

Mac

From Cambridge To Finland

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“I have six months' worth of memories that will stay with me forever.”

I’ve been officially over the halfway point for a while, which means many things. Firstly, I have six months’ worth of memories that will stay with me forever and experiences I’ve grown from. Six months of mistakes and triumphs that will define me as a person, and six months spent with new people who mean a lot to me in a country that challenges me to grow. But it also means only five months are left.



Since November, I’ve had a whirlwind of everlasting moments. Shortly after my first Beavertale was posted, I went on a magical trip to Lapland with Rotary. There, I was able to experience all sorts of wonderful winter activities, including skiing, snowshoeing, meeting huskies and reindeer, and seeing the Northern Lights. We also travelled to Rovaniemi, the home of Santa Claus and a well-known tourist destination.

The end of the Lapland Tour marked the end of November, and the start of December, or “Joulukuu,” in Finnish, which directly translates to the month of Christmas. Finland has many wonderful Christmas traditions, such as Christmas markets in the major cities, and various days of National celebration. On December 6th, we had our National Day of Independence. I attended a formal Rotary party with other exchange students, and played the national anthem on piano for everyone.

From December onwards, I continued to learn Finnish. It can be disheartening to still not fully grasp the language, though it’s known to be notoriously difficult. I have picked up much more, and must remember the progress I have made since coming to Finland, and the upcoming progress I’ll make with it in the future.



Christmas was celebrated on the 24th of December, with many families having a formal Christmas dinner in the evening. At this dinner with my first host family, I had many delicious Christmas foods. These included a variety of casseroles, fish dishes, and an assortment of tasty delicacies.

In school, I continue to attend classes and have become very comfortable with the constantly changing schedule and rituals the school holds. I have many friends at school I am now quite close with, and still look forward every day to seeing them and attending classes. Finnish lessons still happen twice a week, and there are five other Rotary Exchange Students in my class, which makes it all the more enjoyable.

A notable activity I had in school was something called Vanhojen Tanssit, which translates to “Old Dances.” This is when second-year students (Finnish high school students aged 17-18) at school participate in rehearsed ballroom dances that they perform in front of their school and families. We started rehearsals in December, and had our actual dance mid-February. I was able to participate, despite being a first year. We had twelve dances in total, and it took just over an hour altogether. This is a very big event in young people’s lives here, something they look forward to since they were young. Many Finns fondly call this “Princess Day.” I found it to be nerve-wracking, but altogether a wonderful experience that I could never forget.



My school also had a very popular event every school in Finland has: a celebration and send-off for the third year students. As the third year students finish their exams and graduate, they have one special day where they dress in hilarious costumes, and decorate various trucks and vehicles with humorous posters or decorations. They then drive around the city in these, as all students and citizens alike wait on sidewalks as the third-year students throw candy from the passing truck. My host sister participated in this.

Unfortunately, Turku (my city in Finland), did not have a very nice winter around Christmas. Snow was scarce, but spirit remained and for the months of January and February, there has been plenty of snow and cold weather. An activity I've enjoyed this winter is walking on the frozen river. Many people enjoy skating or skiing on the river as well.

My Rotary district, 1410, continues to plan events for the exchange students. Soon, I will go to a district ski event, and in April, I will attend the annual district changeover event.

I feel as if time is moving much faster than before, an anomaly I didn't believe to be possible. I have this main goal in the back of my mind for the rest of my exchange, or at least until my next Beavertale: Continue to embrace the culture, life lessons, and the language of course.

Thank you again to my Raisio-Jokilaakso Rotary Club and District 1410, as well as Rotary Cambridge Sunrise and District 7080.

Terveisin,

Mac Clarke