



Olivia

from Woodstock to Peru

“Aunque pase el tiempo, hay palabras, momentos y sentimientos que nunca se olvidan.”

With my final departure not too far away, I try to enjoy each and every day that I have left. Do I really only have thirty-three days left? How is it possible that I’ve experienced so much in only ten months? More importantly, how have ten months passed in what seems the blink of an eye?

Since my last BeaverTale, I’ve had some of the most exciting experiences of my entire exchange. The exchange students in my city hosted a second talent night. The funds are going towards constructing a park for a poor neighbourhood in my city. What was different this time was that we performed with the outbound exchange students from our city. The rehearsals were a lot of fun because they taught us traditional Peruvian dances and songs. Not only did we get to practise with them but also talk about our experience as an exchange student and what to expect in different countries. It was weird to think that not too long ago I was in their position. The night ended up being a great success. I think my favourite part was performing the “Anaconda” (Not by Nicki Manaj). The “Anaconda” is a traditional Peruvian dance, also known as the dance from the Peruvian jungles. We wore very colourful costumes with patterns and jewelry that symbolize Peru.





The first week of March was the trip I had been looking forward to all year. It was the trip to the jungle in Northern Peru. The purpose of this trip was a social project that all the exchange students had been working towards. The money that we had previously raised went towards building a water tower for a small village located right on the Amazon River. The towers and filtration system typically need to be replaced every twenty-five years. When the time came for their old tower to be replaced, the village couldn't afford to build a new one. Until the new one was constructed, the people had limited clean water and sometimes bathed and drank water directly from the Amazon. Many people were getting sick, especially children. It was a special moment when the tower was finally complete, and even more special knowing the community is safer and has access to clean water.



In the afternoons of our trip to the jungle, we would take tours to different villages and travel through the Amazon. The first day we got the chance to visit an island that's used as a conservation sight for monkeys. Everywhere I looked, I saw a different species of monkey. Some of them were very outgoing and would constantly try to play with everyone. I saw one of the smallest species of monkey in the world. The adult size could easily fit in the palm of your hand. They were extremely shy and mostly just watched everyone from the treetops. We took a boat from that island to go fishing. I wasn't sure what for but when they said piranhas, I thought they were joking. Apparently not, as they gave us the chunks of meat we were going to use for bait. I underestimated the speed of a piranha. You

had to be very attentive to your fishing rod because if you didn't, the meat was gone in a few seconds. On my fifth try, I finally caught one. A baby red belly piranha. I carefully took the hook out of its mouth and dropped it back into the water as fast as I could. What a day.

The next day was a crazy day. We went swimming in the Amazon River. To be honest, I'm surprised they let us do that. I was terrified but it was a one chance of a lifetime opportunity. I put a life jacket on and jumped into the water, unknown of what could be lurking below because the water was so murky. I stayed in the water for about ten minutes before I climbed back into the boat and went back to the lodge. That night we went hiking through the jungle (yes, the place with venomous animals and yes, at night). The jungle came alive at night. I could see nothing yet hear all of the animals. We turned off our flashlights and saw fireflies the size of grapes fly above our heads. The view of the sky was beautiful, hundreds of visible stars. It was so surreal. Coming back to find a tarantula in my friend's room was also a very surreal moment. On the last day of the trip, I found the courage to try suri. Suri is a large grub and a popular delicacy in Amazonian cities. I ate one and decided one was enough.



Right now, I'm taking cooking classes. I have a Peruvian cooking class, a baking class and a class where I cook foods from all of South America. I'm really enjoying them and looking forward to cooking for friends and family back home. Once or twice a week, I go and play soccer with exchange students and friends from my first school. It's a lot of fun and made me realize how much I missed playing before. I couldn't have asked for a better host family. Even though they've had some difficult circumstances this year, they never fail to stay positive. Whether it's going out for lunch, the beach, or even having a nice quiet day in the house, I enjoy every moment with them. I know I'm really going to miss them. One day I hope on returning to Peru and having the chance to see them again.

As I come to an end of my last Beavertale and to the end of my year, I would like to say thank you. Thank you to my friends and family both in Canada and in Peru. You have supported me in every situation and have helped me accomplish something that occasionally I thought I couldn't do. Thank you to my wonderful host country of Peru. You offer experiences



that no other country could've given me. I've gotten the chance to learn a new language, culture and the diverse beauty throughout your land. Though you've given me challenges, overcoming them was what made me change and grow as a person. Thank you Rotary for the opportunity that not many get. This year has positively influenced me to continue learning, travelling, helping others and challenging myself. It has been an honour being an ambassador of Rotary and Canada, I hope to encourage more students to do the same. A red blazer that was once empty is now filled with pins, each representing a different person, place and memory.

-Gracias y nos vemos muy pronto!

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