

Lycée Ermesinde

Lycée public autonome à plein temps

My time in Canada

5 months away from everyone

-is it worth it?

Delles Emma

Directrice de mémoire: Rockel Seja

Je déclare sur honneur avoir développé et rédigé ce mémoire sans l'aide abusive d'autrui.

Table of content

Preface.....	4
The start.....	5
The Journey	7
Travel playlist.....	9
What I packed in my bag.....	9
Mystic Beach	11
Hockey	15
Fall is coming.....	16
Thanksgiving.....	17
Family.....	19
Halloween.....	20
Pace.....	22
Pace playlist.....	23
Whistler	24
Christmas	26
School in Canada	28
English class	32
A spell of modern evil.....	33
Stuff my English teacher said that made perfect sense in context, but not so much out of it.....	34
Things that I did in my media Design class	35
Mental health.....	39
My last days in Canada	40
Small things that I can confirm about Canada	41
Going home	42
Conclusion.....	43
image sources.....	44

For everyone who ever wanted to do something but ended up not doing it because they were too afraid of what would happen.

Preface

From September 2019 until January 2020, I went on an exchange in Canada and it was a very lifechanging experience for me, so I decided to write this paper about it. I actually wrote it by hand in a journal, where I could help deliver my emotions by some artistic aspects that would not be possible on a computer. In this document you will find everything regarding the content of that journal. I hope you enjoy, as I try to take you with me on one of the best experiences in my life so far.

The start

Since I was a child I've always loved to travel and see the world. See different people, hear different languages and learn about other cultures. It was always clear to me that, at some point in my life, I wanted to live in another country for some time so there were only two questions remaining: "When?" and "Where?".

When I was in 8th grade, I first got the idea to do an exchange, but for some reason I never really looked into how to do it. For years I've procrastinated to take it seriously and see it as a real option I had. Until last year it hit me that it was now or never, I mean, I wouldn't do an exchange in my last year of school. I could never do an exchange in this form if I didn't do it now...so one day I took the decision and I started planning. Question one was solved.

Now the remaining question was "Where?" For the longest time I was thinking Scotland because I love the Scottish accent and I never even thought about the option to go outside of Europe. But then, someone gave me the idea to go to Canada and I was completely amazed. Yes! Canada is the place I wanted to go to. It was a country I always wanted to visit one day, so why not just live there for a few months? All the pictures of the landscapes I've seen were beautiful and from what I've read about their culture Canadians were very friendly.

So let's start planning!

I've heard a lot of people mentioning that they want to do an exchange as well, but they don't know where to begin with planning. I started with just sending out a bunch of online applications to different agencies that offer such services. The first one to reply was HiCo Education and they seemed really invested and helpful from the first moment, so we decided to work with them to get me to Canada.

There was one worker responsible for me, to simplify we'll just call her Mrs. W. in this paper. Mrs. W. asked me different interests that I may had or preferences on a region where I wanted to go. I didn't have any clue on where except that I knew I wanted to go to Canada. She and I had a quick phone call, to get to know me better and confirming my level of speaking English. Later she sent me some school recommendations, from which I picked Royal Bay Secondary School, based near Victoria on Vancouver Island. After a lot of paperwork, a Visa request and getting a passport, I finally got the name of my host family.

A young couple with a one-and-a-half-year-old son, a dog and a cat. The next morning, I wrote an email to them and we talked a little bit. Two months later, about two weeks before I flew to Canada, we skyped to get to know each other a little bit better before I moved in with them. I was

very nervous, but they were super nice, funny and their kid was so cute. He was constantly climbing on the chair he was sitting on and tried to steal the laptop or waved at me. Hannah, my soon-to-be-host mom, was very friendly and was telling me which things I needed to bring and was calming me down in assuring me that they were going to help me with everything that I needed help with. She also showed me their dog, for which I was really excited for (I always wanted a dog)! During the Skype call Jamie, my soon-to-be-host dad, just joined for a little while and he seemed very funny. Overall, we got along really well, and I was ready for a great time with them.

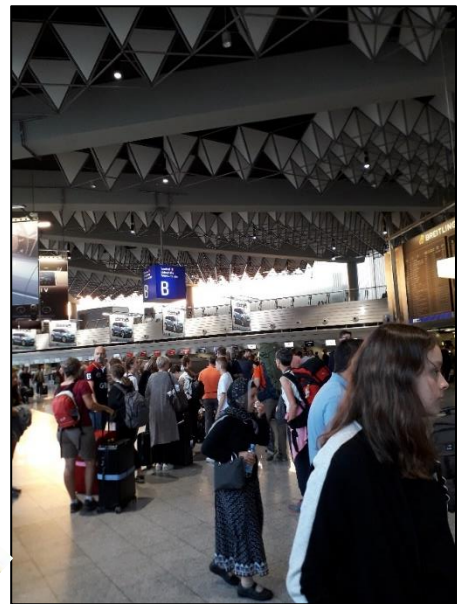
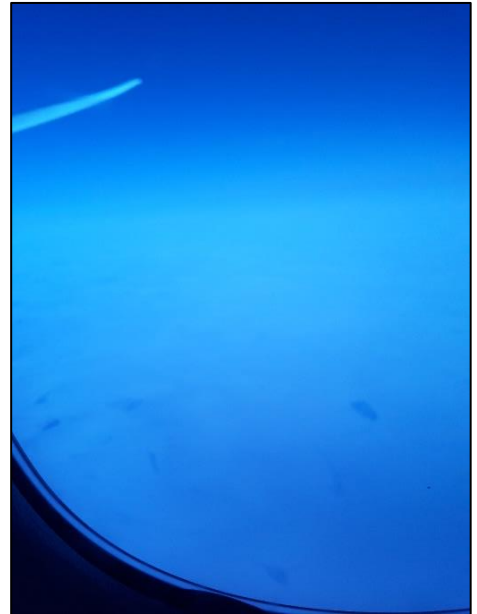


Right before the end of the call Hannah suddenly thought about telling me that, they would not be there to pick me up from the airport when I was arriving, because they were spending that weekend in Vancouver. This meant that I would have to stay with another family first and Hannah would pick me up the day before school started. Uhm excuse me...WHAT?? Why did no one tell me this, before? But okay, I could do this, it was only for two days, and for most of these days I would probably be asleep anyways.

