



# Graham

from Mississauga West  
to  
Czech Republic

Hello all, it's been a few months now since my last BeaverTale and so much has happened in the meantime. Everything is still going very well, and I have made so much progress with my understanding of language and way of life here, as well as experiencing so many new and exciting things.

December:

December was a month of new things, there are many new and interesting traditions that the Czechs have for the holiday season. The first of which was a visit from Saint Nicholas on the 5<sup>th</sup>. He came along with some devils and an angel to make sure that all the little kids were behaving well, and he gave out some gifts for the kids who were good and promised to be for the next year. Some other of my favourites are the Golden Pig and the Christmas Carp, the Golden Pig is an old story that has confusing rules (everyone has their own rules) but the most common belief and the rules that I followed were that if you don't eat any meat until dinner then you will see a golden pig in the evening. Some people take it a step further and say that to see the golden pig you can't eat anything for the whole day, I was originally planning on using these rules, but I couldn't resist the Christmas cookies. It all ended up working out in the end because I did see the golden pig and it was definitely worth it to see!



The next tradition, one that I had heard about before coming here, is the Christmas Carp.



In summary the carp is the main dish on dinner, very similar to our turkey on Thanksgiving, where you have soup and other assorted themed dishes for days afterwards. But the main dish on Christmas Eve (which is just Christmas here, it is celebrated on the 24th because the 25th is more for singing carols and celebrating the birth of Jesus) is carp soup, carp fillets, and potato salad. It was a very special meal; we celebrated at my host family's cottage along with their extended family, so it was a full house. That evening we were paid a visit by Jesisek or baby Jesus who brought everyone lots of presents, and the next morning Santa came as well.





Before we went on our Christmas break there was a “Christmas academy” which was a performance by the students and included many great performances such as traditional singing and dancing as well as an excellent performance by our school’s choir. I may be a little biased but if I had to choose one performance that was the best it would be mine. Two weeks before the date of the show a group of girls from the class above mine who were in charge of the final act, which is usually silly to get everyone in a good mood before the holidays, came to me and asked me to help them out, so of course I said yes without knowing what they had in store for me.



Our final performance ended up being a rendition of the song “Let it go” from the movie Frozen with me dressed as Elsa, we also had some other acts as well such as “what does the fox say” and a conga line at the very end. Overall, it was a fun experience and definitely something that I’ll remember for a long time. December also had the second gathering of all the exchange students; we all met in Prague for a weekend. It was a very nice weekend with many fun activities and a tour of the beautiful city, and of course it was very nice to catch up with everyone again.

January:

January was another month of fun; it started with a bang. I met with some of my schoolmates on New Years and we all had a great time and got to see all the fireworks which was a really amazing experience. Another tradition that happens around New Years is the three kings. It is a tradition that involves young children dressing up as the three kings; Kašpar, Melichar, Baltazar. They then go around to all the houses and

sing a carol; in return they receive some gifts like money or sweets. It is supposed to be like a charity event, and it can be good for getting the community together and spreading cheer in the new year. A few days later, the town where I am staying Lužice had their annual ball where people dressed in traditional outfits known as Kroje. There was a lot of traditional dancing which was fun to see especially since some of my friends from my class were participating.



On the 14th of January my host brother Tobiaš had his birthday, which was also a lot of fun and everyone had a good time drinking apple juice and eating my new favourite cake called Medovnik.



The next big event in January was another Rotary event in a city called Třebíč. It is well known for its two UNESCO heritage sites as well as its many other historical sites. We were there for a weekend, on the first day we had a tour of the city and had some time to practice for the talent show on the second day.

Speaking of which, I was in a group with the other Canadian exchange students as well as a Ukrainian student and we performed The Hockey Song by Stomping Tom Connors.



We unfortunately didn't bring home the title of best talent show performance, but we definitely will at the end of year district conference!

And the last notable thing for January was that my classmates and I got our first half reports back, I surprisingly did much better than I expected to. I was one of seven students from my class who had a higher than a two average in all of my classes (the grading system here is on a 1-5 scale with one being the best and a five being a fail). Also, it was really cool to see that they had my hometown on my report; it reminded me of how far I've come not only as an exchange student but also as a person.

February:

So far February is turning out to be another fantastic month, a lot has happened in the short time it's been so far. But to begin the month we had a visit from other foreign students from India and Indonesia, they gave some amazing presentations to my class about their countries. It was really nice to hear about more countries and be able to relate to their situations with living in another country. The week of my writing this report we have a week off school so many of my friends from my class are going all over and I am hearing lots of fun stories.



None compared to mine though as this week I am in Italy for a week of skiing in the Dolomites. So far it has definitely been one of my favourite weeks of the exchange. We have done lots of skiing and have eaten even more incredible food.



Just this evening I had my first authentic Italian pizza, and it was certainly incredible.

In fact, I got a picture with the chef, and I made to sure to thank him for making such a delicious meal.

I am really looking forward to the rest of the week here and also the upcoming ball that my school is having. Unfortunately, there won't be a king this time so I won't be able to win it again but I'll make sure to have fun anyways because I'll be a part of the midnight surprise where a group of students act



a scene at midnight and it will include a lot of singing and dancing. In my next report I'll make sure to let you all know how it went, but I'm sure it will be great and very memorable for sure. Lastly, I have come to an agreement to do presentations about Canada for the local library with the first one being on the 5th of March, it will be called "Conversations about Canada with Graham Monks" and I am really looking forward to giving these talks.



**Conclusion:**

The past three months have definitely been some of the best so far, I've made so many new friends and memories that I won't soon forget. I'm really looking forward to the rest of my exchange, but it feels like it will be over before I know it, which will definitely be difficult to accept but it will stay as a great memory for life. So once again a huge thank you to everyone who made this possible for me it really means the world to me.

*Graham*

