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PAXPRESS

The Newspaper for Exchange Students, Host Families, and Schools

Time Flies Too Quickly

"Time flies when you're having fun!" We can relate; this year has flown by. We never dreamed a student from Ukraine could so easily walk into our home a "stranger" and become family. We were excited to introduce Alex to life in Texas. It made us see the places we'd taken for granted through fresh eyes. He made many friends at school, earned a well-deserved citizenship award, and attended prom.

As we're preparing for Alex's going away party, we feel blessed to have this experience with such a wonderful young man. We consider Alex to be a son and a brother to our family. Our only regret is that it's ending too soon.

—Khristi Ward (TX), host mom of Alex (FLEX, Ukraine)

The Ward family hopes that Alex *will* come back!

Finding Her Niche

Soon after she arrived from Corsica, I asked Cécile how she planned to get involved at school. "I don't know. I'm not sporty," she said, then looked discouraged as I rattled off the typical extracurricular activities. Nothing suited her. Cécile is full of depth, artistic passion, beauty, and sophistication beyond her years. After a brief pause to consider where this amazing girl would fit in, I exclaimed, "Ohhh…it's theatre, Cécile!" My enthusiasm was met with one perfectly shaped eyebrow raised in skepticism and the words, "You're joking, right?"

Several weeks later I received this note: "I thought you'll be glad to know that I'm a part of the next play of John Glenn!" Cécile had auditioned for the high school musical! And the rest, as they say, is history. She soon sang and danced in *Pippin*, followed by a second role in *The Addams Family*. Cécile found her niche. Thanks to tremendous personal courage and trust, she has discovered a new part of herself and a community of lifelong friends.

—Kim Wolf, community coordinator (MI)

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Cécile (far right) seems to have found her niche in the theatre.

Grand Prize Winners

Claude and her host mom are all smiles! Click to watch Claude's contest #3 submission on "overcoming obstacles."

Eggy grills up some burgers with the Rotary Club at the Taste of Manatee Food Festival.

And the Winners Are…

In this last issue of *PAX Press* for the 2014-2015 exchange year, we continue to bring stories from students, families, coordinators, and schools all over America. Chances are you've noticed the contests we've held throughout the year—maybe you even sent in a submission or helped a student to do so. We were thrilled that quite a number of students competed in all four contests. As promised, those who did had their name entered into a drawing for a final prize (Amazon gift cards). Let's find out a little more about our winners...

Eggy got busy quickly! He jumped right into community service in early September, with a road clean-up event. Throughout the year, he leant a hand to countless needs, including in the school library, gardening and composting, cooking at a local food festival, collecting food for the Salvation Army, and much more. And let's not forget the six presentations Eggy shared with classmates in November and December, highlighting his native Indonesia. Eggy also got involved with HOSA, and in late January participated in a regional competition for which he prepared for a month. He took second place in the Medical Math category! Way to go, Eggy!

When Claude arrived in the U.S., she was amazed at the warm welcome of her host family, who immediately drew her in to daily life. Although she was nervous about presenting during International Education Week, Claude soon discovered that her classmates were curious to learn more about Cameroon. Claude immersed herself in a variety of volunteer activities, including helping at a local library, collecting used eyeglasses for the Lions Club, tutoring at school and church, and serving food to veterans. Not only did Claude come to learn that she has a gift for teaching, she was rewarded with the gratitude of those she helped. She looks forward to launching similar volunteer efforts when she returns home!

—Eggy (YES, Indonesia), hosted by the Cornell Family (FL); Claude (YES, Cameroon), hosted by the Brady family (TN)

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Journey Reflections

Yes, the journey has been long indeed. I thought I would go back home as the same immature young girl, but that's not the case.

The journey hasn't been easy. There are times I cried and totally gave up, just felt like the world turned against me. Others encouraged me, others laughed at me, others felt sorry for me, others judged me.

Before I left home, my biggest challenge was saying goodbye to my mum and dad. I could see tears dripping from their eyes, but they had to support me since they knew this exchange year would make the new me.

