



Swanel

from Mississauga West
to
Taiwan

“It’s the small things that matter.”

You might have already read in every other Beaver Tale about how time goes fast and this is because it is completely true. Over a year ago I anxiously awaited the call to find out if I would go on exchange and now I am a little shy of three months into my exchange. My name is Swanel Bryan officially a citizen of the world. I live in Miaoli County which is a little south of Taipei. To many people this area is very 'country' but I must say I love it!! It is way more intimate than being in the big city, yet it is not secluded where you don't get the opportunity to meet many people. My first Host family is very kind and they also have a daughter that is on exchange in America. So technically I am an only child here, which I'm not used to but I have no problem with it. I attend a Vocational high school, three days per week and a University twice per week; where we focus more on learning about the Taiwanese culture and Language. I do believe I am having a bit of difficulty with learning Mandarin but I still have hope it will get better as time progress. I can honestly say that I feel pretty normal here and I get along with everyone that I cross paths with. It is mind blowing to think how much you can miss if you don't take the time to recognize all the special things that happen on Exchange. To future exchange students I would say go for it and just always have an open mind and it's the small things that matter.

I'm on exchange, so you could say I am an explorer. One evening I was riding home with a friend that lives close to me. While on route we noticed that we missed our right turn. Knowing that, we still decided to continue hoping that eventually we

would make it back on a path that would take us home. It became evident that we were on the road behind our houses so we thought for sure we would be able to make it back following the road. Eventually we were riding for a little while up and down some little hills and suddenly we heard dogs barking and of course I started singing 'who let the dogs out'. At this point my friend was in front laughing at how I always randomly sign songs in relation to what is happening. As we rode up the hill we thought that by the time we made it down we should be on the correct road. Let me tell you, we thought wrong! The dogs bark became louder and louder and by the time I looked ahead on the slope of the hill I noticed that my friend had stopped and there they were about two dogs running towards us. In the moment I didn't even notice if they were big or small dogs all I knew was that they were coming and they were coming fast. I hopped off the seat of my bike without actually hopping off the bike and I wobbled my bike around trying to get back to the top of the hill. To be completely honest the only thing I was thinking about was trying not to get bitten I don't believe my friend behind crossed my mind in the midst of it. I vaguely remember seeing that she had stopped and it was after I began to turn that she did the same. My heart was racing fast and by the time I made it to the top with my friend following close behind I stopped and we started to laugh; with my legs shaking we realized the dogs were no longer after us and immediately my friend commented on how seeing me wobble up the hill was the funniest part of what just happened. For me it was noticing that someone actually 'let the dogs out.' This experience definitely taught us to be more careful because what we didn't notice was going down the slope of the hill took us directly onto someone's property.

You would think that is enough dog chasing experience but for me it's not. Not long ago I had an Exchange function, going to this event I was given a ride so on my way back I took the train. I had to walk twenty minutes home. My walk home is fairly simple, it consists of a left, a right, then another left turn. The only trick is I can make that first left at three different times. This particular day I decided to take the last possible left which means it's the one closest to my house. An important note would be that when making any of these lefts the roads become ridiculously narrow and because it's late and dark I decide to cut across the corner property in order to avoid being on the road with a car. The property is open, it has no gates and is very convenient for my plan. As I approached the statues I noticed there was a little black figure that resembled a dog but because it was still I contemplated if it was a statue as well. My instincts told me to turn around because this might be real after all and so said so done. By the time I made my move to turn around this thing that was still

less than a minute ago moves off charging at me. Immediately, I start to run and by the time I got off the property because the dog was still barking I thought it was still chasing me so, I screamed. It was after this I noticed I was safe and immediately I voice noted my friend that was with me for the previous dog chase because of course this never happens twice.

Other than being chased by dogs I must say Taiwan is a truly amazing county with warm people and amazing food. I will forever be grateful to Rotary for allowing me to be a part of this experience. So far, I have met so many amazing people from so many backgrounds and I know that many of these bonds will forever be able to withstand the distance just because it's the on common experience that we have. 'The ultimate life experience.'

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