The day after the skype call, Mrs. W. finally sent me the profile of the family that I would be staying with for the first couple of days in Canada. I had a short email exchange with them and they were very open and told me that they would be picking me up from the airport and that they had two other students staying with them at the moment, one from Spain and one from China.

The Journey

On august 31st 2019, I took a flight from Frankfurt, Germany to Vancouver, British Columbia and then took a connecting flight to Victoria, Vancouver Island. There were 5 other people from the same organization that flew with me to Vancouver and luckily, I found them very quickly at the airport in Frankfurt. One of the girls also took the same connecting flight as me to get to Victoria so I was at no point completely alone, which helped a lot with my anxiety, although I was still very nervous.



This journey had the power to maybe change my whole life. I had no idea what I was going into. Would I find friends? Would school be hard? What if I didn't get along with my host family after all? Everything could happen, but I would never find out if I didn't get on that flight. So, I took all of my courage and stepped onto that plane that would take me 8000km away from everything I knew.

Diary:

Aug. 31st

10 hours. I will be on this flight for 10 hours. I'm sitting 2 rows behind the two girls from the same organization. Beside me is a German couple that is cuddling and already complaining about the limited leg space, we're not even in the air yet! At least, I'm sitting next to the window so I'm able to enjoy the view. I also have my headphones to listen to my music (very important!) and there is a tv as well.

I am so nervous, but the funny thing is I'm not even nervous about being away from home for at least 5 months, as you might expect. No, I am mostly anxious about arriving in Vancouver and something not being right with my papers or me not finding the places I need to go.

I know I'm going to be fine and I won't be alone (there are 5 other people flying with me, one girl is even taking the same connection flight as me). Still, this is all very nerve reeking. Thank God for the next few hours, where I can still mentally prepare myself.

--6 hours later--

In the past hours, I've watched three movies and listened to music. At the moment, we're flying over miles and miles of just snow. It looks so pretty! I tried taking some pictures of it, but unfortunately you can't see it very well. I am feeling less nervous now, I am just really excited for the months to come!

Travel playlist¹

Some songs that I listened to on repeat during the flight, because they helped me relax and made me excited for the beginning of a new chapter.



ROCKET MAN
HONKY CHÂTEAU
ELTON JOHN



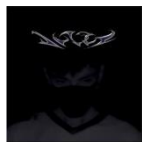
DROPS OF JUPITER
DROPS OF JUPITER
TRAIN



OBSTACLES
SOMEDAY WE WILL FORESEE OBSTACLES
DOLKIN



GOOD TIMES (ORCHESTRAL ARRANGEMENT)
LAST YOUNG RENEGADE
ALL TIME LOW



SLIMMERY
SLIMMERY
DYZZY

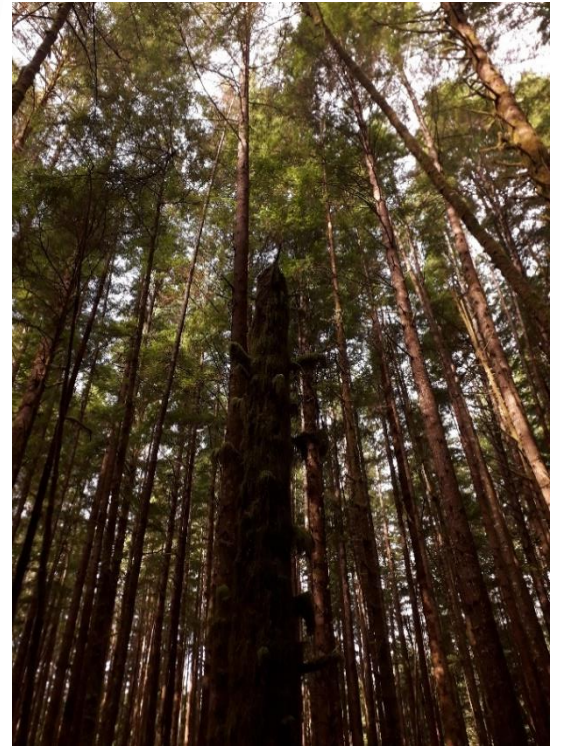
¹ https://open.spotify.com/playlist/4XF8vvEqcoFoL30k4aLWwG?si=KH_9PtieQom4dojsrMUNEg

