

I started off December jumping right into the Christmas spirit! We held our annual Rotary Christmas Carnival at the Show Ground right in Rylstone. We raffled off 20 fresh hams, had a bbq, sang carols, and even had Santa come with his sleigh and give candy to all the children. In total, we estimated about 80 people came throughout the day. This number was apparently low to previous years, but I still thought it was really incredible for a town so small.

Due to the low numbers, we had a bit of leftover food. I gave a ham to my host family, which they are considering as my pay, and then had the rest given to me. My principle, and future host father, decided that to get rid of the food that I would just be in charge of setting up a barbeque at school the next day. I wasn't too sure about all of that but I enlisted a few of my friends to help and we had a really fun time doing it all. We didn't sell much considering people didn't have much notice, so we went over to our hall where our peers were performing their rendition of Hairspray and gave everyone free food which was much appreciated by all. I was then able to watch the next performance of Hairspray and support a couple of my friends who were still in it. I also sold drinks during the intermission to raise money for my year's formal at the end of 2017. It was surprisingly good for such a small school and I was really proud of my two friends who were Corny Collins, the host of the show, and Edna Turnblad, the mother of the main character.

I also got into the Christmas spirit at school. My entire year came together to decorate our common room. My friend brought in a tree and some lights. We all then decorated our own bauble to put on the tree. We made a paper star and a paper chain that reached around the entire room as well. It was the first time that everyone in my year did something together which was really incredible.

My school has a couple types of incentives to try to encourage students to prioritize their school work. Four times a year, they host a merit presentation where students receive awards for effort and high achievement. And at the end of the year, they host a presentation ceremony where students receive trophies for their achievements and the best students get scholarships or money. I had the opportunity to see both of these ceremonies this month. Members of the community donate money and come in to present awards. Between the students, teachers, family, and community members, our school hall was packed. They do these presentation awards for every year. I was given the opportunity to represent Rotary and present a few awards at the Rylstone Public School ceremony. This consisted of students from Kindergarten through year 7. The other type of incentive is their privilege excursion. This year it was a trip to a water park in Sydney, Wet'n'Wild. I was able to go on the excursion even though I wasn't at school the entire year but

it was so much fun. Only four other people from my year went on the trip, but it happened to be my four of my best friends and we had the best day together.

My counselor, David, and I also went to a Rotary meeting in another town, Mudgee, about 45 minutes away. David is the YEO for Belgium and France, and the two students going to those countries are both being sponsored by Mudgee clubs. The Mudgee Sunrise club held a final event for Jasmine, the girl going to France, before she left. We went to watch her get presented with her blazer and give her goodbye speech. It was even worth the 5 am start.

That weekend my host family and I went to Penrith, a suburb of Sydney, to do our Christmas shopping. While it was just shopping in a mall, which doesn't sound too exciting, it was the funniest thing to watch a group of country folk in amongst the Christmas crowd. My host parents would scootch over to the side of the walkway to let people pass. And while I didn't think it was that busy, our local Eastview mall gets busier, they couldn't comprehend the number of people in the mall on that day. It's something I wouldn't have even noticed but for them, it was just so much.

I also got involved at school with a dance program the past few months. On the 17th, I had my performance. I did three dances with little kids who had just started dancing. My dance teacher also brought a couple of her dance students who had been dancing for their lives which was really amazing for all my little students to see the level of dance they could achieve. While it wasn't the level of dance I knew, I still had a lot of fun being back in the performance atmosphere.

We also had a couple Christmas parties this month. In the beginning of the month our neighbors, the Prices', hosted a street party. The Prices own the local garage so they invited everyone who works for them and the entire street. They catered the party and just had a great night outside. I also had our Rotary Christmas party, where the members chose the executive committee and then had dinner with the club and everyone's family. The last Christmas party was with my host brother's Scouts club, Venturers. His group leaders invited me as well. They had a beautiful three course dinner for us and then surprised me with a birthday cake. They even gave me the same Venturers shirt they gave all the other scout members.

As we headed into the heat of summer, I finished off the year of school, excited for my 5 week summer holiday. To celebrate, my host family took me on my first camping trip. They took me to Dunns Swamp where we went on a couple hikes as a family, slept under the stars, and played cricket in the street. It was much better than I could have ever imagined, mostly due to my host mother's beautiful cooking who didn't let anything slow her down from making some

beautiful meals. She made us stir-fry, fajitas, roasted bananas, all things I wouldn't have thought to be camping food. The only annoying part was the thousands of flies that surrounded us at all times.

I've really bonded with my host family. My host parents are getting married in September next year, so I've been teaching them how to waltz for their first dance. They've picked it up quite quickly for never having danced before. I had a girls day with my host mom in a neighboring town Bathurst. We went shopping together, and had a lunch date. My host parents also brought me and my host brother to Mudgee to drive around and look at everyone's christmas decorations, a tradition for the family. My host mother and I also went for a drive to a very run down town Glen Davis, just for the beautiful views.

I also had my Australian birthday this month. My host mother made the two of us breakfast in the morning. I then went out to lunch at our local Yum Cha with my best friend. The two of us then just walked around the town and went down to the river and had ice cream. That night David and his family had invited me and my current host family over for dinner. I knew something was up because they aren't ones to do anything small. When we arrived the backyard was decorated with a mix of American and Australian themed items and all my friends, family, teachers, and rotarians jumped out of their garage. David had a giant spit roast and made so much food. David also contacted my family back home for all the most embarrassing photos they had and made a slideshow which he projected outside. It was incredible the number of people who came out to celebrate with me and how generous they were with their presents.

A few days later I also had an Australian Christmas. I was able to spend the entire day outside, and I don't think I've ever sweat so much on Christmas before. I was woken up by my host brother, Brody, playing Christmas carols on his sax at 7 am. We all opened our stocking and presents then had a 'small' fruit platter for breakfast. I spent the rest of the morning outside with my host sister, Tearne, who came home for Christmas, and then went down to the river to take the dogs for a swim with my host brother, James. Tearne and Brody then went to their mom's for Christmas lunch, while my host parents, Buster and Penny, James and I had Christmas dinner at home. My host mom made a roast chicken with stuffing, roast pork, ham, roast vegetables, and fruit cake. Then we all headed off to Buster's mom's house for Christmas dinner and dessert, as if we could eat any more!

The next day, I went to David's house to do another Christmas celebration with his family. We played a few lawn games, made pizzas with all of their leftovers, and watched Sully on the projector outside. Being the incredible people they are, they got me a few items for my

Ramble around Australia and a trip to Sydney with them for New Years. I will include details of New Years in January's report.

To finish off December, my entire host family went on a trip to go through a beautiful crystal cave that is a part of Jenolan Caves. It was the first time we had done anything as an entire family and the caves were absolutely beautiful.