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Pax academic exchange

PAXPRESS

The Newspaper for Exchange Students, Host Families, and Schools

Over Already!?

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While Catalina's comical re-enactment actually pertains to a different part of her exchange year (watch her video to find out which), many students are no doubt in a similar state of emotional shock at just how quickly the year has gone by.

The year has flown by for many of our students and host families. But before we send this outstanding group of 2015/16 PAXers our farewells, we would like to briefly reflect on the memories made and experiences had. We could not think of a better way than through the eyes of Catalina herself.

The FLEX student put her *Year in Review* project together in her digital media class at Coconino High School. Her host family as well as other PAX students and their host families feature prominently in the film, including Catalina's friends Malika and Sevara (both PAX/FLEX students from Kyrgyzstan).

Strap in for more expressive faces, a bit of junk food, and even a tearful goodbye.

—Catalina (FLEX, Moldova), hosted by the Seelhammer family (AZ)

Prom

Prom with My Bestie!

May 7 was one of the most memorable days of my exchange year. I had the chance to experience my first and last prom at Menasha High School. It was the best "different" prom I could ever wish for, and what made it even better was I was with my best friend, Jana, whose family immigrated from the Philippines a couple of years ago. For almost 10 months, she was there for me, to listen, celebrate, and cheer me up, so it was just worth it spending a very memorable moment with a very treasured person. This 2016 prom gave me a chance to make friends with other people in my school and to spend time with other friends I've made so far this year.

—Alia (YES, Philippines), hosted by the Wayland family (WI)

A silly moment between the besties, Jana and Alia (right), before prom.

A Red Carpet Experience

Once, prom was only something in American movies. I'm a boy who doesn't fancy those beautiful dresses, but as the saying goes, "Tuxedos and suits are the armor of modern man."

And the opportunity came! I went with Yue as my prom date. I dug out the suit that I brought with me all the way from China and put it on. Yue handed me my boutonniere, a white flower decorated with silver stripes. Then, I put on my bow tie. I took a glimpse in the mirror—I have never been this handsome before!

The prom theme was "Rock the Red Carpet," and in the music one could hear nothing but happy laughter and see nothing but excited, joyful faces.

—Bote, (China), hosted by the Allison family (IN)

Host sister Amanda (left), joins Bote, her friend Jordan, and Yue (China) before heading to the prom.

A Favorite Memory

I went to my first and maybe last prom, which I think is one of my most favorite memories in my exchange year. Being with my best friends, having dinner together, and dancing with them like crazy made prom night so special.

It's almost time to go home, but I'm not upset at all, because I have been so lucky to make my mind's diary full of wonderful and amazing memories, so I'll always be able to say, "I have packed 10 months of life in my mind's suitcase, and I would like to carry it with me for the rest of my life."

—Nishat, (YES, Bangladesh), hosted by the Knudsen family (WA)

Friends Sara, Nishat, Angela, and Sami look to the skies on prom night.

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On the Home Front

Emmanuel's Legacy

Emmanuel of Ghana befriended everyone from the moment he arrived. Whether at school, home, church, volunteer activities, or sporting events—he became the center of attention and achieved "movie star status" in our small community. His million-watt smile, genuine love of all people, hilarious giggle, and positive personality made him instantly popular. His willingness to step outside his comfort zone and try new things inspired others to be fearless. He reached out to those kids at school who were friendless, sitting alone in the cafeteria, becoming their new best friend. His name means "God with us," and it fits him well.

He taught us that material possessions and monetary wealth have nothing to do with happiness. His unquenchable thirst for knowledge challenged his teachers and renewed their faith in the future of our youth. He epitomized every positive trait that our school strives to instill and became friend, mentor, tutor, and encourager to everyone he met.

While small in stature, Emmanuel makes up for it with his giant personality and mighty love for others. Emmanuel represents the best of the exchange program and has been a complete joy every moment of his stay. He made an indelible impression that will never be forgotten.

—Shellie Weaver (MO), host mom of Emmanuel (YES, Ghana)

Emmanuel and host sister Olivia give a thumbs up on graduation day!

Heading to Malaysia

My daughter Grace has been selected for the YES Abroad program. She will complete her 10th grade year in Malaysia and live with a host family. Grace has received lots of advice and assistance from her exchange sister, Shaira, currently a 10th grader and also a YES ambassador from the Philippines. Grace hopes everyone in her new school will be as friendly as the students at her school in Salt Lake City have been to her Shaira.

—Vicky Wason (UT), host mom of Shaira (YES, Philippines)

In the future, Shaira and Grace will both be YES exchange alumnae!

Everything is Bigger in Texas

Paul is enjoying his last few weeks along the beach at Corpus Christi and on the farm of his host family. His first impression of Texas was how huge the state is, all things country, and the heat factor. The host family solution to the heat is to cool off during a visit to the beach along the coastline of the Gulf of Mexico or relax in the wheel of a tractor tire on the farm.