What I packed in my bag

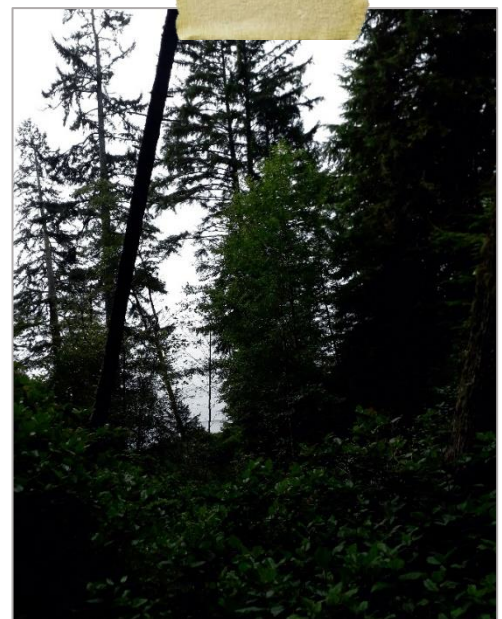
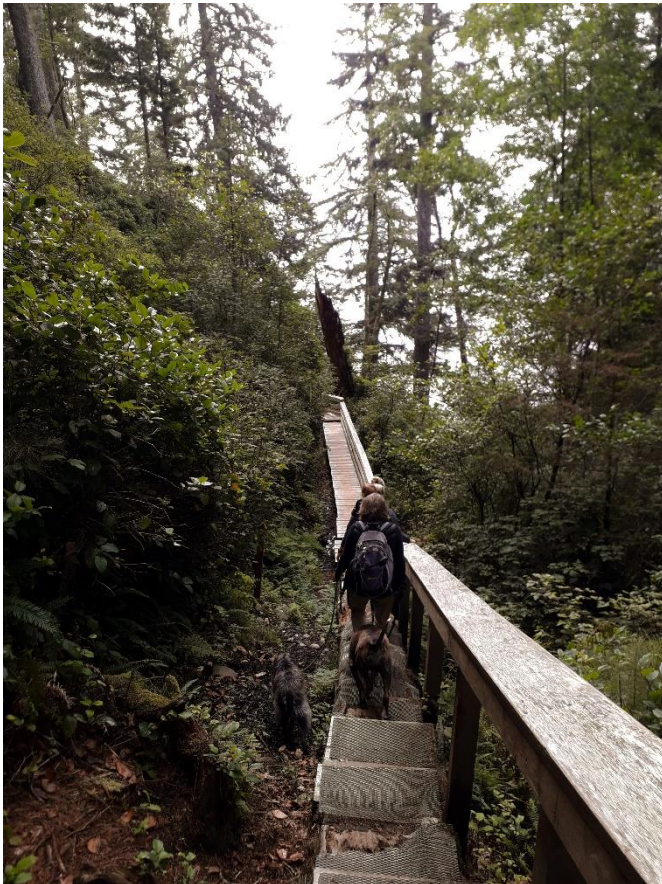
- Pretty much my whole closet: I have the advantage that I do not own that many clothes, so I just packed almost my whole closet. Except for a few hoodies that would have taken up to much space.
- My favorite books: I did not need them but they gave me a feeling of safety and I am also glad I packed them because they gave my room in Canada a familiar feeling and made it more cosy.
- Kind of with the same intention as the books, I packed some photos of home: My friends all gave me a Photoalbum that they put together, which was really sweet, so I definitely had to pack that to look at whenever I felt homesick. I also brought some pictures of my family that I put up on a pinboard in my room.
- Gifts for my host family: My host family would have to put up with me for at least five months, I didn't want to seem like I'd be taking that for granted, so I brought them a few things from Luxembourg. I put together a cookbook with some traditional luxembourgish recipes, I brought some "Quetschekraut", some Tea and, my favorite, some vocab cards so they could learn Luxembourgish (which they tried but mostly just made fun of our spelling).
- A journal: I didn't want to forget anything from my stay in Canada, so I brought a journal to write all my memories down, and I used it a lot!
- My Camera: With the same intention as the journal, I also packed a camera, so I could keep as many memories alive as possible.
- My Laptop: Important to keep up the communication with home and to relax in my room and watch movies on.

On one of the first weekends after I arrived in Canada, my host mom, host grandma, my host brother and I went on a hike to a beach called mystic beach. It was the most beautiful place I've ever seen. We were walking through the woods, that are the same as at home but yet so different. On every tree there is moss and lichen. The sun is barely shining through the roof of leaves over our heads, letting little particles dance in the light.

The forest has a magical feeling to it, as if there are fairies living in every tree, secretly watching us.



Mystic Beach



Diary:

Sept. 21st

Today, I woke up and for the first time, felt really homesick. I don't know what made today different from other days, but for some reason, today I just missed my own bed, my friends and my family. I just kind of wished, I stayed home and didn't come to Canada.

But when I got up, Hannah invited me to go for a hike to a beach with her mom and Kingston and because I wanted to get out of the house, I said yes. We took the car to get to the starting point and then we started walking. The way was marked with little orange smiley faces on the trees and at some point, Kingston started counting them and he got really excited whenever he saw a new one, he's so cute!

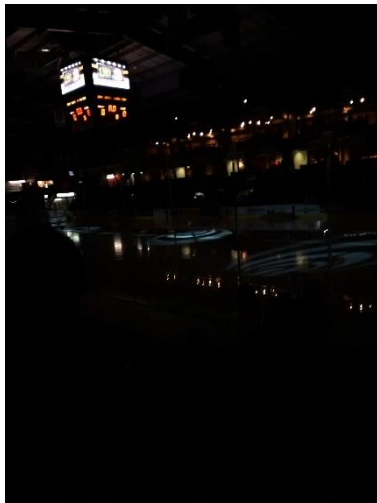
When we got to the beach, I literally almost started crying, it was so beautiful!! A wide rocky beach, the grey ocean and the cloudy sky. At the far left there were some dark green evergreens and if you concentrated on the horizon you could see mountains on the other side of the ocean. And I realized that it's stuff like that that I wouldn't be able to experience if I took the easy road and just stayed at home in Luxembourg, in my own comfort zone. This day made me really happy!



It's moments like this
that make it worth it,
Moments like this
make it alright
And when I see the
waves
not far away
It makes me want to be
alive.

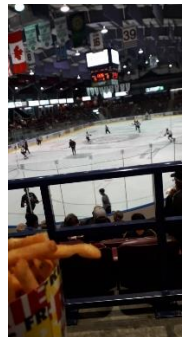


Hockey



If you ever go to Canada and don't see an ice hockey game, were you even really in Canada?

Even though sport isn't necessarily something I enjoy watching, this evening was a lot of fun. I met a lot of other exchange students, most of them from Germany, that also had no idea about what's going on in the game. We spent most of the game just talking about our experiences in Canada so far. Although our storytelling often got interrupted by players crashing into the plexiglass in front of us or the whole stadium shouting when there was something important happening on the field or someone scored a point. It was fun to hear different point of views from people that were in the same situation as me. Most of them were positive, although there were a few that already changed host family because they didn't get along at all with their first one. Or one girl went from being an only child at home to having 5 host siblings that were all younger than her. Overall, it was a very exciting evening, and when I took the bus home, I kind of felt like I just left from a concert, with adrenaline still flowing through my body.



Fall is coming



Diary:

October 1st

I've been here for a month now and I still can't believe it. It feels so unreal and time has gone by so quickly! Now it's October and fall feeling starts to hit. Soon, it will be thanksgiving (which I found out, Canadians celebrate on the second Monday in October) and then it's Halloween already! I'm getting along with my host family so well and I'm starting to really bond with my host brother, he is so cute! Let's see what the next month has in store for me!

Annotation: It felt weirdly natural being in Canada like I've been there for a lot longer than just a month but on the other hand it felt like I only arrived a few days ago. I was starting to get a life there, a life separate from the one I've been living 8000km away in Luxembourg.





Thanksgiving

Did you know?

Thanksgiving used to be the day where people celebrated their harvest and were thankful for everything they had. Even though there are way less farmers now than when Thanksgiving started to become an official holiday in Canada, around the 1870s, it is still to this day a good time to sit back and be grateful for everything in your life. People celebrate Thanksgiving usually with their family or friends (also known as “friendsgiving”) and just enjoy spending time with them and having dinner together.



