

I started October with a trip to Sydney with my new host family. I had planned to take the SAT in Sydney with David before I arrived in Australia, but David went above and beyond to try to make this the best experience of my exchange. And it was. They took me to see My Fair Lady at the Sydney Opera House, we ate on the harbor, we went to the top of the Sydney tower, and went to Taronga Zoo. When we got home, I had about a week left of school holidays and spent most of the week just settling in more with the family. The next weekend we went to Newcastle to drop off my one host sister back at uni and celebrate the birthday of my other host sister. We went out to a lovely dinner, and spent the next day at the beach. It was another great weekend, and I really felt like a member of the family.

The past three weeks I've begun to fall into a pattern of Australian daily life, which has been amazing to see. I've immersed into the school well. Everyone in my year is still very excited to have me be a part of their group, and I've made a couple really good friends. I've still had to deal with a bit of backlash from my first host family, but I've decided to not let them affect me and to continue on having a great time on my exchange. Because my last host father is a member of rotary, I haven't been able to go to many meetings. But I did get to go when our District Governor came to visit, and I got to present to my Rotary club about me and my life in Rochester last week.

I've also been given the chance to experience a few cultural events. A couple weeks ago, my host family and I played "Bush Croquet". The only way I can describe it is as really intense outdoor putt putt. We played on a friend's lavender farm, so we would have to hit the croquet over bushes, around trees, through puddles; and it was so much fun. I was able to get a bit of beginner's luck and made it into the grand final, where I came last. But everyone thought it was



so great that the silly American could play so well. They have a deal that whoever wins the croquet game has to host the game next year so I had quite a few people cheering me on in hopes of coming to Rochester.

I've also experienced a bit of culture shock this Halloween, in the fact that no one celebrates it. My host sisters didn't even know what date Halloween was. So I took responsibility to share a bit of my own culture with them. We found a Halloween Festival at a town called Lithgow about an hour away and went last Saturday for the evening. My host parents and I didn't really have costumes so we just dressed crazy and walked around the festival. They had good music, food, and games; and even tried to break the world record for the most number of people doing Michael Jackson's Thriller dance.

My host father has also taken me to some of the hidden beauties in Rylstone. We've gone on quite a few bushwalks to different places. I've hiked to see some Aboriginal cave paintings, the top of a mountains to look over a valley, and from one end of a swamp to the other.

I've really connected with this family and feel like a member, so it's going to be hard to leave them, but they are only a 20 minute walk away from my next host family and promise to meet up, at least so I can see their dogs.





Harbor Bridge at night.





Sydney Opera House at night.







Sydney from atop the Sydney Tower







Sydney skyline from the zoo bird show.





Newcastle beach







Lavender Farm where I played bush croquet.







David and I looking over Dunns Swamp.







Capertree Valley.

