



Tristen

from

Burlington Central

to

Peru

“Experience the opportunities you would never have the chance to do again”

Never before this experience did I think I would be living in a different country for almost a year, learning to speak a language I didn't know, and being without the comforts and safety of home. Not to mention living with people I had never met face-to-face before finally stepping off of the plane.

It all began on July 28th at the incredibly early hours of morning in Lima, Peru. Once getting through the baggage claim, which was difficult as I didn't understand what the papers I was given were asking for, I followed the crowd through the airport to the area where the exit was. There were a lot of people entering into one area that it was hard to try and look for my new family, plus the PanAm games had just finished, so many of the participants were on my flight, making it even more of a hassle to squeeze my way through the awaiting camera crews.

After a few minutes passed looking for a sign with my name on it or people waving their arms at me, my host mom came running towards me and gave me a big hug. After that, I felt that safety again and knew this would be an amazing year. I was welcomed by my mom, Violeta, my dad, Carlos, my brother, also named Carlos (but we call him Carlitos), and his friend, Alejandro. I also have two sisters, Melissa and Sandra. The drive from the airport to my house wasn't very far, and Alejandro was able to speak some English to me, so the time went by very quickly. Once we arrived to the house, I was shown my room and the rest of the house. Until about 4:00am I played UNO with

my brother and his friend; I was so excited that I wasn't even tired, but for the guys, they were ready to go to sleep (oops)!

A week into my exchange myself and the other exchange students were all together in a camp for about 5 days to meet each other for the first time and to go through the rules of Rotary and what is expected from us. It was nice to start off the year knowing almost everyone who would be experiencing this change together, and by the end of the time being there we were all like we had known each other for much longer than a couple of days. It's amazing how quickly people can become close to others around them. Even though I hadn't known my family

, even though my brother and I were in the same grade and I had previously met his very well, nearing the end of our time at the camp I had missed them and was happy to return back.

Shortly after the camp I started school. I was nervous. Friends, who I can now say are my closest friends, would also be at the school, but still, I had never been the "new kid" before and knew I had about a 1% understanding of the Spanish language. The first week of school my mom drove my brother and I, but for the next weeks to come we would take the public bus to and from school. All of the teachers and my classmates were extremely kind and always happy to help me when I needed it. Luckily, many of my friends understand and can speak English, so I never had a problem communicating to them or through them as my translators to other people. My Spanish has definitely gotten better over the amount of time I have been here, but of course there are always things I still need to improve on, but I'm working hard to learn it the best I can.

Recently, myself and the other exchange students went on our first trip together to Arequipa, Puno, and Cusco for twelve days. It was amazing! Living in Lima that is a main city in Peru, not to mention it is the capital, it was nice to leave the city life and experience more of what the country has to show. The landscapes and views were spectacular, definitely things I would never be able to see back home in Canada. I even celebrated my 17th birthday during the trip and as part of tradition, I got a cake pushed into my face.



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The highlight of the trip though, was the day of Machu Picchu. Unfortunately, I was sick the morning we went, but I still climbed the whole thing without stopping to take breaks (mostly because I wanted to reach the bathroom) and now can proudly say I climbed to the top of one of the worlds 7 wonders.

I have a daily routine here and everything just seems normal. I consider my family and my home to be mine now as well and don't think twice about calling my mom, "Mom" or my dad, "Dad". I love them every much and will always have them as my second family, nothing will ever change that. Thanks to Rotary I can live the year of my life here in Peru and would not have wanted anything different out of my experience thus far. Estoy emocionado por estos próximos pasos en mi vida, y lo que mi futuro tiene para mí.

Con amor,

Tristen