



Sudu

from Milton
to
Switzerland

“You’re living your best life”

Sometimes, I wish there was a pause button on life. Without even realizing, I have already reached the halfway mark of my exchange. When I think about home, the one place I truly feel myself is here, in Switzerland.

Looking back, it does not feel as if six months have gone by. However, since I arrived, so much has happened. Some days I don’t even get the chance to sit down and breathe. Any moment I have free, I find something to do. There are so many things to see and places to explore, but it feels as if I do not have enough time to do all. Despite that, I have been able to make the best out of everyday. I live each moment one at a time. Being here has brought me joy that I have never experienced before. Every little thing that has happened, I am thankful for. Even being stuck on the later tram because I was a minute late. Sledding down the Rigi and having painful aches all over my body the next day. Waking up to catch the early train after a late evening out so I can experience the weekly Saturday market in Domodossola, Italy.

In less than two months, I would be all settled in my third and final host family. I have to be honest, it is a bit difficult to pack everything all up and start fresh again in an unfamiliar setting. At first, I was a nervous wreck about changing families. Saying goodbye has always been a challenge for me. However, already the first evening in, I knew my second host family would embrace me with love just like my previous one did.

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Now that it is currently winter, it is a tradition for nearly all Swiss to go skiing. Well for me, coming from Canada, several expect that I'm a pro at skiing, but it's actually the opposite. I may have been in my natural environment as a Canadian, but I can't ski to save my life. I have to say though, I did pretty well despite the fact that four-year-olds were having less trouble

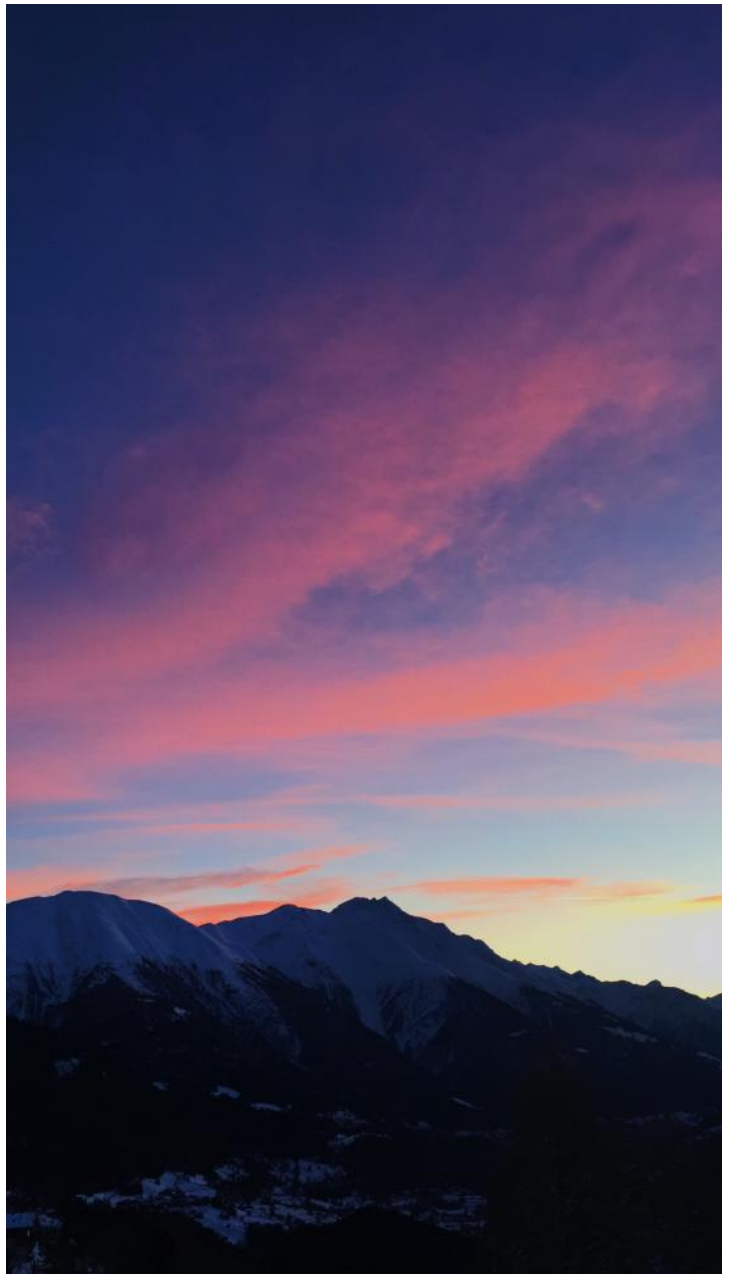
than me.

