May/June 2014 Vol. XIX, No. 4

Pax academic exchange

PAXPRESS

The Newspaper for Exchange Students, Host Families, and Schools

Cavid takes in the grandeur of the Pacific.

An Ocean of Experiences

I think it happens with all exchange students—we think America is like Hollywood movies, but it is not really like that. Being an exchange student does not mean you are going to be happy and have fabulous times every day. No, being an exchange student means you are going to have awesome times but also sad ones. Sometimes, you are going to feel mad. Sometimes, you are going to think that you should not be here or that it may be a waste of time.

I think the reason that we are here is that we are going to change the world to be a much more happy place. I am 17 years old, but I think I have more than other people who are older than me. Everything I have seen, heard, and experienced this year has shown me that human beings are naturally inclined to love each other, and that was before being Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist or Atheist—before being American, Australian, European, African, or Asian. We are humans. The only thing that could generate hatred and push people to become terrorists is ignorance. When people don't understand the differences between each others' cultures, they tend to close off themselves, pushed by the fear of the unknown.

Being an exchange student is learning, while recognizing the value of people back home. It is really awesome but hard to live between two countries, two communities. It is certainly not a waste of time.

—Cavid (FLEX, Azerbaijan), hosted by the Maxwell family (OH)

Inside this Issue

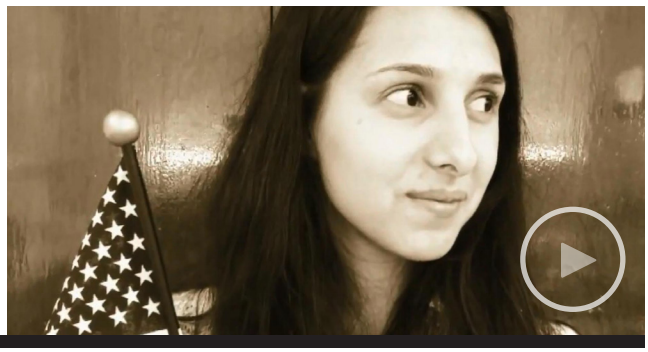
Alumni News 2
Exchange Living 3-4
Get Involved! 5
PAX Plus 6
The Adjustment Cycle 7
As Seen in Social Media 8

www.pax.org

My American Journey

Her dream was to experience American life—against impossible odds. Based on a true story, Lebishka's mock trailer for the epic full-length motion picture of her exchange year is sheer inspiration. "This is the type of film that reminds us why we go to the movies!" gushes PAX area manager Laurie Sciabica. In her first feature film role, the Macedonian is simply flawless. Indeed, community coordinator Fabi Casillas adds, "If you only see one movie this year, make it the mock trailer for *My American Journey*."

—Lebishka (YES, Macedonia), hosted by the Sukon family (TX)



Future is Now for Recent Future Leaders Exchange Alumna

Alina (FLEX, Ukraine 2007/08) will be spending the summer on a scholarship from the Iacocca Institute at Lehigh University in Pennsylvania.

The first president of the U.S. Embassy Youth Council in Ukraine, 2007/08 PAX alumna Alina is already on to impressive things. Having never flown or been outside of her native Ukraine for that matter, Alina's 2007/08 school year at Williamsport Area High School (PA) was a formative one to say the least.

The U.S. Embassy Youth Council in Ukraine was established in 2012 in response to then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's call to engage youth worldwide in order to develop solution to various problems, be it effective governance or environment, and in order to help the U.S. Embassies worldwide do a better job reaching out to youth. As the first president, Alina is involved in building the organization of active young Ukrainian professionals from the ground up.

Alina's passion for civil service is also evident in her board membership in the Junior Chamber International—an international community of citizens between the ages of 18 and 40 with the aim and purpose of creating positive change in the world. A senior at Kyiv-Mohla Academy, majoring in applied math, she has won a scholarship to the Iacocca Institute at Lehigh University this summer, where she will be representing her country.

Alina attributes most of her accomplishments to participating in the Future Leaders Exchange (FLEX) Program through PAX. She considers it to be a breakthrough time, challenging the narrow view of a post-Soviet kid, expanding her world view, helping her gain confidence, and teaching her to be a civic activist with a passion for working to make her community better.

She gives special thanks to her host family, Geoffrey and Dr. Robin Knauth, for making this personal transformation possible and for demonstrating how one family can begin serving as diplomats and changing the world—one human relationship at a time.

—Ann Swift, PAX community coordinator (PA)

Greetings from India!

I am writing this to give an update on what I am up to since returning to the subcontinent.

I have completed my bachelor's degree in Business and am now pursuing my master's in Media and Communication. I was recently awarded a distinction for my academics and have also done various internships in the corporate world to gain practical knowledge.