The goals that I have now make a tremendous difference in my life. They've allowed me to achieve success and to accomplish what I had previously dreamt of or wished for. I hope that my future ambitions will be realized as well. I will have fought for what is right and fair. I will have risked for that which mattered, and I will have given help to those who were in need. I hope I will leave the earth a better place for what I've done and who I've been.

—Elisabeth (YES, Kenya), hosted by the Klein family (WA)

Elisabeth's reflection shows a different girl than the one who arrived!

Class of 2015!

I can't believe my exchange year is almost over. I got a great life experience being in the U.S, which I will use in order to build my successful future. Graduation was one of the best things I ever experienced in the U.S. Standing among graduates, I felt like I was making a new big step in my life. Because if something is over, then other good things are about to happen.

I wish all exchange students the best in their future. Let's bring changes together. And I want to say a special thanks to our host families and coordinators. Without you, our exchange year would not be so bright. Congratulations to all 2015 alumni!

—Anastasiya (FLEX, Turkmenistan), hosted by the Mikell family (AL)

Anastasiya poses with host sister Hayley after the ceremony

Goodbye, Au Revoir, and Wada'an

As a first-time host family, we decided to double host, opening our home to Abdul from Saudi Arabia and Edwin from France. It has been a fun, sometimes difficult, but rewarding year. Overall, we feel we have enriched their lives as they have ours. We have learned a great deal about the Saudi and French cultures.

People do not realize how attached they will become to these young students. I know they both will do well and stay in touch with us. Abdul plans to return to this area to attend college at Fort Hays in Hays, KS, which is only 60 miles from where we live. Edwin will hopefully return to the U.S. when he finishes his chef training. I am proud that they both have grown in maturity and strength since coming here.

—Carolyn Soukup (KS), host mom of Abdul (YES, Saudi Arabia) and Edwin (France)

Host dad Jim and host mom Carolyn send Edwin and Abdul to their unique American prom experience.

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Get Involved!

A Performance to Remember

One year ago, when I just got my placement information, I researched my future school and found an interesting, and in my first opinion, weird video of a performance of some drummers and dancers from this school. "Strange Americans," I thought. And I could not even imagine that later I would become part of this outstanding and energetic group—Drumline.

Drumline is an annual contest of band performers; the idea is to create a meaningful and harmonious show combining the percussion, the front ensemble, and the color guard. I was a part of the color guard. The concept of our show was based on *The Raven* by Edgar Allen Poe. This is a story about the death of the protagonist's wife Lenore and his suffering without her. The ravens (color guard) released his wife out of the picture frame, and the couple was reunited, but not for long. Ravens are not as innocent as they seem. The protagonist was separated from his beloved and left alone again, only to hear the word "Nevermore."

Although the season is over and we will perform nevermore, it was an unforgettable experience. Drumline members showed me how hardworking and creative Americans can be and how team spirit is important.

—Ekaterina (FLEX, Russia), hosted by the Wahl family (OH)

Ekaterina is intimidating as a raven!

Honing Leadership Skills

I had the wonderful opportunity to attend the Henderson High School Leadership weekend at Camp Lee on Mt. Charleston, just northwest of Las Vegas, NV. The knowledge I gained during the program made this retreat one of my most memorable experiences in America.

On the first day, I learned how important it is for a leader to be able to relate to every member of his or her crew. We discussed the power of words as well as the definition and qualities of a leader. On the second day, we spent a lot of time in our retreat "family clusters," exchanging our opinions on different aspects of leadership. I was surprised by the diversity of our backgrounds and how different people can find ways to communicate and successfully complete tasks. One of my teammates said, "The biggest value of the leader should be 'no jealousy, no envy.'" I could not agree more with this statement. A leader should be selfless and free of prejudicial thoughts.

On the third day, I was taught the most crucial lesson of all: be a realist but never give up your dream. I've decided to determine short-term goals and long-term goals and slowly but surely move towards them one by one.

—Anastasya (FLEX, Ukraine), hosted by the Pace family (NV)

Anastasya (front row, second from left) smiles with fellow leaders.

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Get Involved!

Zoey (right) and a friend hug the Detroit Tigers' mascot!

