



Mac
From
Cambridge
To
Finland

"There are no words to mark the end of a story while you're still living in it."

It's hard to believe that my exchange is nearly over, but as I begin to write my third and final Beavertale, the reality of it becomes all the more daunting, and I am left with copious amounts of memories to reflect upon. To begin, I have had unforgettable experiences since February, as I left behind the long, cold, and dark Finnish winter for the pleasant surprise of a Nordic summer.

My home for the last year, the wondrous city of Turku, has truly woken up as spring arrived. The moment the icon of the city, the River Aura, unfroze was right about the time citizens began to re-explore the city. I was able to enjoy many nature- and walking-related activities, as well as pop-up shops that suddenly appear in the city centre.

I have been very lucky to live so close to the heart of the city, and conveniently right by both the bus and train stations. Besides Turku, I have visited many other cities in Finland including Paimio, Naantali, Helsinki, and Espoo. In the shore city of Naantali, I attended my Rotary District Conference and was able to meet with many exchange students I've gotten to know over the past year for the last time.



In April, I went on a Rotary Tour to Stockholm for a weekend. Sixteen other exchange students from around Finland and I took an overnight cruise to and from Stockholm, where we stayed in a hotel for two nights. Though I had previously been to Stockholm with my first host family back in October, I still had an amazing trip. I got to see tourist sights I previously had not, such as the ABBA Museum and my personal favourite, the Swedish Royal Palace. This was definitely a trip



to remember.

The first of May, or in Finnish, “Vappu,” is a very important day in Finnish culture. The day marks the beginning of spring and hints at a lovely summer to come. The main celebration is actually the eve of Vappu, April 30. All graduated students in Finland, no matter what age, wear their graduation caps—the only acceptable day to wear them after graduation—and enjoy traditional Finnish pastries and drinks. At school, we spent the day viewing live music and entertainment. Then, in the evening, millions of Finns go to their city centres to party and take in the joys of the day. Then comes May 1st, which is a day spent relaxing and enjoying nice meals and quality time with family.

And with May comes the end of the secondary school year. Third-year students have already taken their final exams and have most of the month off until their long-awaited graduation ceremony, while first- and second-year students endure two more weeks of school, an exam week, and then finally their summer vacation. I will miss my school, mostly because of all the friends I have made. I will hopefully see most of them again before I return to Canada in June, but if not, I will cherish our memories together.

I am confident in my basic Finnish skills, which may not seem like much of a feat, but I assure you, it is farther than I ever expected to get with this difficult language. More so, I feel that I know the Finnish way of life, culture, and traditions. There is only one special day that I have yet to experience: Midsummer.

Finland’s Midsummer is somewhat similar to Sweden’s, but they each have their own customs. For example, in Finland, it is not a day of large gatherings and elaborate festivities, but rather a quiet and sentimental day spent, usually at a summer cottage, with your close family. Often served are thin pancakes cooked outside over a fire. I am very lucky that Midsummer falls on June 20th this year and that I am able to experience it before my trip home.

My last day of school is May 29th, which marks the beginning of a very busy weekend. That Friday, I will see my school for the very last time, then go with my school to a church for a special service before saying goodbye to the reason for my student visa. The following Saturday

is the third-year students' graduation. This is not open to everyone, but I will attend for my host sister. In the evening, she has her graduation party, and then on Sunday I will pack for my Eurotour.

Eurotour is definitely something I have been looking forward to for the entirety of my exchange. It is fourteen days long, from June 1st to the 20th. We will start with a very early flight from Helsinki to Munich and will return home by cruise from Germany to Finland. The countries we will be touring are Germany, France, the Netherlands, Belgium, Luxembourg, and finally Germany again.

With that final Rotary tour, it signifies the end of my exchange. After I get back to Finland, I have just under two weeks to enjoy the country that has been my home and spend time and final moments with the people who have made me feel welcome in it.

Truly, I feel as if there are no words to mark the end of a story while you're still living in it. It's still unbelievable to me to be living in such a clearly important memory. There is a quote by an author and poet I very much enjoy that has given me great comfort over this past year:

"The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes."

— Marcel Proust

I'd like to finish this Beavertale by thanking every person, moment of fate, and the numerous decisions that gave me this gift of a year, from the journey to get here to the adventure of discovery I have had here.

All the very best,

Mac Clarke