Paul's last impressions are of how beautiful and lovely the great state of Texas is and how friendly everyone has been during his stay. He will treasure these memories forever.

—Denise Bonds (TX),
host mom of Paul (Germany)

Paul chills out in a giant tire!

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Get Involved!

Home Run!

I had an awesome experience playing with a baseball team. I made many friends while learning how to play the game. I used to play cricket in India, but baseball is so different. I did not know anything about baseball, but my coaches and teammates helped me. I even got my first base hit in a game, and I was on the news!

—Achyut (YES, India),
hosted by the Coons family (IL)

Achyut speaks with a local journalist about his baseball exploits this year.

Write On!

I am very passionate about journalism, and by the time I got a chance to be in my host school's journalism class, I didn't want to take it for granted. Instead of giving us lectures, our journalism teacher treated us like professional journalists. After some discussion, we went straight to the field, conducted interviews, collected data, and put things together. This year, we published three issues of the school newspaper, *The Squall*.

In *The Palm Beach Post*'s 36th Annual Excellence in High School Journalism Awards, I was nominated as an Excellent Feature Writer, and many of my fellow student-journalists also were nominated for several other categories. Although none of us won first place, we were very happy and proud that *The Squall* got an Honorable Mention for General Excellence in the Printed Newspaper category. I enjoyed every single second I spent in journalism class with these amazing future journalists, and I hope that my days as a journalist don't stop here.

—Bela (YES, Indonesia)
hosted by the Mitchell-Rowland family (FL)

Three student-journalists, Carrington, Bela, and Rachel, in a moment before the awards ceremony

Take Me Out to the Ballgame!

I had another dream on my bucket list checked when I went to my first baseball game ever, between the Baltimore Orioles and Detroit Tigers. It was really fun to learn how the players play, why they run to bases, how they score, and many other baseball things.

It was fun cheering the team and seeing the people jump and scream like maniacs because the ball went far for a home run. I guess after this match, I can consider baseball as one of the sports I like in the U.S.

—Yasmeen (YES, Israel Arab Communities),
hosted by the Hose family (WV)

"Baseball game: Check!" says Yasmeen, who is with her host sisters Seirrah and Sonya at Camden Yards.

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An Insider's View

Büşra from Turkey, Tetiana from Ukraine, and Intza from Spain had the opportunity to visit West Virginia Senator Joe Manchin's office in Washington, D.C. These West Virginia PAX students had the opportunity to observe the daily operations of a senator's office and meet the senator himself.

It was an amazing opportunity just to sit and listen to the phone calls that were coming into the office about various issues that West Virginia residents were requesting Senator Manchin's help with. The senator was very gracious to spend a few minutes with us. He offered the three girls a great amount of encouragement to continue their studies and to make a difference in this world. They then had the afternoon to tour the U.S. Capitol Building and visit the U.S. Supreme Court. It was a day full of learning and lots of fun.

—Jessica Boyd (WV), community coordinator

Intza (Spain), Büşra (YES, Turkey), and Tetiana (FLEX, Ukraine) take a timeout from their busy meeting schedule.

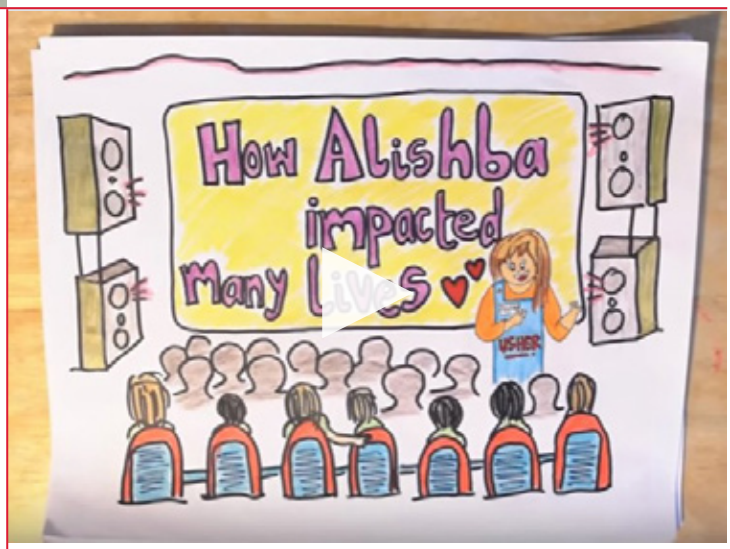
A Multicultural Goodbye

If someone asked me a year ago what exchange meant, I would have replied "a cultural interchange." If someone asks me the same question now, I must add exchange is setting a new trend and doing things beyond our expectations. If a year ago someone said that I would be one of the organizers of an American school's first Multicultural Night, I would have laughed.