Winter is also the season of many holidays. Being away from family during these moments were not difficult like I had originally anticipated. The break from school was a blur. I remember being home, celebrating Christmas with my host family and their extended relatives. Next thing I know, we are a couple of hours away in Wallis, celebrating New Years with people I have never met before.



A question I am often asked is, "What is your most favorite thing about Switzerland?" I tend to find it quite difficult to answer as there are numerous things to choose from. Although, I usually reply with the same response, "the mountains." Living and growing in the Great Plains of Ontario, you really don't see such spectacular views. Waking up each morning and getting to see the Alps from my bedroom window is something I have never imagined.

What's even better is when the sun sets and the mountains are coloured in shades of pink and blue. Whenever I see the mountains, I'm like a kid in a candy shop. I am filled with such immense joy, that I can't help but squeal.



Not only is seeing them exciting, but also getting the chance to hike/climb up them. While it may be true that it takes a huge amount of strength, reaching the top makes the struggle all worth it.

One of my most cherished memories, since I have been here, happened not too long ago. As my host family, friends, and I, were making our way home after a fondue night in a little house close to Lauenensee. Every single inch of the evening sky was sparkling. This spectacular view reminded me of my experience in camp Wanakita. The first night we were there, it was the only day where the sky was clear and all you could see were the twinkling stars. I clearly remember being surrounded by the other exchange students as I felt a sense of comfort and love for everything. This exact moment, I was experiencing the same emotions. I never wanted it to end. As my host mother and I chatted, her arm wrapped in mine, a shooting star flies across the sky. Yes, a shooting star. We all were astonished. Right then, I knew I was living the life of my dreams.

Language is still a difficulty at times. I find it easier to be able to comprehend than verbally speak. However, I have been able to understand Swiss German more. At times, my host mother jokes about I will be better at speaking Bern Deutsch (the dialect of canton Bern) than High German. In some cases, it does become tough, but I have learned to accept that everything happens at its own pace. Yes, I have my ups and downs with language, however at the same time, I am learning. Slowly, langsam.

When I am not doing German, you'll often find me on a train heading for another adventure. One day I'll be halfway across the country just to go ice skating with friends.

Something I fondly remember from our welcoming weekend is one of the rebounds mentioning how exhausted we will become. I didn't believe her at first till now. When you are an exchange student, there are many things to discover. You're constantly on the move and some weeks, you barely get 10 hours of rest. Sleepy and happiness are the only two words that can clearly describe the emotions I have felt since my first week here. There was a moment where I was living out of my backpack for quite some time. I would arrive home from a trip and in less than 24 hours, I was already on my next adventure. I honestly am not sure how I survived. Something I usually get told is how jammed packed my daily schedule is. Every day I seem to have one thing or another going on, although that's because I want to make the best out of my time here!

As I bike home daily from school, I cycle along the Aare river. Memories begin to flood my mind as I think back on everything that has happened.

Things seem to happen spontaneously. Not knowing what is ahead may seem quite frightening for some, but for me, it has become a new lifestyle. Being able to make a plan the night before, creates lasting memories that stick with you for the rest of your life. In the time I have been here, one important thing I have realized is, not to have the highest expectations. Having an image of the way things should be, only brings disappointment. Some days it is difficult to make it through the day but looking on the bright side and realizing that there are better moments ahead is what makes everything worth more.

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During our most recent Rotary gathering, we got the chance to meet the newbies who recently arrived in the country late of January. Seeing their expressions full of excitement and curiosity to discover, fondly reminds me of my first month here. The urge to explore is still so present for me. From being an outbound to inbound, and now an oldie, it scares me at times when I realize how quickly everything is going by.

It will be soon a year since country announcement day. My life was forever changed since that day. Looking back, all what I have experienced was with the help of Rotary. Through such an amazing organization, I have been able to meet people and have done things I never imagined myself doing. Deciding to give this exchange a chance was the best choice I have ever made. I remember the first time I saw the youth exchange poster hanging on the bulletin board of my high school office. Filling out all the forms, going through the club and district meetings, the year-long process, leaving behind everything I have ever known, was worth it. I would never trade this life-time opportunity for anything else this world has to offer.



Till next time, Tchüss!

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