



Katie
from
Georgetown
to
Brazil

“Open Eyes and Full Hearts”

Another three months have passed, and here I am again trying to summarize something impossible to justify with words. This is the third and final Beaver Tale of my exchange, whether I want to believe it or not. The existence of this paper means that the exchange year is coming to an end and soon I will be back in Canada. That day is coming faster than my brain can process it, and faster than my heart can decide how to feel.

I procrastinated calculating the number of days I had spent in Brazil and the number of days I had left until last week. In the beginning counting can make homesickness worse, and right now knowing causes me the same amount of panic as not. May 8th was Mother’s Day in both of my countries, as well as the day marking my 9th month in my host country. On May 8th there were 70 days remaining until the day I step onto Canadian soil.

I never imagined that I would love Brazil this much. The feeling snuck up on me, and when I finally realized what it was, it felt like being smacked in the face. Of course I knew that I had grown to love the food, the culture, the nature, and lots of other things about this country, but not how much. Canada has always been my home, but now I have another place in my heart and it will be so strange leaving this home behind. Heading into the unknown is one thing, because it is guaranteed that what you know will always be there waiting for you. Now I am travelling from one known to another with no idea when I will come back...

What snuck up on me was the pride I have for my new country. This pride spilled over during a family discussion in which I found myself defending Brazil... to Brazilians. Even as I type that sentence seems foreign to me. I have always been a proud Canadian; to me appreciating my home is natural. There is no such thing as a perfect country. Like people, so long as a country is trying to improve, I believe there is something to look up to. One of the most magical parts about going on exchange is the newfound appreciation students discover for both their home culture and their new one; exchange students look at the world with open eyes and full hearts. Sitting at home it is very easy to become accustomed to the way things are, and to forget to be thankful. That is what seems to be happening here in Brazil too. There is a lot of fear for the future of the country, and many Brazilians are unable to see beyond the faults in the government and the numbers in their bank accounts. For a generally happy people, there is surprisingly very little excitement for the Olympics, and few want to travel to other parts of the country. It is easier when we do not have to worry about the future as much, but some days it feels like foreigners are the only ones who can see "the light at the end of the tunnel". It is true that the economy is suffering, and that the people in positions of power seem to work for their own greed rather than the good of the people, but Brazil is so much more than its politics. It has a long and colourful history, clear traditions and diverse cultures, more natural resources than any other country in the world, and more than enough room and potential for growth. It is a country that has everything, and everyone should be able to see that!

My appreciation for this wonderful land became even stronger during my most recent voyage. With many of the exchange students from my district, and a few I knew from my previous trips, I was fortunate to be able to spend almost 9 days in the Amazon! This trip was incredible, and well worth the wait. We slept in hammocks on boats during the night, and during the day activities ranged between forest and cave hiking, to piranha fishing and alligator spotting! There is nothing more heart-warming than cuddling a sloth or hugging a child from an Amazon tribe, and I got to do both in the same day! It was fascinating learning about the local vegetation and cultures. The Amazon rainforest is the biggest forest in the world, but you only really understand what that means when you fly over it or walk under the canopy formed by the leaves.

It has been quite an adventure living here in Brazil, and I have learned to love every minute of it! I am living with my third family right now and will be going to the airport with them too. My sister is the same age as me, and we are becoming closer every day. My brother does not live with us because he is off studying, but when he visits it is always a good time. I feel like I have known these people for years, not months. I am so lucky to be a part of this exchange family! Like my Canadian one, this is not the first time they are hosting and they hope to pass the experience on more in the future. It makes the thought of leaving them less

dreadful because I know that someday we will meet again in one way or another. I am still dancing with my tap class at the local theatre, and at school my friends always greet me with big hugs and smiles when we meet. It is so nice to feel like I fit in somewhere, even if I sometimes have a funny accent! The other exchange students in my city have become my best friends, and it is by their sides with our amazing group that I was able to survive so far away from everything I knew back in Canada. Even my language is still improving. I truly feel bilingual on good days, and have even begun to read books in Português! This new language is the best souvenir I got during my time here.

Thinking about how far I am physically from the country I was born in has nothing in comparison with how far I have come as a person, and how valuable this exchange has been for me. Thank you to all of the people from every country and beyond who have guided me through this adventure. These remaining days are passing faster than I can count them, but I will make the best of every one! Maybe my exchange will end soon, but this is not the end of my journey!

Até mais! Beijos!

Katie