



Darren

from

Mississauga

to

Germany

“Koelle Alaaf!”

Guten Tag!

It’s absolutely amazing what 6 months in a new country can do. The time here has flown on by, and I looking back, I realize how well I have embraced my new life here in Germany. I had so many misconceptions about Germany before coming here, but now I love being a part of such an amazing, vibrant and friendly culture. December and January did not really bring any special trips like my first portion of the year, but I think it was really nice to be able to see more of the region where I live, spending even more time with the locals, and being a little bit more independent. Unfortunately, since writing my last beaver tale, I did have to say goodbye to my first host family, the Kleins.

I spent the Christmas holidays with the Kleins, and it was absolutely amazing. I sang in the choir of my small town during the Christmas Eve Mass, and then we went home and had a nice meal with the family, as well as exchanging gifts. It was a nice time, and I really felt like a part of the family. The meal was absolutely delicious, and a lot of the meat was meat from cows that were on the family farm. We got together with some of the extended family of my host parents over the next few days, and I spent some time in Bochum, a city in the north of my province with my host aunt and her family. It was an amazing time, but I couldn’t help thinking about home. Christmas was definitely one of the most difficult times of my exchange year.

In the new school year, I changed host families, and getting to know them has been so nice. The Mueller family have welcomed me so nicely into their home. They

have two sons who are both in university in cities a few hours from here, but I have gotten to know them as well. It's a very active family, and for now we go to the gym together on the weekends, but in the summer they plan to take me on hikes and bike tours of the area that I am looking forward to a lot. In January I also started going to hang out with my friends from school a lot more often, and it feels so normal. It's crazy to think that I would ever find living in a new country normal, yet here I am. In terms of the language, German comes naturally to me, and I go weeks on end without relying on any English. It feels so good to be able to communicate effectively with my friends, and since I have gotten better at the language, my friends definitely like talking to me more, and they show more of an interest in my Canadian life as well. They always ask me about what life is like in Canada, and a lot of them hope to visit me one day.

One of the most amazing experiences that I've had here in Germany has been Carnival. I spent the time in some of the smaller cities around me like Gemuend and Bad Muenstereifel, and on the last day, I went to Cologne with some of the other exchange students. Cologne has one of the biggest Carnival celebrations in all of Europe, and it was such an amazing experience. I cannot express with words how much fun this festival was, and how much closer I feel to the German culture since then. Of course since people speak a special dialect of German just for Carnival it was a little bit tough to understand, but my host parents made a huge effort to help me understand, and I absolutely love the carnival atmosphere. It kind of speaks to the work and party atmosphere here in Germany. When Carnival comes, people party hard.

I can't believe that I am already halfway through the year. I know that from now on, my exchange will go by at the speed of light. I already feel nostalgic about the days from the beginning of my exchange, spending afternoon after afternoon on the farm. It reminds me to live each day of my exchange like the last one, because after a few more months it will be over. I can't wait to see what the rest of my exchange will bring, but at the same time I know with every passing day I am one day closer to leaving the country that I have grown to love so much. Throughout all of the highs and lows so far, being in Germany has been such an amazing experience and I feel so lucky to be a part of this.

Auf Wiedersehen!

-Darren