



# Darren

from

Mississauga

to

Germany

## *“Fremd to Friend (Foreign to Friend)”*

If you had told me at the beginning of this year that I would fear leaving Germany more than I had feared leaving Canada in the first place, I wouldn't have believed you. Yet here I am and I can't believe I will soon be leaving behind my friends and family to go back to my friends and family. It's crazy to think that the memories that I have this year will soon be all I have left from my year in Germany.

Now as the time winds down, more and more people keep asking me when I am going home, and if I'm looking forward to it. Honestly, I have never been more emotionally conflicted in my life. I always knew that I would be going home eventually, and that has been what's been preventing me from being homesick all the time. I have been taking comfort in the fact that Germany is my reality for now, but I won't have that forever, so I have to enjoy it while I can. Now as my time here slowly runs out, this is the very thing I'm starting to fear. When I was scared, I knew I would always come back eventually to Canada. But now that I don't want to go home, it's even scarier not knowing when I will be coming back to the friends that I have made here.

I think that the last few months of exchange are undoubtedly the best ones, and that makes it even more difficult to think about leaving. You speak the language, you have a great group of friends, and since you speak the language better you can get along better with your host families. I have seen so much of the world this year on exchange, and the people I travelled with have become a new family to me. Seeing Germany, France, Switzerland, Austria, Czech Republic, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg with the other exchange students was truly a life changing experience. I remember during the big trip through Germany, travelling on a train up the side of a mountain, and taking another lift to the highest peak in Germany. I stood there, feeling quite literally on top of the world, and I knew that this has been the best

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year of my life. I've also been on a few trips with my friends from school, to Paris and to London. Running through London to catch up with the class after they left the restaurant without us was definitely interesting. Fortunately we made it to the London Eye right on time to see it light up, thanks to a bit of luck on the metro and the kindness of strangers. I get that being in high places and reflecting on my life seems to be a common theme with me, but standing on top of a lookout over London with your best friends, who you feel so close to despite knowing less than a year is an absolutely indescribable feeling. Germany has gone from being a foreign land to a home for me, and I can only think about it and be thankful.

I moved to my third host family right after my trip through Germany, and the Schmitz family has been so nice to me. Here I have two host sisters, which is nice since I've only ever had brothers. One of them was also an exchange student in Mexico, and is going to do another exchange through her university to Brazil next semester. I've visited her with my host parents at her university in Muenster as well, which was really beautiful. I also went to a few classes with her, and I shocked myself at how much I could understand. Although I have just over a month left, I know that I will be learning right until I get on the plane home. I couldn't be more thankful for what Rotary has done for me, and I can't wait to share even more stories when I come home.

Auf Wiedersehen,

Der Deutscher-Kanadier

*-Darren*