We had a Friendsgiving, as well as two Thanksgiving dinners with the family. On the Saturday before Thanksgiving, my host family and I were invited to a friend of theirs, who actually happened to become my schools' principal the next month which was funny whenever we saw each other in the hallway. They lived in a house in the middle of nowhere on a giant property in the middle of the woods which was really pretty. We made a huge fire and I got to shoot with a crossbow! That was really scary because it had a lot of force, but it was also really exciting.

On Sunday, some family came over to our house where we celebrated pretty relaxed, there was no formal dressing up or polite small talk involved, like I'm used to from family gatherings at home and movies. We all just played some games, joked around, and ate a lot of food. Then on Monday, actual Thanksgiving, we went to my host mother's dad's farm. The menu was pretty much the same: The obligatory Turkey, that I didn't eat because I'm vegetarian, I'm a bad guest, sorry, with cranberry sauce, mashed potatoes with gravy and pumpkin pie for dessert. And even though, we didn't get up one after the other, to say what we were grateful for, as you sometimes see it in American movies, there still was this happy feeling of being surrounded by those you love and appreciation for one another. Not only did I begin to really love them, but it was also the love that they have for each other that made me feel calm and happy.



Family

Speaking of being grateful, I couldn't have been luckier concerning my host family. Like I mentioned earlier, I lived with Hannah and Jamie and their 2-year-old son, Kingston.

They were all super fun and nice and we got along right from the start. I remember even the first night I was there, Jamie was already making jokes and was trying to get me to come out of my shell. They always really made me feel like I was part of their family, introducing me to their friends as their "temporary kid" and at some point, they even planned on adopting me, so I could never leave XD.

"When Emma arrived at our home, it became obvious that she would quickly become part of our family. She bonded easily with our toddler and participated in all the family shopping trips, swimming, hiking and adventures. Emma has a sense of humor and fun that makes her a joy to be around. She knows all the Disney songs and the people who sing them and could probably do some choreography to them too! I think about Emma often and miss having her around. One day we shall meet again!"
-Hannah, host mom

During my stay, they really became part of my family and I became part of theirs. I celebrated holidays and birthdays with them, we had fun activities like hiking or going to the pumpkin patch. Some of my favorite memories from Canada are with them, like when we would sometimes drive to the store at 9pm on a Saturday night to buy Ice cream and snacks and then watch a movie together until we all fell asleep on the couch.

My host parents were always there for me when I wanted to talk about something or needed anything at all. I love Kingston as if he were my real brother, I loved to play with him, even when he sometimes was a little bit exhausting, he had A LOT of energy for such a small body. He was really the cutest kid ever and we had a lot of fun moments together. I really didn't want to leave my family, so now I am planning on going back to Canada after I graduate and work as an Au pair for Kingston for a few months.



Halloween is my second favorite holiday of the year, after Christmas, so I enjoyed it a lot to be in a country where they actually really celebrate it. In Canada, they're less extreme than in the US but it's still something that pretty much everyone celebrates. Kids dress up to go trick or treating and compare afterwards who got the most candy. Teenagers go get drunk and then scare little kids that are going from door to door, because they're jealous that they're too old to get candy. And adults go from one party to another for about two weeks straight, dressing up as a sexy police officer and get drunk to forget that they can't go trick or treating anymore. Until they are parents and they can accompany their children. Basically, it's all about trick or treating. So that's what I did.

I, a scary vampire, and my host family, a bunch of, not so scary, construction workers went on a hunt for candy through the neighborhood. It was amazing to see all the decorated houses, some people probably spent way too much money on decoration that they use once a year, but it helped to set the mood. We got exactly four houses down until we met the first friends that also live in our neighborhood. By the end of the street, there were at least ten of us in a group. It was the best day of Kingston's life. When he understood that all of that Candy was for him, he just ran off from one house to the other. And he wasn't the only one who had a great time: walking around in the freezing cold, trying not to step on little children that are running from house to house as if it's the most important race of their life, watching the sun go down, while hanging out with a bunch of people you like, is a surprisingly amazing way to spend your time.

Halloween



Apart from Halloween, October is also a great time to drive to the store at 8pm to get ice cream and snacks and then go home and watch a horror movie together.

Speaking of Ice cream, I had a lot of it in Canada, because pretty much from the beginning, Jamie and I started betting on different things, usually, when we had rotten fruit that wasn't edible anymore, he would take it out onto the balcony and try to hit a tree with it. If he did it, I had to buy him Ice cream, if he didn't, he got me some.

Those were definitely some of my favorite moments that I had with my host family.

Diary:

Nov. 10th

I just had the cutest moment with Kingston. He randomly came into my room (as he does) and saw an apple in my backpack. He just shouted apple and before Hannah or I could do anything he'd taken a bite out of it. Then he climbed up on my bed to sit next to me and handed the apple to me, so I also took a bite out of it. So, we just sat there for about 10 minutes, sitting on the edge of my bed, eating this apple back and forth without even really talking. This was just a really cute moment that I wanted to write down and wanted to remember. I love this little dude.

Annotation: That moment was such a random moment and exactly something that a younger sibling might do, and Kingston probably didn't even realize it. It's stuff like that, that made me feel welcome and like I was a part of the family.

Pace



After I'd been in Canada for a few months, one of my friends, Teresa, mentioned to me, that she's in this musical theatre program called "Pace". It is a school program for the whole district, so not only Royal Bay (my school), but students from a lot of other schools could participate too. She told me to join, even if the shows were starting pretty soon, and because I missed doing theatre, which is something I've already been doing for almost 6 years in Luxembourg, and I thought it would probably be a fun experience, on the day of the next rehearsal, I went with her.

It was very different from what I expected and what I knew from theatre at home. It was a) less acting and more just singing and dancing to various Christmas songs and b) it was very unorganized! No one really knew what to do and no one really cared. The first rehearsal I was immensely overwhelmed, and I felt very lost. Here it's also worth mentioning, that most of those kids have been doing Pace-shows since Kindergarten and every year it's more or less the same numbers, so they already knew what they needed to do, but not so much me. That first day, I learned about 3 different dances and I was completely overwhelmed, I almost quit immediately. But then I said to myself, it's only going to be a few weeks and maybe I'll enjoy it, so I went again next week, and I am so glad that I did. Every rehearsal I knew more and more about what was going on and it started to be more and more fun. And after a while, I started to get to know the people and I began to really memorize the numbers.

