



**Sarah**  
from  
**Mississauga West**  
to  
**Finland**

**Veni, vidi, vici**  
**“I came, I saw, I conquered.”**

Nine months have passed since I first flew into Finland. Time has flown by, in a blink of an eye. This exchange has brought hardship and challenge but simultaneously has brought moments of uncontrollable joy and elation. The Finnish winter has been long and dark but has finally passed, allowing for the sun to finally shine through. Even if there has been some snow still coming and going in May, everything in Finland has started to wake up and come back to life. Soon, the summer will come, bringing a sun that shines throughout the night.

During the recent months, I've filled my days with various activities and experiences. I've had the pleasure of participating in orchestral performances, embarking on a family trip to Estonia, enjoying numerous skiing outings with friends (both downhill and cross-country), tending to sheep, immersing myself in handcraft events, exploring cities with friends, journeying to Sweden and celebrating Vappu in Helsinki (a student and labor day). I have also enjoyed the aspects of a simple life: enjoying walks with friends, playing billiards in between classes, taking a trip to the grocery store for a midday snack, and enjoying late-night conversations with my host siblings.

The hustle and bustle has yet to end. The weekend I write this is the Eurovision weekend. Eurovision, a beloved European song contest, is something my host mother considers sacred, meaning we are all watching it religiously. In an effort to make the most of my final months on exchange, I've made numerous plans and goals. Plans to visit cities, attend graduation parties, have baking days with friends, and continue traveling across the country with my family. Plans to enjoy my last days of biking in the countryside before I am back in a big city. Plans to hang out with my friends before we are separated by oceans and time differences. Plans to eat food that I have grown accustomed to eating regularly. before they are no longer so commonplace.

Throughout these months, I have undeniably established a life for myself here in Finland. I have long since set the foundations of friendship and family the moment I arrived. With each passing day, layer by layer, I have truly carved a place for myself in this small Finnish town. I have learned an entirely new language, made unforgettable memories, and experienced the unthought-of. I have familiarized myself with the small nuances of Finnish culture and uncovered hidden aspects of myself. This does not mean my exchange has been easy. No, it was far from that. There have been moments of hardship and trial, moments of anger and moments of apprehension. However, through these challenges, I have found triumph, joy, and newfound confidence.

To those going on exchange this year, to those in the planning stages, and to those who are simply contemplating whether to apply: you are about to embark on the most memorable year of your life. The upcoming year will be full of emotions—happiness, frustration, elation, sorrow, and everything in between. It is a year of profound growth and rich experiences, with each emotion adding depth to your year. Embrace the uncertainty, accept the challenges, and revel in the moments of joy, for they are all essential elements of this remarkable chapter in your life.

To the Rotary Clubs of Mississauga West and of Keuruu, to the Rotarians of District 7080 and 1390, to my family in Canada and my families in Finland, to my friends from every corner of the world, and everyone else who has been a part of my life this past year: Thank you. You have helped me make this exchange an experience that has been forever engraved into my memories.

Sincerely,

*Sarah*