I could not thank PAX enough, as it's only as a result of my program year that I am what I am today. The values, patience, and ambition the program instilled in me both directly and indirectly have made me a person of virtue. Even today when I am in some kind of upset or down moment, I remember to give it some time, as I know things will get better.

These are lessons I learned while adjusting to a host family, new country, new school, etc. but which have now become a second nature approach to daily life. Not only PAX, but my host family, the Rissers, my exchange sister from Tajikistan, and my liaison Laura Puckett all had a great hand in nurturing me from a girl to the mature young woman I feel like today.

Thanks so much!

—Sangini (YES, India 2009/10), hosted by the Risser family (PA)

Sangini credits her time in Greencastle, PA for her current success.

Back to Front Page

Sittie is determined to keep on learning.

Live and Learn

Learning is a part of human nature. Knowledge is my power; I need to learn. I have always lived my life in one community—a place where traditions were strictly followed, a place I thought would be my only world. I always imagined myself as a fairy in a cocoon with my eyes closed to the world. When I came to America, the cocoon broke.

Who would have thought that I could play violin and saxophone? Who would have thought that I could ride on public transportation all by myself? Who would have thought that I could have a bank account, work with machines (Robotics class), and work with electric wires (Electrics class)? Before, all I had was my job as a student. Now, I know that I need to make decisions on my own and be responsible for myself. If I don't, then who will?

Humans are prone to make mistakes, yet we also learn from those mistakes. The knowledge we acquire will help us survive. So, live and learn, for there is no end in learning. The whole of life, from the moment you are born to the moment you die is a never-ending cycle of exploration.

—Sittie (YES, Philippines), hosted by the Karlsen family (OR)

Making Great Strides

An exchange student has a more exciting life than anyone in the whole world. As the saying goes, "The world is like a book, and if you don't travel, then you're stuck on one page." Who wants to read just one page?

Living in a completely different culture when you're a high school kid is a challenge, but getting away from my family for a while gave me confidence in everything I do. One thing I found challenging was to learn what American kids are interested in and to talk to them about that. Additionally, American parents think that their children should take care of themselves. In Jordan, parents take care of their children until they go to college or move out.

I cherish the maturity I've gained and the knowledge that everyone is free to believe what they like. No one has the right to control anyone's beliefs.

—Abdullah (YES, Jordan), hosted by the Pilgeram family (UT)

Abdullah of Jordan (right) has been reflecting on his experiences.

Maider solidified her presence in ice.

Leaving Home…Going Home

I left my home in the Basque Country nine months ago with ambition, excitement, and a tiny gleam of fear in my eye. Now, a school year, thousands of adventures (mostly in freezing weather), a suitcase of memories, and a heart full of friendships later, I'm getting ready to leave my home again. This time I'll leave behind a whole new world that I couldn't even imagine before.

The passport I will show at the airport is the same, but I am not. I am just a little older but 10 times more experienced. I know there is no problem I can't overcome. I know that I won't hesitate to ask for help, and I will help those who struggle. I know that life is what you make it, and mistakes are just first-aid kits for the future.

I want to spend the time I have left squeezing Michigan and drinking the happiness it offers me, because it is part of me now. I belong to Bay City, to Central High School, to Bill and Cindy Holmes, the exchange student family, and most importantly, I belong wherever I go.

—Maider (Spain), hosted by the Holmes family (MI)

Back to Front Page

Host dad Aaron and Javier successfully transfer 10,000 honeybees.

What's the Buzz?

Javier had his first experience with beekeeping this spring in the USA. After receiving his first batch of honeybees, host dad Aaron invited Javier to participate in this fun and fascinating hobby. Javier had prepared for this day by watching videos about honeybees and attending a beekeeping class. Though excitedly nervous, the day came for Javier to be all "hands in" to put the bees in their new home. Suited up with his beekeeper hat and jacket, he helped to remove the queen bee from her box and place all 10,000 honeybees in their new hive in our family's backyard.

Javier was amazed at how docile and gentle 10,000 honeybees could be, and he developed a new admiration for these friendly bees who do so much to help pollinate our vegetation. In his last few months here, Javier will check in with the bees weekly to ensure all is well with them, and he looks forward to the day he receives his package in the mail with fresh honey that his bees produced!

—Michele Gonzalez (VA), host mom of Javier (Spain)

A Prom to Remember

"Do I want to go to prom?" I asked myself. Well, I am really not that social, but prom *is* the most exciting event of this entire school year. Yes, indeed, but I could not decide who to ask. Should it be Ivy? Choi? Kimberley? Unable to choose one girl over the others, I decided to invite all *three* girls to come.