Unfortunately I missed the first two shows, because I went on a school trip to Whistler (later more about that), but the first show I participated in, was happening only 4 weeks after I joined the program, so I was pretty nervous, and didn't feel ready at all. It ended up being okay though, no one really cared if you messed up and it was a lot of fun either way.

I met some incredibly cool people in those few weeks while I was doing Pace and it was so much fun to just sing and dance with almost no pressure to be good.

Pace playlist



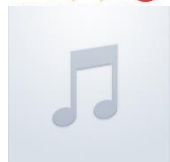
12 DAYS OF CHRISTMAS
HOLIDAY SPIRITS
STRAIGHT NO CHASER



DRUMMER BOY
UNDER THE MISTLETOE
JUSTIN BIEBER



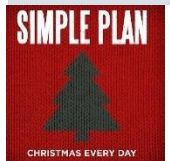
CHRISTMAS TOWN
ELF THE MUSICAL SOUNDTRACK
ORIGINAL BROADWAY CAST ELF...



AUSSIE JINGLBELLS
AUSSIE CHRISTMAS WITH BUCKO & CHAMPS
BUCKO & CHAMPS

SILENT NIGHT

FRANZ XAVER GRUBER



CHRISTMAS EVERYDAY
CHRISTMAS EVERYDAY
SIMPLE PLAN



CHRISTMAS CAN- CAN
CHRISTMAS CHEERS
STRAIGHT NO CHASER

Whistler



The international student program at my school, offered a lot of fun activities outside of school to their exchange students, over the semester. One of which was a 3-day trip to the ski resort Whistler.

We had the choice to either snowboard or ski with an instructor for a few hours for two days. I always wanted to try snowboarding, and since there was no one there, to tell me no, I did. It was amazing and honestly so much fun! Even though by the second day, all my muscles were really sore, and it took me a while to make a whole run without falling, I always got back up and the better I got the more fun it was. I was in a small group of all beginners from other schools, some of which I already knew from the hockey game I went to earlier in the semester. We all got along pretty well and had a lot of fun together. Our instructor was only two years older than me and we also had a lot of fun, joking around.

When we weren't skiing or snowboarding, we had a lot of spare time to explore the beautiful village. Despite being a very tourist-y small town, it was beautiful. When we arrived and got off the bus, I remember me and my friends being a little sad that there was no snow in the village, because that is part of a ski trip. But then, later in the evening we went to a restaurant to get dinner, a very cozy small place, with a fireplace and everything, and at some point, we looked outside and saw that it had started snowing! Christmastime came around soon and there were lights put up everywhere, which made it seem like little Christmas Miracle. It was beautiful.





Christmas

Ah! Christmas time, this means watching “Home alone” while sipping tea and snuggle up in a blanket, hearing the same 5 songs over and over again everywhere you go, cookies, lots and lots of cookies and of course, tons of snow. Well, maybe not exactly, there was no snow for Christmas. Though all of the other things are pretty accurate.



Christmas day was a very fun time with some family coming over, but not too many people so it was still very enjoyable. The whole day consisted of eating and opening presents and laughing at my host brother who had the same excited reaction for every single toy he got. Sometimes he would get so invested in a toy he just unpacked that he forgot that there were still more presents under the tree and then be even more excited when he remembered. His toys were so much fun though that by the end of the night, everyone else had also played with them. For example, he got a little toy dinosaur with lots of screws in it that you could unscrew, and it even came with a tiny electrical screwdriver, how fun is that?!

We were doing secret Santa, so everyone was supposed to only buy presents for one other person, so I didn't have to worry about what to get everyone. My host grandma and her sister didn't let that stop them to buy everyone multiple presents though.

For dinner we had the traditional...nachos. Yep, that's right we had nachos for Christmas dinner, because we're cool, and they were delicious.

In terms of missing home and my family, you probably would expect the Christmastime to be a very hard time for an exchange student, but my host family did a really good job in distracting me and making me feel welcome so I actually didn't think about Home too much. And in a sense, I think, I even was home. At this point, I started to realize that Canada had become my home away from home and my host family has become part of my family and I'm a part of theirs.



School in Canada

If you ask any international student, what they think about school in Canada, you can be almost certain that they will all have the same answer: it's like being on vacation. Here at my school in Canada, you have four subjects per semester, that you have every day. In my case, those four subjects are English, Spanish, media design and guitar. Yes, guitar is a real school subject here. The differences between school in Canada and at home don't end there though.

Let me give you an example of a day in a Canadian school.

8:47am

I enter school, music blasting in my ears while I walk up the narrow staircase that's completely painted in a bright yellow, way too bright in my opinion. I arrive on the first floor (the Canadians call it the second floor, they don't understand that the ground floor doesn't count as a story), I open the door and walk to my locker, avoiding eye contact with the group of grade nines that sit on the floor to my left all staring at a Nintendo switch in their hands.

8:54am

I enter my first class, English with Mr. D., great class. He's frantically writing something on the white board, as usual. I give him a smile and a head nod before I slide into my seat and decide to try to figure out what that weird sketch on the board is meant to be. It shows an animal like creature, it has wings...or are they horns?

9:00am

The bell rings, it's a deafening sound, I hate it, I'm not used to school bells, because my school in Luxembourg doesn't use them, but also from all the school bell sounds in the world, why did Royal Bay have to pick that one? It's a sharp sound and it has more in common with a siren than a school bell. Slowly there are more and more people walking in. I throw up a peace sign when I see my friend Teresa, walking in, her rainbow-colored hair popping off from her black clothes. She sits next to me, a concerned look forms on her face when she sees the creature that our teacher has drawn onto the board. Mr. D. is sitting at the front, smirking as he takes a sip out of his red solo cup and starts the class.

