



Katie
from
Georgetown
to
Brazil

“Falling in Love All Over”

This is the second Beaver Tale I am writing, which means that my exchange is over half way complete. February marked the sixth month that I have spent getting to know the wonderful country that is Brazil. It was challenging enough summarizing the first three months of my adventure; my task only increases in difficulty as time passes and these moments become memories. As an Exchange Student, even when you are in your city staying with your host family, you rarely have time to rest. This is probably a good thing though, because we have the rest of our lives to catch up on sleep or worry about the future. After all this time, being here still feels like a dream. At this point, even once I go home I am not sure I will ever truly wake up. If I tried to write about everything I have seen and done in these months, chances are I would be on the plane home by the time you finished reading! After the initial response of “How am I supposed to cram so much living onto so few pages?!”, three phrases come to mind. They are: “Send me on my way”, “Finding something to do” and “Falling in love all over”.

I have learned that the best way to see this country is to get up and go! Whether I had weeks to plan a trip, or little more than a last minute Whatsapp message, they all turned into fantastic adventures. The part that makes each one special to me is what became of the time I spent, who I spent it with, and the moments I was able to experience...

The holidays here in Santa Catarina begin as soon as school ends. In my case, that was the end of November. I got to know the other side of my city, because I moved into my second home. Changing houses is terrifying, but also a blessing because it feels like beginning the exchange all over again. Having the ability to communicate definitely



made the process easier the second time. The first few days with this family of four were a bit of a shock; having lived in a home with only two people, my brain was not accustomed to processing so much talking from the minute I woke up until I hit the pillow at night! I dubbed this period of time "Language Boot Camp" because I have not been that tired in a

long time. Thankfully, that effect seems to have worn off. My parents are José Luiz and Ledenice Corrêa, and we live with my Sister Grazielle, Grandma Adelina, and five dogs. The house has a fantastic view of the city, and I am very happy here. Even among the extended family, I feel that I am becoming a part of the group. Passing Christmas and the holidays would have been much more difficult had I not felt so welcome among them.

As soon as Christmas ended my travels began! I spent New Year' Eve at Meia Praia beach with my family, and later was invited with another exchange student to the beach house of one of the Rotarians. Ronaldo and Chris, his wife, introduced us to about four different beaches and we ate a tonne of seafood. One of my favourite memories is from our hike up "Morro do Macaco"; the view from the top was stunning, at least until we were chased down the mountain and soaked through our sneakers by a giant thunderstorm!

The next trip was to a neighbouring city called Joinville, where I stayed with Sanjana, a fellow exchange student from India. I realized just how much I missed having spices in my food, and was overjoyed when she offered me curry with our meals. Besides seeing the city, we also helped send Oliver, an Australian student on his way home. It was definitely an odd feeling having to say goodbye, especially since Oliver's was the first of many upcoming farewells. On one hand we were all emotional because it hurts seeing someone go, especially when you have no idea when you might meet again. On the other, I could not help but feel excited for him because I know he went back to the people who missed him, and I can hardly wait to see the people I left behind in Canada.

My two biggest voyages really gave me a chance to embrace the best that Brazil has to offer. Most recently, my host family and I spent Carnival in Joaçaba. Even though only two samba schools paraded, the energy was as strong and joyous as one can imagine. Dancing for such a long time is clearly exhausting, but everyone on the street



and in the stands becomes enraptured by the music, the movement, and the brilliance of the floats and costumes. The pulse of Carnival is indescribable, and one of the most amazing things Brazilian Culture has to offer. In addition to the parade, I also got to spend three days in Rio de Janeiro travelling with about 80 other exchange students. We



crammed quite a bit into our time, and had a lot of luck because it poured rain for much of the trip, minus the most famous places. I can now say that I have done what so many people only dream of. I have gone to the top of the Sugar Loaf, climbed the Selaron Staircase, posed in front of Christ the Redeemer, and even swam on Ipanema beach! I had a blast during my first 'formal

introduction' to Brazilian dance, as we had the chance to participate in a Funk and Samba class. Of all the travels in Rio, I value most of all our hike through one of the city's pacified favelas. Even Brazilians got surprised when we told them where we went, because favelas are known as the dirtiest, most dangerous places in the country. It is incredibly humbling looking at the tiny self-built homes nestled into the mountains, and climbing the hundreds of stairs that residents use countless times every day. The part that inspired me is that despite everything, this 'crude' village has a strong sense of community and is working to grow beyond its stereotypes. Santa Maria Favela has come a long way since Michael Jackson used it in part of his video for "*They Don't Care About Us*". Today, Rio de Janeiro has an initiative to paint all of the homes in the Favelas; every colour and stroke helps to tell the story of an incredibly strong, brave people.

