



Exchange student describes Christmas in Brazil

By Chet Greason
STAFF REPORTER

The first thing I do when interviewing Rotary exchange student Yasmin Reinhr, 16, is apologize for the mild weather. Seeing as Yasmin is from Brazil, I assume she was looking forward to experiencing a proper Canadian winter.

"No, no, no!" she exclaims. "This is too cold for me!" She laughs, and explains that though she's getting used to the colder climate, it's 24 degrees in her home city of Brasilia right now.

Yasmin is living in Canada as part of Rotary's student exchange program, which sees students from all over the world travel and experience different cultures. While in Canada, Yasmin will be staying with three different host families. Currently, she's living with Al and Gloria Strathdee and their family. The Strathdees' daughter, Andrea, will be participating in the exchange next year.

Although this is not Yasmin's first time traveling, it is the first time she's travelled alone. "I was nervous on the plane," she says, but once she landed, she was happy to learn a particular Brazilian stereotype regarding Canadians was true. "Canadians are very polite," she says. "You can go outside and feel very safe." She also couldn't help but find it funny when she noticed that, as per the stereotype, a lot of Canadians sport toques, boots, and flannel shirts. "Not all...but some," she laughs. She says Brazilians, like Canadians, are very friendly...maybe even a little more so, which makes sense since Yasmin smiles throughout the entire interview.

"I chose to come to Canada because everybody in Brazil talks good things about it," she says. However, she sometimes misses home, especially the weather and the food. "Our big meal is at lunch, and we eat lots of rice and beans," she says. "Here, you eat a lot of potatoes," which, she says, she likes, but maybe not every day.

According to Yasmin, Brazil and Canada have a lot in common, especially when it comes to how we celebrate the holiday season, although the build-up to Christmas is not as long in Brazil. "The 24th is when our party starts. The whole family gets together...cousins, aunts, uncles...and we start around 8



Rotary exchange student Yasmin Reinhr (second from right) from Brazil, with members of her host family, from left, Billy, Rachel, and Andrea Strathdee. (Greason photo)

p.m."

Yasmin says Brazilian families play games and exchange gifts, enjoying a big meal around 9:30 or 10 p.m. The meal typically consists of turkey, ham, farofa, which is a kind of flour fried in a pan with bacon or banana, and rabanada for dessert, which is a dish similar to french toast.

After midnight, the family can open their gifts, as it's now officially the 25th. However, usually only the kids and the grandparents receive gifts. The party continues until 2:30 or 3

a.m. "When we wake up, we go to another family's house and eat leftovers," she explains.

Although she's noticed Christmas is slightly more commercial in Canada, Brazil still has sales and Santas at the mall. However, the focus remains on spending time with family. Also, Santa is called Papai (Daddy) Noel, and though he still lives at the North Pole and climbs down chimneys, "In Brazil, nobody has a fireplace, so I guess he just comes in through the window," she laughs.

Yasmin says they decorate Christmas trees in Brazil, although never real ones, and homes usually have more than one. Also, much like Canada, siblings often argue over who gets to hang the star on the top of the tree, with mothers suggesting a compromise.

With no fireplace, the stocking-hanging tradition is not usually recognized in Brazil. Also, they don't typically have advent calendars or parades either, although a decked-out Coca-Cola truck winds through the streets of Brasilia every year. Yasmin explains that Coca-Cola is a big employer in her home town.

Although Christmas is similar in Brazil, new year celebrations differ greatly. Yasmin says the new year is usually celebrated on the beach. Though Brasilia is not on the ocean, this time of year sees summer in Brazil, so many Brazilians go on vacation after Christmas. Yasmin says her family makes their way to the ocean for the new year, where revelers participate in a number of traditions, such as jumping seven waves and eating five grapes, keeping the seeds for good luck. They also throw flowers in the ocean as a gift to Iemanjá, the ocean goddess of the Umbanda religion, and make wishes to her for the coming year. "I don't know why," admits Yasmin when asked about the traditions. "A lot of people

don't know why. It's a different religion, but a lot of people do it."

Yasmin has already been to Toronto, Owen Sound, Sarnia, and plans to visit Niagara Falls this week and Ottawa in February. She also hopes to see Montreal at some point before she returns home to Brasilia.

So far, though, she says her trip to Canada, cold weather and all, has definitely been worth it. "It's been amazing," she smiles.



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