9:17

The kid that only shows up about twice a week and sits in the back of the class, walks in, a smile on his face and a Tim Horton's coffee cup in his hand, the teacher smiles and waves at him. Being late to a class is completely normal here, no one cares if you're on time or even if you're there for the whole class, you can just stand up and leave in the middle of class. This is something that I noticed pretty early on and I don't really know how I feel about it. On one hand, I think it's the students' responsibility to learn their stuff and if they think they can do that outside of class or if they're having a bad day and don't feel like going to class, that's fine. On the other hand though, I think that the Canadian school system is very reliant on the students discipline, the kids there almost never get forced to do anything and if there is a lack of discipline to do their work, the students won't learn. By the way, the sketch on the board turned out to be Mr. D.'s version of a horse...

10:21

English class is over and I gather my things, talking to my friend about a comic we both read and we walk over to the stairs where our paths separate, she goes up and I make my way through the hundreds of teenagers down to get to my guitar class. But first I'm drawn to the cafeteria to get two of the most delicious cookies that have ever existed on this planet, which they sell every morning at Royal bay secondary school's cafeteria.

10:32

Guitar class is starting and there are surprisingly many people here. We are a mixed class; every grade and every level of guitar is present; I myself am a complete beginner and not very talented. It may sound weird because it's everything but academic, but guitar class is probably my least favorite subject that I have here in Canada. Maybe it's just because I am too impatient, but I, contrarily to pretty much every other musician on earth, find guitar one of the hardest instruments to learn.

11:15

We've played a few songs together, mainly 80s rock n' roll, and now we're on to doing some musical theory and I'm relieved. As a kid I did all of this at least once a week for six years, and although I had to translate everything at first, now it's still pretty easy even in English.

11:53

The bell! It's lunch, finally. My first stop is the cafeteria, usually I bring my own lunch, but today is Pizza day and the pizza here is so deliciously disgusting I can't resist (yeah, I'm having a very healthy diet here in Canada.) After I got the pizza, I make my way up to the second floor where my friends

and I usually sit to eat lunch. Every day it's a surprise who's there because, just as any other Canadian student, my friends find an excuse to skip school almost every other day.

12:13

I finished my pizza and now I'm watching my friends performing some kind of weird Irish dance in the middle of the hallway. Gosh, why am I friends with these dorks again?

12:21

The deafening sound of the bell announces the start of the next block, I say goodbye to my friends and then make my way to media design. We're currently working on a surrealism piece in photoshop and I'm kind of frustrated because it doesn't really look how I wanted it to but maybe I'll find a solution today.

13:35

It worked! I talked to my teacher about my project and we found a solution on how I can portray my idea in a different way. Next to me sits a German international student who always talks *a lot*. She's very nice, we get along very well but she also never pays attention when the teacher is explaining something, so I have to help her afterwards when she doesn't know what to do.

2:00

Spanish, my last class of the day. After I fought my way through the students in the small staircase to go up, I get welcomed by a warm "Hola!" by my teacher before I fall into my chair, exhausted, and for a moment I just listen to the upbeat Spanish music coming out of the speakers. Behind me someone frantically copies the homework off of one of his friends even though the teacher is standing about 3 steps away.

2:46

The whole class is exploding in a fit of laughter because we are currently filming our own telenovela (a Spanish soap opera) and it's hilarious. It is so bad that it is really good and so much fun! Especially the bad acting is amazing, and no one knows their lines, so we almost always have to read them off a small whiteboard standing off-camera. Although we did write a lot of storylines and scenes, involving drugs and strippers, that probably never would have been allowed in a Luxembourgish school.

3:18

School is over and I start walking home, I stopped taking the bus after school, a while back because a) I need the exercise an b) that bus is ALWAYS late or it doesn't show up at all, so I am faster at home if I walk than when I wait for the bus. I am excited to just relax and hang out with Kingston!



English class

English class was easily my favorite class in Canada. My teacher, Mr. D., was an amazing teacher, as well as a great person. He was very funny, and his class was always interesting and fun. The way he organized class made me want to participate and have discussions and share my thoughts. He's one of the people that definitely helped me to step out of my comfort zone and become more confident.



The first thing we did in English class, was read Macbeth by William Shakespeare. This is an assignment I did at the very beginning of the semester, where we were instructed to somehow portray or describe or elaborate on the three witches that open up the play.

I decided to portray them as three mostly dark emotions that everyone knows in one form or the other, because in class we were talking about how they probably represent some kind of darkness and evil. The one on the left represents anger, the one in the middle is numbness and, on the right, it's sadness.

A spell of modern evil

Gather around,
Let's create this world
Make every ingredient count
Let everyone scream and shout.

Take the tears of a mother
who had to leave her kid behind
so, he could have a better life.
Throw in a piece of rainbow
that that got burnt
because love isn't always learned.
The scream of a child
drowning out the voices
screaming inside his head.
The broken rib of a teenager
who told the truth
that was not meant to be heard.
Add a man's tears
who's been told he's made it up
The girl's tongue,
bathed in a venomous cup.
The soul of a man
who's believed
to don't have one.
A lock of hair
pulled from a scalp
that hoped to believe
At last put in the lung of a kid
who choked on the candy
that was meant to help them
breathe.

Now let this world go up in
flames,
As it becomes the hell that no one
can escape.

There is a scene in Macbeth, where the three witches perform a spell in which the ingredients are a list of various evil things in the world, for example a "finger of birth-strangled babe, ditch-deliver'd by a drap" (William Shakespeare, Macbeth, 1892, Act IV scene I). Our assignment was to write a similar spell, with evil, that is still in the world, hence "a spell of modern evil".

Stuff my English teacher said that made perfect sense in context, but
not so much out of it

*insert any musician or
author name here*, you
magnificent bastard.

I'm gonna draw a horse-
AAARGH! It's a Camel!

No more punching
Shakespeare!

I'm not going to sing it!
~10 seconds later ~
sings it opera style

Choppedy
Chop chop!!

Did you like the
strangulation? That
was fun, right?

I didn't fall
down, my stool
did.

OKAY! I'm grabbing a knife!

AAAh Duncan's dead!
AAArgh crying babies
flying everywhere!

