



**Rachel  
from Tillsonburg  
to  
Switzerland**

*“Oh, you’re from Canada? Do you see a lot of moose where you live?”*

It’s hard to believe that I have been in Switzerland for just over 14 weeks now. The saying “time flies when you’re having fun” certainly applies. I remember arriving in Switzerland like it was yesterday. I was too excited to be nervous as I said my final good-byes to family and friends and made my way through security. After a long eight-hour flight I finally landed in the Zurich Airport and quickly I became lost as I didn’t know where to go for my luggage, luckily a family recognized me (and my red blazer) from the flight and they stayed with me until I found it. I was beginning to feel nervous after I collected my luggage and headed out to meet my host family for the very first time. I was overwhelmed with joy when I saw them, right away I was hugged and welcomed to Switzerland and to their family. It was a two-hour train ride to my new home in Switzerland, the views from the train were something straight from a fairy-tale and it finally began to set in that this is where I would be living for an entire year.



One week after my arrival, I started my four-week language camp in Bern. My class had about 12 other exchange students from around the world and we all became friends instantly. At the end of the camp we had our first language placement test and then it was time to go to our regular schools. I was nervous for my first day at my high school called Gymnasium Thun because I was going four weeks after school had started and I was afraid no one would talk to me, but right away I was welcomed by the class and everyone introduced themselves and asked me questions about myself and about Canada.

After just one week of regular school Herbstferien or autumn break began, and we had three weeks off school. The first week I travelled with my host grandparents and host sister to a remote village in the mountains called Lenk. We did a lot of hiking and the views were amazing. The next two weeks my host family and I travelled to Sardinia, Italy. I will never forget how warm and salty the water was. Almost everyday we went to a new beach or town, all with amazing views! After the two weeks of warmth and relaxation it was time to head back into the fast pace of Switzerland.



Everyday I learn something new. I'm always going on new adventures with either my host family or with friends. Travelling in Switzerland is so easy with their intricate train and bussing systems. I also have a travel card called a GA (Swiss travel pass) that allows me to travel for free on busses, trains, boats and more to almost anywhere in Switzerland.

In the past three months I've been faced daily with situations that push me out of my comfort zone and I'm thankful for them as they have allowed me to become more confident and outgoing.



Before leaving for exchange I was told that I need to be able to laugh at myself. At first, I didn't really understand why I was being given this advice, but soon after arriving I realized it was the perfect advice for me. An example of this was my second week in my regular high school (speaking German was and still is a struggle for me), I had to give a presentation to my German language class on how to properly use a comma when I didn't understand this myself, or when giving my first speech to 40 members of my Rotary club in a language I was not yet comfortable with. All these experiences have made me realize how much I have grown when put into situations like these and how rewarding it feels after making it through them.

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I live in the beautiful city of Thun; it is about a twenty-five-minute train ride to Bern, the capital of Switzerland. This historic city has channels from the Thunersee or Lake Thun running alongside the buildings. One of my favourite things I did when I arrived was jumping off the bridges into the water. The waterways that run into the town turn into a community pool, from there you walk about 5 minutes into the heart of downtown (in your bathing suit) where you pick one of several bridges to jump from. Naturally, my host sister picked the highest bridge to jump from because I have a fear of heights! There is a panoramic view of mountains, Lake Thun and nearby towns from the top of Schloss Thun or Thun Castle built in the 1100s (making it over 700 years older than Canada). Thun is also home to Switzerland's largest military school.



I am now starting to be able to pick up and understand more High German and I'm able to understand more when talking to people and during my lessons in school, but I still do not understand a lick of Swiss German, yes, Switzerland has its own dialect of German and each canton has a different dialect. Switzerland has four official languages, French, Italian, Romansch and of course German. Most swiss people also speak English very well. It's crazy to think that there are so many languages in such a small country.

These past three months have gone by so quickly and it has made me realize how important and short my time is here. It has made me even more grateful for everyone and everything. I am so thankful for all the love and support I have received from my family, friends and Rotarians and I'm so thankful for all the amazing memories I have already made and the amazing people I have met and I'm looking forward to all the memories to come.

Bis zum nächsten Mal,

Until next time,

Rachel