Singing in Front of a Roaring Crowd

I am a Chinese exchange student in Michigan, and my story is about music. In China, I sang Peking Opera and won some prizes. I like Peking Opera because it is the quintessence of traditional art and culture in my country. Also, I am keen on playing piano. I really enjoy music because I can read the emotion in it.

After I arrived in America, I joined the Select Choir at my high school, Bay City Western. It is the top choir with many talented singers. My music dream started to be unique, and my singing skills have improved. In the past eight months, my choir has had three concerts and a competition at Central Michigan University, but being invited to sing the national anthem at a Detroit Tigers' baseball game was the most significant thing in my exchange year! My picture was even used in a news story about it, and my face was shown on the giant screen in Tigers' Stadium!

Although I have to leave this wonderful country very soon, I will keep all these memories in my heart and continue to live my music dream.

—Zoey (China), hosted by the Welch family (MI)

Challenges Become Victories

There wouldn't have been a better way to end my exchange year than joining my school's track & field team this spring. Just when I thought I had experienced it all, this sport taught me that there are always new challenges out there, and that if you work and want it hard enough, those challenges become your victories.

Our girls' team finally won the conference championship after 31 years. This sport became more like a family: practicing together in warm and cold weather; staying out late covered in blankets during long track meets; and pushing each other to be better. My best memories will be being part of a team that is crazy enough to run along with you until the finish line so they can cheer you all the way to the end. After doing track, I run confidently and fast to whatever challenge life is preparing next.

—Jona (YES, Albania), hosted by the Main family (WI)

Jona (second from left) celebrates with teammates Alysa, Mia, and Patricia.

Never Say Never(land)!

This time is probably the most memorable time of my exchange year. With getting ready to say goodbyes and exchanging numbers, I am also doing much more. I auditioned for the school spring musical and ended up getting three roles, including the lead of Peter Pan. The spring musical was the best thing that could happen to me. Not only did I have fun doing it, but it also taught me some valuable lessons. It taught me the importance of teamwork and sticking together. I learned to respect other people's opinions and to give them importance. Now that it is over, I can confidently say that it was the most beautiful time I could ever have with the people I enjoy being around. Also it allowed me to face my fears in a sort of a way—I was scared to wear tights on the stage!

—Syed (YES, Pakistan), hosted by the Hume family (MA)

With his "Lost Boys," Syed sure found a place he belonged—center stage!

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The Adjustment Cycle

So Much Beauty in a Year

The end is coming closer, and it is hard to realize I will have to say goodbye to everyone very soon.

I came nine months ago to this small rural town, and I met extraordinary people, starting with my host family. I am one of the lucky ones who arrived in the right place from the beginning. Moreover, I am one of few exchange students who had the chance to live a double experience. Indeed, my host family originated from India. This chance has given me the opportunity to discover two different cultures in the same year. I had my American life at the high school and with my friends, and I discovered the Indian culture with my host family. Twice as much discovery gave me an experience twice as good!

—Alice (France), hosted by the Patel family (OR)

Alice (second from left) with host mom Sony (second from right) and her host mom's two sisters at the Grand Canyon

Overcoming a Fear

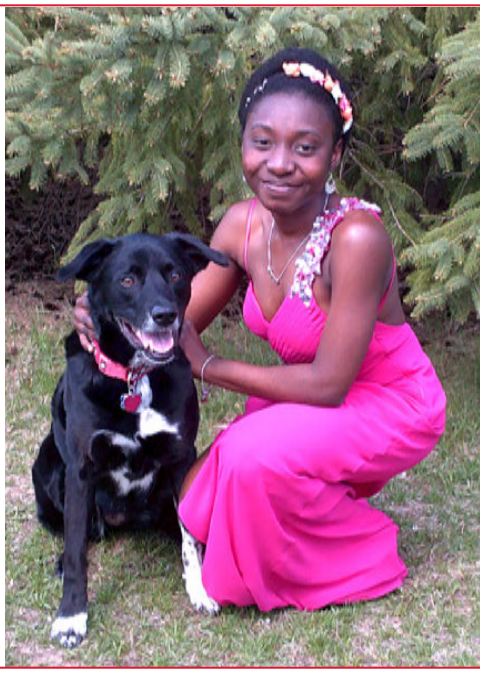
Life gives us a chance every single day as we run through its changing motions. A chance to meet great people, moments of joy, sadness and laughter, and above all, a chance to make positive impacts in the lives of the many we are connected with each day.