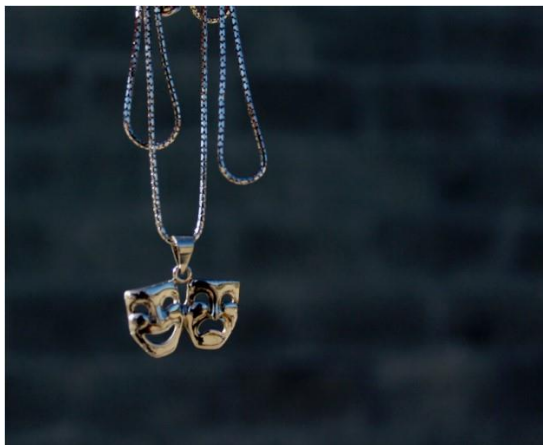
1ish, 2ish or 3ish, not 4ish or
moreish

Things that I did in my media Design class

Media design basically includes pretty much every digital artform there is, like for example, photography and photo editing, graphic design, animation, and video editing. We mostly concentrated on photography and photoshop, but by the end of the semester we also had a small film unit.

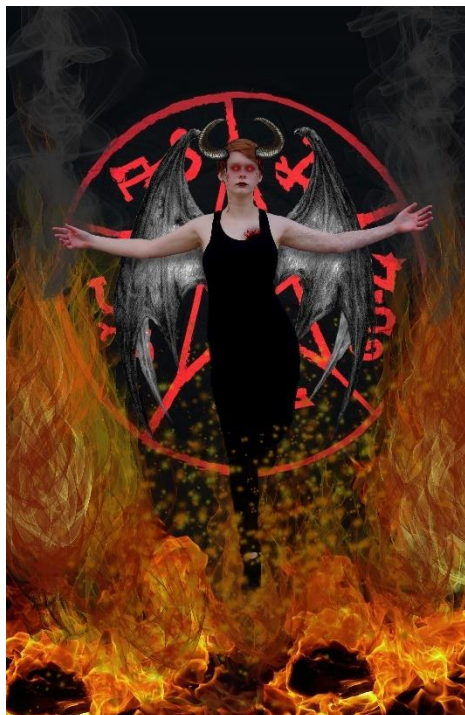


We started the year off with learning about photography and composition before we got into photoshop. These are some of my best photographs I took from that time.



After a couple of weeks, we got a bit more into photoshop and used it for stylistic purposes, rather than just small corrections on our photos.

This piece was the first time I really used photoshop, except for minor adjustments in my photographs. The assignment was called “virtual vacation” and we could photoshop ourselves wherever we wanted to be. And of course, because I’m a big nerd, I photoshopped myself fighting Loki, from the movie “the avengers”. I am actually pretty proud of myself; I think it looks very good, considering this was my first time doing something other than color adjustments in photoshop.



Halloween assignment: transform a teacher, a friend or yourself into some kind of a Halloween-creature...

Do you think maybe I took it too far?



This assignment was about levitation and I really like how it turned out. This location is my Mr. D.'s classroom, which I think represents his personality pretty well, kind of chaotic but really homey and fun.

For our next assignment we were supposed to do a movie poster to a non-existent movie of any genre. I chose to do a horror movie poster. It was a lot of work because I couldn't find a fitting background for the left side, so I had to use six pictures alone for the background and then paint the clouds into the sky. Though I think it was worth it because I would definitely go see that movie if it was real and maybe had a different title, but at that point my creativity had left me.





The last piece that we did in photoshop, was surrealism themed. We put a lot of time into this one and instead of just doing something aesthetically pleasing, this picture was also supposed to have some kind of message or meaning behind it. In my artwork, I tried to convey human creativity and the frustration that comes with it when you have an art block, which is actually quite ironic because that's exactly what happened to me while I was working on this. My original idea didn't work out as planned so I had to make some changes to the design which was frustrating to wrap my head around. In the end it all worked out though and I'm pretty proud of myself for not giving up and finishing it. I was also the only person who actually did two art pieces, because I am a very fast worker in photoshop.

Mental health

In my life so far, I struggled a lot with my mental health. And over the last year I've been working a lot on improving this and being happier and I think taking a few months away from home really helped me do this. Being 8 000km away from your normal life and all of your responsibilities, helps you to put things into perspective and gives you time to figure yourself out without having to worry about much else.

The people you meet there, don't have any prejudices against you, they have no idea who you are, so you have room to experiment and be the best version of yourself without anything or anyone holding you back.

I also find that my anxiety has really improved in some ways, meaning I contributed a lot in most of my classes and spoke freely, which is something I have a lot of trouble doing at home. In Canada on the other hand, it's easier to talk, because I knew that if I wouldn't want to, I wouldn't have to see any of these people ever again. This thought helped me a lot over the first few weeks and now, a few months later, I almost don't mind speaking at all in most of my classes.

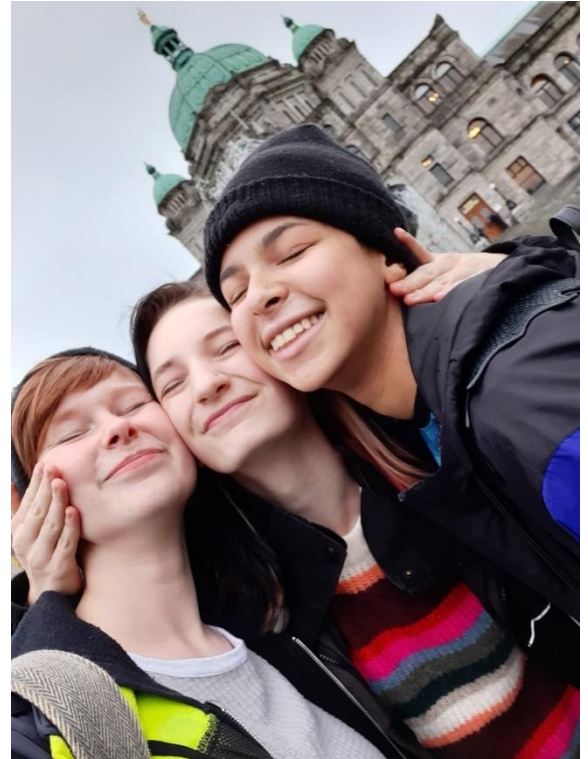
Forcing myself out of my comfort zone, also forced me to be more independent and be more confident. Learning to be more independent and overcoming my fears, made me stronger as a person and with that, also more self-aware. I had a lot more time to try out new things and I came across situations where I actually learned a few things about myself that I hadn't realized before. It even began with my determination of doing this exchange and actually going through with it, that I became stronger. I had so many opportunities, before and during my stay in Canada where I could have blown the whole thing off, but I didn't and that is something I am really proud of myself for.

