

## August Report

Dear Rotarians,

This month was filled with so much activity and excitement! Of course, in the beginning, I was nervous and had millions of questions running through my mind. But, the second I saw my host parents and the country I'd been anticipating to see for seven long months, my nerves were calmed and all of my questions were answered with "it will be okay."

The first city I saw in Sweden was Malmö. It is located very close to the Denmark border and is the third largest city in Sweden. Right away I fell in love with its old, European brick buildings and roads. It fascinates me how these beautiful pieces of history fit in so seamlessly with the modern architecture and overall feel of the city.

Since driving home with my host mom, I felt accepted right away at home. It was an indescribable feeling seeing my family, Höör (my town), and my house in person and not just the pictures I'd practically been studying. I have three "host pets": an adorable black labradoodle named Kajsa, Starkkes Katt who looks just like Garfield, and Katrina a little black cat. The week before school started I spent a lot of time at home and they were nice to have around. My host mom always jokes, "Your best friend is here" whenever Kajsa comes in the room.

But my real best friends are definitely my family. Every night we all hang out in the living room, talk, drink tea, and watch TV movies. My host sister, Lovisa, always gives me good advice and makes the most delicious desserts. She visited Spain for a week after I arrived and brought me back a bracelet. I felt touched that even though I'd only been living with her for two weeks, she thought of me on her vacation. I wore the bracelet on the first day of school for good luck!

I had three weeks in Sweden before school started and my host mom and Rotary Club did everything they could to fill them! Starting my second day, my host mom always had an activity planned for me. We toured a mine and went down to the beach. The water was freezing, especially compared to Galveston! I had my first meeting with Rotary. It went really well! I had to introduce myself to everyone but I haven't given my full presentation yet. There are two other exchange students in my town, Thomas and Kentaro. Two Rotarians took all of us to the animal park (where they both used to work as guides) and told us all about the animals of Scandinavia. Another day, my second host dad (Thomas' current host dad) took us all sailing. We were having fun up on deck and all of a sudden it started to pour down rain! We all took cover down in the boat and eventually the sun came back out. We docked in a small fishing town called Kivik. Once we got off the boat we hiked up a hill and had the most incredible view of the ocean from a cliff!

I have had two Rotary events so far with all of the other exchange students in my district. We are already a family and get together as much as we can! The first time I got to meet everyone was at a crawfish party my host club put together. Because it was in Höör, I got to help prepare the food and decorate. It is Swedish tradition to have crawfish parties the first weekend in August because you can only catch crawfish for a short time starting the first day of August. Once everybody came it was so

much fun! We played games, ate a ton of crawfish, and sang a bunch of traditional Swedish songs. The second time, a few weeks later, we had a canoe/ camping trip. We canoed with a partner all day so it was really good bonding time with whoever was your partner for the day. I was with a Californian girl named Gina. We were the only pair that capsized! How embarrassing! That night, we had a big bon fire and a huge soccer game with everyone. Soccer is so not my forte but it was still fun! I love all of the other students and am so happy to be in this district!

The first day of school I was a little nervous, mostly because I had no clue what to wear to Swedish school. But everything turned out great! I was put in a class with only 15 people so I've gotten to know everyone already. The other kids are super nice and always tell me where to go and help me in class. All of my teachers are really understanding and I can almost follow along in class. I'm in the media program, so I have a lot of journalism/newspaper/research/design classes along with the basics like English, Swedish, and math. The schedules here are different every day of the week so I still don't have it memorized! Also, my school has 5 different buildings but, I'm proud to say, I've only been lost once!

I joined a volleyball team as well. The girls are all super close but they've totally accepted me as a new member of the team! The team isn't quite as advanced as my previous teams in the U.S. but they are very dedicated and the gym is always filled with positive attitudes. My coach is really nice and is a really good trainer. I have practice 3 times a week so it keeps me busy which is good. In the beginning, going to volleyball was so comforting to me because on the court, I felt in place as much as everyone else. It was the one place I knew what I was doing!

Since arriving in Sweden, I've become a pro at riding trains and busses. I ride my bike a lot too but I am definitely not pro! Elementary age kids pass me up every morning on their way to school! Little kids are also better at Swedish than me! I've learned quite a bit since I've gotten here but it is strange being on a train and not knowing what the 5 year old next to you is saying because their vocabulary is too broad! I've eaten a lot of meat and potatoes, and fish and potatoes, and more potatoes! I like the Swedish food and haven't tasted anything crazy yet. Another big thing here is fika. It's essentially a time to socialize, eat some sort of sweet, and drink coffee. Swedes can never get enough potatoes or coffee!

I am so happy with my club, family, and school. I have absolutely loved every minute of my exchange so far.

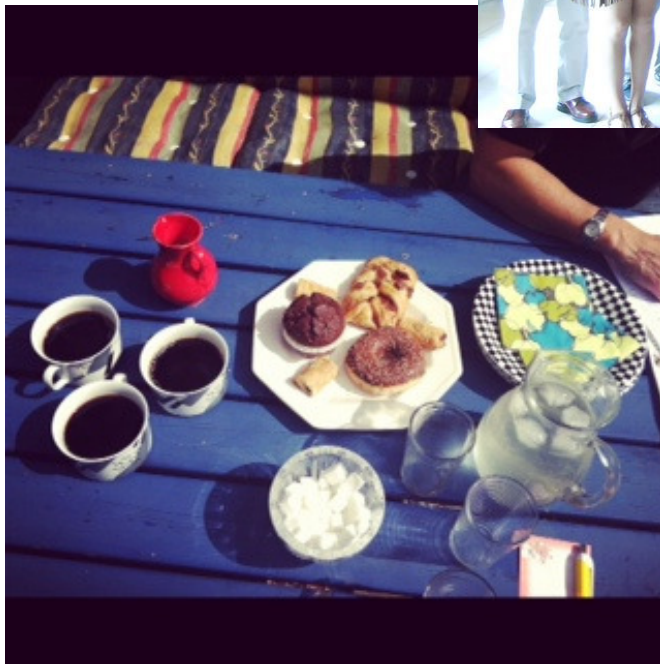
Sarah Otto



Gina and I canoeing (before the flip)



Höör's Rotary Club with Inbounds and Outbounds



Typical "fika" with my host parents