

Hello Skaneateles Rotary members,

My name is Maddie Bohrer and I am currently finishing my second month in Goiania, Brasil! I know most of you are familiar with my family; my brother Calvin and my sister Emma have each visited with you to share their own exchange experiences in Hungary and Japan. So as you can see, Rotary has played a dynamic role in both my siblings and my lives. Without the support of our Skaneateles Rotary, none of us would have been able to partake in the incredible yearlong experience that is youth exchange. So first and foremost, I would like to thank all of you for the many ways you have supported each member of my family.

Before this year, if I had been asked what came to mind when I thought about Brasil, I would reply, "Rio de Janeiro, Copacabana, Carnival, and Christ the Redeemer." I knew absolutely nothing about the culture or the language (which is Portuguese and not Spanish like most people believe). Now after having lived in Goiania for the past two months, I can tell you that Brasil is so much more than just Rio's colorful attractions. The people here are extremely welcoming, and friendly to a fault. Brasil is spelled with an S, and Rio de Janeiro is pronounced (Heo-G-genero).

So far, I have been attending Colegio Millenium Classe and living with an incredible host mother. I was able to meet my host sister and really get to know her just before she set off on her own Rotary exchange to Taiwan. Even though we only spent about two weeks together, we truly connected. I already miss her and am looking forward to the day when

she will come to visit Skaneateles. Just like me, she is having a fantastic time learning the language and exploring her new culture. Because of Rotary, I have formed incredible new relationships, some from the first moment of my arrival. My host mother Regina (pronounced Hegina) is a photographer and one of the coolest people I've ever met. We get along so well, and I can already tell this is a friendship that I will cherish for the rest of my life. As she does not speak English, and my Portuguese still has a ways to go before I would be considered fluent, it was a relief to learn we shared a bridge language: Spanish. Although I cursed its name in high school, I thank God every day for my AP Spanish class! It is serving me well. So I speak Portuguese all day in school and Spanish by night. Some days, my head hurts, but I am so thankful to be developing both of these languages.

Everyone assumed my knowledge of Spanish would help me with my Portuguese. Spanish and Portuguese are indeed similar, but they are also very different. Speaking two languages daily has resulted in me becoming a speaker of Portunhol; an interesting mix of Spanish and Portuguese. I have been so lucky to not only be learning Portuguese but also applying my Spanish skills during my exchange. As for my Portuguese, I am proud to say it is coming along quickly because of the advantage of my Spanish base but my accent is still decidedly "gringa" as my host mother affectionately calls me. When we speak Portuguese, we call it "aula de nao ser gringa", or "class of not being a gringa."

In addition to the shock of a new language, the culture and the people are even more of a change. I have always considered myself a friendly person and would include New Yorkers under that descriptor as well. However, Brazilians put the US to shame in that regard! A great

example of this would be when I attended the birthday party of my host mom's friend. This aforementioned friend, whom, mind you, I had never met before, tackled me with a hug and kisses upon sight. She then proceeded to take time out of her own birthday celebration to introduce me to every single person and dish me up a heaping plateful of homemade food; all the while, managing to keep me wrapped in that hug! How's that for hospitality? I have never felt so welcomed and accepted in my life. The Brazilian people truly are incredible.

Now that you know a little about my exchange, I would like to talk to you about the incredible opportunity that has become available to me. The dream trip, or Nordeste Trip, is a journey of 28 days that explores the northeast of Brasil. The educational goals of this trip are to:

1. Identify cultural and social differences in the northeast
2. Observe and learn geographical differences of the regions visited
- 3 .Contemplate the vast and exotic nature of Brasil
4. Learn and experience the Brazilian history and culture.

I would like to share the following program description with you:

"The Northeast region is well known by its numerous beaches, tropical paradises and several historical and cultural riches! Here is where it all

began, the arrival of colonists and birthplace of Brazilian people. During this trip you'll see what the northeast has to offer, tropical climate, exuberant vegetation on mountain ranges, historical and cultural patrimony, contagious happiness and hospitality of its people, natural wonders, kilometers of beaches, and let's not forget, plenty of sun, warm crystal-clear waters, and lots of music!"

On this trip we will experience the cultures of northeast Brasil, learn traditional dances, both by attending performances and taking lessons. We will explore the natural beauty of Brasil's waterfalls and beaches on horseback, and travel through historic towns and artisanal markets. And so much more!

As you can imagine, I was beyond excited to learn about this incredible exchange opportunity! That is, until I saw the price tag. With all of the incredible experiences offered during this expedition, this trip is not inexpensive. In order to pay for my Rotary exchange, I had to work nearly every day after school of my senior year and the majority of the summer vacation. I lifeguarded for two agencies, babysat for multiple families, and signed on for any odd jobs I could find. I was happy to dedicate this past year to saving every penny because I knew if I wanted to have this exchange experience that it was up to me to make it happen. I am an extremely independent person, so I felt proud that after all this hard work, I was able to pay for Rotary almost entirely by myself. I applied for, and earned both a Rotary and Case Family scholarship.

Despite working so hard however, it is frustrating reality that life is so expensive! I knew I did not have the means to pay for this trip and

neither does my family, with both my other siblings in college. Furthermore, we are not allowed to work while in another country. I was at a loss and not sure what I would do. I resigned myself to the fact that I probably would not be able to go.

As I mentioned, I do not like to ask others to do things for me. However, after much soul searching, I decided that I needed to reach out for help. I guess this is a life lesson on its own; we all need help sometimes in our lives. So I established a Go Fund Me campaign to help raise the funds for this incredible exchange experience. This decision was very hard for me, but I made it knowing that one day, I would pay this kindness forward.

I am amazed to say that thanks to the extreme generosity of our special little village, to date, I have raised almost \$2,000 of the necessary \$3,700 dollar goal! I feel truly blessed to be a part of such a loving and supportive community. Although I have made tremendous progress, I still have quite a ways to go. So I am here tonight (via my mom) to ask you for your help. Every donation is a step closer to my goal and is appreciated immensely. As difficult as it is to ask for support of my campaign, I know it will be so incredibly worth it for this once in a lifetime experience. I plan on paying this forward by documenting and sharing my adventures with everyone, encouraging high school students with the Rotary application process, and helping to support future exchange students as my community has always helped me.

In closing, I want to thank you so much for the many ways you have supported my family, and me. And however you chose to support my

campaign; whether by keeping me in your prayers, sharing my story, or making a contribution to my campaign, I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

I wish you all the very best and I cannot wait to thank you in person upon my return to the USA next summer.

Your Brazilian exchange student,
Maddie Bohrer