My last days in Canada

School ended two days before I actually had to leave, so the next day I decided to go downtown with my friends, one last time.

We did all the tourist-y things that I hadn't done before, took really cheesy pictures in front of the government building and had some delicious food at our favorite restaurant.

Then we went to my friend's house for a little bit. When it was time for me to leave, we all became very emotional. They walked me to the bus stop, and we couldn't stop crying the whole way there. It was a very sad but also happy day, and I am so incredibly grateful to have met these people and that I found friends for life in them.



Friday, I reserved for family time. I spent the day hanging out with Kingston and his grandma. We watched TV, played with Kingston's toys and had fun.

Hannah had asked me what I wanted for my last meal in Canada and I said that I wanted the nachos that we had on Christmas eve. Not only because they were delicious, but also because they reminded me of a great evening and gave me a sense of family.

That last evening in Canada was perfect. Hannah's mom came over, and we all had amazing Nacho's. Then, later, when Kingston was in Bed and Hannah's mom went home, I watched one last movie with Hannah and Jamie, while finishing my last bucket of Ice cream.



Small things that I can confirm about Canada

1. Their money really does smell like maple syrup.
2. As cliché as it sounds, they do say “,eh?” after a sentence, at least 10 times a day.
3. Their favorite words are “sorry” and “thank you”
4. Sundays aren’t considered a holiday, like all the stores are open and it’s more like a second Saturday.
5. They are a lot more aware of allergies than we are, before people open a granola bar that could contain peanuts, they ask if anyone has an allergy. In the store candy is separated by “may contain peanuts” or not.
6. They don’t really take school seriously; they walk in and out of there how they please and for that reason you literally get marks for just showing up for class.
7. Their 5 cent-coins are like double the size than their 10 cent coins. Why?
8. *Everyone* owns a truck.
9. People offer to help all the time, for example, one of the first times that I went downtown me and my friend got off the bus and looked around kind of lost and immediately some guy walked up to us and told us where we should go and what’s probably most interesting to us.
10. Breakfast really is the most important meal of the day. At home, most people that I know either have a slice of bread or maybe some cereal for breakfast, especially during the week, but here every day it’s something else. Either scrambled eggs, or oatmeal or pancakes, they put a lot more thought into it. Then lunch is usually pretty small, like a sandwich and dinnertime is around 5pm.
11. They don’t have bagged milk. They do in some places but it’s definitely not as common as you might think, kind of disappointing but also relieving.

Going home

As I'm writing this, I'm on my way back to Luxembourg. I feel a mix of excitement and sadness. On one hand I'm excited to see my friends and family again, but on the other hand I already miss everyone in Canada. Just to think that I won't be able to wake up tomorrow morning by my host brother jumping on my bed. Or I won't go into Royal Bay on Monday and see my Canadian friends and my teachers, it makes me so sad. I will come back, that's for sure, but it will never be the same as it was in the last five months.

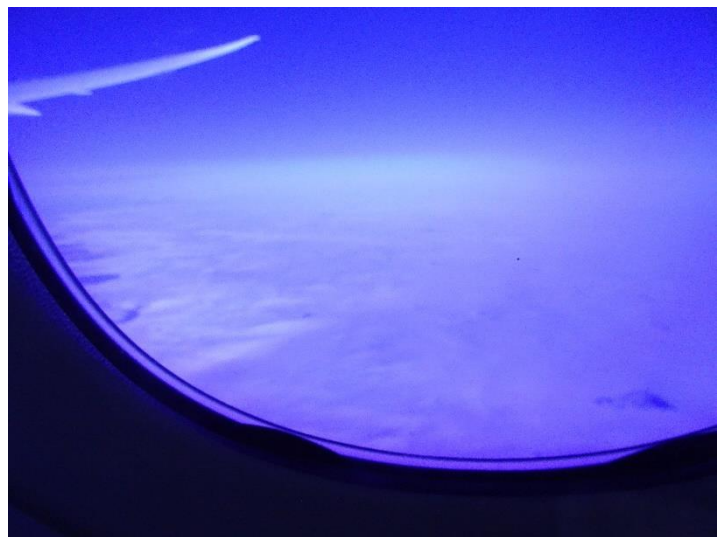
I'm sitting at the Vancouver airport right now at my gate (I am so happy I found it, this airport is huge!) and I'm trying to realize what's happening. Earlier, when I was waiting for my flight in Victoria, I could not stop myself from crying. It probably looked pretty weird, me sitting by myself, sobbing. I stopped crying now but I am confident that I'll start again at some point on the plane.

Diary:

Jan. 31st

I've been home for almost a week now and it still feels so weird to actually be back. In a lot of ways, it's as if I never left; Everything is the same, but it isn't...

People broke up, people got together, some people (almost) got their driver's license, my cousin is now bigger than I am and in school everyone already knows all the "new" classes that we have. It kind of feels like the last 5 months were a dream, I already got that feeling on the plane, and it hasn't faded yet, if anything it got stronger. I still can't believe that all that I experienced in Canada really happened and that it's already over. I miss everyone so much!



Conclusion

Do it. If you ever have the chance to live or study in another country, even just for a few weeks, do it. It might be scary, and you never know what's coming your way, but it will all work out. The last five months I spent in Canada have definitely been among the best months of my life.

Of course, it wasn't always easy, sometimes things didn't work out the way I wanted them to or I missed my friends and family but eventually it all worked out. I found a new family and a second home, 8000km away from Luxembourg. I made friends for life, saw so many amazing places and learned so much about life and myself.

When I came here, I was so scared, I had a few panic attacks over thought of coming to Canada without knowing anyone, there were a few times I almost blew the whole thing off, but I didn't. I faced my fears and got on that plane. This plane took me to the best experience I ever had and to think, that I almost didn't go is so stupid.

In the end, taking some time off from your life at home, can help you in so many ways. I know that it did for me. It helped me to put things into perspective and grow as a person. When you go to a place where no one knows you, you can reinvent yourself, try new things, without having to be scared about being judged.

Sometimes you have to force yourself out of your shell, out of your comfort zone, and allow yourself to grow and get a different perspective onto the world. If I could do it, so can you.

Do it, even if you're scared, I guarantee, it's going to be worth it.



image sources

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