One of the first clubs that I joined in school was the Multicultural Club. As expected, the members were students from various ethnicities. For the first time in the school's history, a Multicultural Night was arranged to celebrate the diversity of the school. Being the club's co-president, I worked day and night with other members to pull off the first ever mega event. Our anxiety grew as the day came closer. We had no idea how people would respond. But in the end, it turned out to be a huge success. This won't be the last event of its kind; the trend that started during my exchange year will continue!

—Fariha (YES, Bangladesh), hosted by the Sprada family (NY)

Fariha stands in her booth during Multicultural Night.



"It all started volunteering as an usher at a local theater," Alishba explains.

120 Hours of Volunteering!

Over the past seven months, I've not just lived the moments but also discovered my true passion of giving back to the community. I learned how giving human beings are, even when they don't have much to give. We open countless doors of understanding, compassion, and empathy when we take time to actively listen and communicate with others. Our community is a diverse fabric of human beings, and we all have a voice in enacting change, improving the lives of our neighbors, and promoting a more just and verdant world. Shout out to 120 hours of volunteering!

—Alishba (YES, Pakistan), hosted by the Pearson family (WA)

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An Artist With a Bright Future

We knew our student Rim was an artist even before she arrived from Lebanon. Her mom emailed us some of her paintings during the "getting acquainted" period before she came to live with us. It was no surprise when she signed up for painting class, followed by an advanced course the second semester. We were happy to find out one of her paintings of downtown Grand Rapids, MI, was chosen to display at a local restaurant. But that couldn't prepare us for how proud we were of her when her painting received first place in the Livonia Fine Arts Festival! Although we'll miss Rim when she leaves us in just a few short weeks, we look forward to watching where her art takes her in the coming years!

—Allison Johnson (MI), host mom of Rim (YES, Lebanon)

Rim and her award-winning art

'Til the Day of My Graduation

I feel like it was just yesterday when I came to my American school for the first time. I remember my first ride on a school bus, my first lunch at school, and my first conversation with people that now I call friends. I got placed in a small school, but we have a lot of pride. We're the Hornets! As time went by, now I feel like I'm just like other kids. We rode the same school bus, attended the same classes, did the same work, and graduated together. We'll always be part of the Hornets!

—Ayundya (YES, Indonesia), hosted by Ramirez family (MO)

Sanzhar (FLEX, Kazahkstan) and Ayundya, who share the same host family, were invited to experience graduation!

Aida (left) and host sister Abby at the Soda Lake outlook

Exploring in the Wild West

The whole family drove out to Carrizo Plains National Monument to view the wildflowers, hike a little, and check out Soda Lake. The girls took so many pictures of each other and the scenery. Yellow flowers and beautiful desolate views were abounding—there are only flowers out there a few weeks of the year. We took the long way home through Cholame/Shandon and had dinner at historic Jack Ranch Cafe (James Dean memorial). Aida is kind of obsessed with celebrities (even old ones), so she thought that was cool to check out the whole James Dean story. I will miss her cheerful "yes" attitude, her fear of the rooster, her soft voice, her evolving relationship with Abby, and our deep life talks.

—Stephanie Edwards (CA), host mom of Aida (FLEX, Kazakhstan)

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Oklahoma: Much More than Just "OK!"

The Okmulgee Chamber of Commerce reached out to interview people living there, including Loai from Egypt. Here is just one of his interview responses. Find the resulting article here.

Q: How did you end up coming to Oklahoma, as a foreign exchange student?

A: I was the last of the students to be placed, and it was looking very sad for me, but God granted me the most amazing opportunity to come to Okmulgee, OK, with a family and coordinator that I could never have dreamed to be better. I guess you can say it was just good luck on my part because I love my American family, coordinator, school, friends, and community more than I could have ever dreamed possible. Okmulgee is the place to be, and I wish other exchange students to have this same great opportunity as myself.

—Loai (YES, Egypt),
hosted by the Walters family (OK)

Loai wonders if King Tut would have enjoyed Oklahoma as much as he has!

Awards Galore!

On the last day of school, there was an awards program. I never got so many awards in my life!

I got one for managing to have an excellent grade in math all year long. I received a certificate for being a very thoughtful member in FCCLA Club. I got a gold medal in FCCLA State conference, and I qualified for a national conference. I got an honorable mention for an art project as well. I received a certificate for participating in track. And finally, I got a medal for being an excellent exchange student and ambassador for my country.

I am so glad for having the chance to get all these awards in one year! I feel so proud for being an exchange student in the U.S. It's been a year full of success! Thanks PAX and YES for letting me have the chance to succeed more in my life, come to America, and have the best days of my life.

—Sewar (YES, Gaza),
hosted by the Pence family (IN)

Sewar shows off her athletic award certificate.

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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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