Thank you all for what you have done for me and for all the other RYE students.

Till next time, Tchüss!

Liebe,

Sudu