Whenever we talk of great friendship, most people think of two entities with the same anatomy. Very few think about great and long-lasting friendships with animals. At the beginning of my exchange year, I was placed with a family that had pets. They held in their bosom one of my greatest fears: a dog. It was affectionately called Gidget.

The start of our friendship was a tough one until the mid-part of my stay. Today, all my fears are gone! Gidget and I have become the best of friends. I have found myself playing with her with such great amusement and joy, and it is sad that the bridge of distance will soon be between us. She has been a part of the amazing adventure this year. Animals can be just as amazing and wonderful as any great human friend can be.

—Natalie (YES, Ghana), hosted by the Marks family (WI)

Nothing but love between Natalie and Gidget!



Thinking Outside the Box

Trying to get creative while wearing the traditional hijab and robe can be difficult, but Alanoud from Palestine came up with her own creation with the help of her host family, the Gambinos, to wear on Tacky Tuesday during Spirit Week.

Tackiness aside, the spirit, holidays, food, culture, and mostly the love and affection of her host family have inspired her this past year. She now has big plans to attend school in Europe and effect change in her home country.

—Cindy Thigpen, community coordinator (AL)

Alanoud gets creative on Tacky Tuesday!

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Earth Day Efforts

Giving back to my community always relieves me as a global citizen. My host father and I spent three and a half hours cleaning out a small stream at the bottom of a ravine which feeds into the Conococheague Creek in honor of Earth Day. We pulled out an estimated 20,000 pounds of debris (mostly tires). We collected about 50 bags of trash. The moment I could see the water flowing with ease, I felt infinitely grateful to be of help in making a difference like that. It was an amazing feeling and experience!

—Ghanwa (YES, Pakistan), hosted by the Shields family (PA)

After all that work, Ghanwa looks a little TIREd.

Ayunda poses with a middle school teacher, each of them holding one of her books!

From the Writer's Desk

In my home country, I have written 16 chapter books since I was 11 years old. I was so honored to share this experience in the United States when a teacher from Maplewood Middle School in Menasha asked me to do a writing workshop. I was so excited that I prepared for three months. There were about 50 students within three sessions.

I not only shared about my experience, I also showed the students some of my published books. They couldn't understand the story because it was written in Indonesian, so I handed out a translation. The catch was that it only translated the story to the climax, not all the way to the end. I asked them to continue the story based on their own imagination. Before I let them begin writing, I told them, "It's your time now. Be yourself, or just be anything you want. Have fun!" My goal was to lift up their confidence and spirit to write. Reading their stories made me smile. I was also glad that I could give back to the community and inspire the students to enjoy writing.

—Ayunda (YES, Indonesia), hosted by the Jochman family (WI)

Helping Four-Legged Friends

Following her passion for animals, one of the first school clubs that Yuno from Japan joined was the Animal Advocate club at Foothill High School in Henderson, NV. In addition to making new human friends in this club, Yuno has participated in many different activities for the betterment of animals in local shelters. She has walked dogs, made dog toys, cleaned horse pens, brushed horses and fed them apple treats, and collected pet food and toys for the animal shelters. Meeting twice monthly after school and doing community activities at shelters on Saturdays has given Yuno a great opportunity to spend time with both her human and four-legged friends. Nice way to give and get back, Yuno!

—Margaret Hoppe, community coordinator (NV)

Yuno (center) and friends volunteering at an animal shelter

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As Seen in Social Media

Click on any image to view full post or watch video

We Want to Hear from You!

Whether you have considered hosting a high school exchange student, sending your teen abroad, having an exchange student at your school, working locally to support an international student, or you simply want to learn more about what it is we do, feel free to give us a call at **800.555.6211**.

Already involved and have something to share for a future issue? Regardless of your relationship to PAX, we are always accepting interesting content (stories, photos, videos, etc.) at paxpress@pax.org.

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