Exchange is full of comings and goings, but no matter where I am, I find wonderful places to see, and lots of lessons to learn. One of the most important things for me is to take the time to appreciate where I am and what I am doing. Regardless of where my travels take me, I am always on my way. Wherever my feet go, my heart does too. Of course, travel is not the only thing I have been getting up to. At home in Blumenau I still find plenty to keep myself busy, which is one of the best ways to make connections with others and to ward off homesickness. I regularly attend mass at church with my current family, and go to as many Rotary meetings as possible so that I can spend time with the people who are working so hard to take care of me. I am still taking dance classes at Pro Dança, and have formed a great group of friends there. In addition, I have begun going to the gym with my sister in an attempt at battling the dreaded Exchange Weight. There are some really fun classes offered including yoga, combat, and various cardio and weight circuits.

School started again on February 10th. I am now in the Terceiro Ano and final year of ensino médio, the equivalent of high school. Classes regularly go from seven twenty to twelve twenty, but now I also have afternoon classes twice a week from one thirty to four. On those rare days when I have some spare time, I work on grammar in hopes of further improving my language. Most days I understand everything, and my speaking has gotten quite a better too. Sometimes I think in Portuguese more than English now. *Just to write this report I had to lock myself away and play English music because my words simply would not form!*

Travellers who immerse themselves into other cultures usually come back telling stories about how they were captivated by said country and its people. I am falling for Brazilian culture, and learning to love everything that this country has to offer. For example, Brazilians seem to put a higher priority on seeing their extended families than North Americans do. Some families eat all together every day, or at least on the weekends. Often a person's best friend is a member of the family, whereas a greater divide seems to exist between relative and friend in Canada and the United States. All relationships could benefit from a connection such as this. Afternoon naps and dancing at every party help to brighten up the day here. Without a doubt though, is the nature and landscape of this country that most amaze me. I have never seen so much green in one place, and the endless mountains make road trips exhausting because car rides make me sleepy, but I can hardly stand to close my eyes for fear of missing out.

Having been away for so long, I had hoped that my homesickness would have gotten better. In fact, it seems to have changed form. I am not ready to go home, but I miss it nonetheless. I suspect I am going through a Tim Hortons withdrawal, just as I feel the distance between my Canadian family and friends. I chose the phrase "Falling

in love all over” to explain this part of my exchange because of something I began to notice happening within me. As I fall deeper in love with Brazil and the life I have here, I appreciate my home country more, and feel closer to it than ever before. Trying to explain Canadian culture is a challenge in its own, because Canada is a country unique among others in the sense that the culture is a mixture of various beliefs and nationalities. The Canadian identity is formed by personal experiences just as much as it is by the collective assembly. On a more personal note, I have literally never been this far from my Mom, yet every day I look in the mirror, I see a little more of her in myself. Every time my world grows bigger, it somehow seems to shrink as well, uniting countries, families and stories in ways I can hardly describe.

Seeing how far I have come in just six months is astounding. Hardly realizing it, I have become adjusted to life in Brazil. Eating certain foods, or various parts of my schedule seem normal to me, at least until I talk to the people back home and have to stop to explain. I already had to completely rearrange my blazer due to lack of space for pins, and am looking forward to gathering even more in the remaining months here. Collecting is only part of the tale though, because every hole in that blazer has a story, just as every day here does for me. It is thanks to the Rotarians and family members who support me that I am here and able to experience these wonderful adventures. I wish it were possible to explain how grateful I am, but for now that will have to wait. While here, I am making the most of every day. Before I know it I will be back, and then, I have all the time in the world to share my stories and the love I am finding with you.

Katie