I was so nervous, because this was the first time for me to invite a girl out. "Ivy, may I invite you to be my date?" My voice was really low. "Sure, I'd love to!" "Really?" I was so happy! When considering what we would do, I thought, "Why not ask Choi and Kimberley to see if they would like to go with me too?" After my success with my first invitation to Ivy, I had become more confident. Luckily for me, Choi and Kimberly both said "yes" too!

We found plenty of funny things to do like having a delicious dinner at Olive Garden and going to the dance at the World Market Center in Las Vegas. We took hundreds of crazy pictures in different places. What a great first date for a guy—with three girls!

—Junkai (China), hosted by the Isle family (NV)

Junkai is all smiles on his first date(s).

Mother, oh Mother

The dearest queen of my heart,
A unique being created by God,
And endowed with unsurpassable skills.
When I am hungry, you make sure that I am well fed.
When I am sick, you patiently watch over me till I am well again.
When I am sad, you comfort me and bring smiles to my face.
When I go astray, you calmly and lovingly bring me back to the right path.
You never cease to shower me with love, care, affection, and encouragement.
You are always there for me when I need you.
How can I repay you for everything that you have done for me and still do for me?
With diamonds or with gold?
Even with all the diamonds and gold in the world,
It wouldn't be enough to repay you for being a mother.
All I can say is thank you from the deep depth of my heart; thank you isn't enough, but it is all I have to offer.
You are mother who cares and whom I can emulate and see as a role model.
I love you, because you are the best!
God richly bless you!

—Deborah (YES, Ghana), hosted by the Basham family (WV)

Back to Front Page

Get Involved!

Artem sings his heart out at his high school's talent show, taking first prize.

America's Got Talent… From Russia!

I want to tell a story about my participation in the talent show at Clark Fork High School. I had been preparing for my performance for about a month. I love to be on stage, sing, and perform. For my act, I decided to sing Lady Gaga's "Applause" and "Venus." I played on keyboard in the beginning of my act with a video introduction. Then, I started to sing songs, using props such as chairs, tables, paint, and different decorations. Everybody liked it. At the end of my performance, students from the audience came on the stage and danced. I was so happy. I had technical problems with my microphone and music, but I was singing, because this is my talent—perform in spite of everything. At the end of the talent show, the judges told the results: I received first place out of 11, and I won $75!

—Artem (FLEX, Russia), hosted by the Stamper family (ID)

Not Better or Worse–Just Different

I really like the quote "Exchange isn't a year in your life; it's a life in a year." My year in America has been a blast. Recently, I participated in a competition as a member of my high school FCCLA club (Future Community Career Leaders of America). I made a project called "Differences in Cultures." I did research about differences between American and Kyrgyz cultures and tried to show advantages and disadvantages of each side, keeping in my mind the phrase, "It's not better; it isn't worse; it's just different." It was really useful for me and for others as well. My club adviser approved my project, and I got to show it on the regional level, where I got second place and had a chance to go to States. There, full of joy, I took second place.

—Tatiana (Kyrgyzstan), hosted by the Millward family (UT)

Tatiana earns kudos from the FCCLA.

Charlotte (Germany) and host sister Jewel (left) used teamwork to bring their team accolades.

Kicking Sisters

Charlotte and her host sister Jewel have been playing soccer on the same league team since February. Besides winning third place in the championships, which gave Charlotte her first sports trophy and framed team pictures, Charlotte has gained athletic skills and enjoyed being part of a supportive and encouraging soccer team. Above all, she found playing soccer with her host sister to be an easy and fun way to bond with her host family. Two practices and a Saturday game every week have given the Steffens and Charlotte many opportunities to get to know each other outside of the house. What a great way to end the year!

—Margaret Hoppe, PAX community coordinator (NV)

Back to Front Page

Color Fun Run for a Cause

Our decision to travel to Tucson, AZ and participate in a 5K cancer fundraiser run was made in December, when my sister in Tucson gave my PAX daughter Rocio a Christmas gift of the race entrance fees. My daughter Megan, Rocio, and I ran together as "The Color Exchange" team.

Along the route, spectators threw colored powder on us, and after we crossed the finish line, we each received a bag of the colored powder for the "Finishers' Celebration." When the announcer called "Ready?" the finishers threw their bags of powder into the air. What mayhem! As the powder settled all over us, we were covered with color that melted as it mixed with our sweat. We looked shocking, but hilarious! We could not stop laughing and grinned from ear to ear all day. It was a family fun run we won't soon forget!

—Erin McCarthy (NV), host mom of Rocio (Spain)

Host mom Erin, host sister Megan, and Rocio of Spain are a colorful trio!

Rising to the Top

When Ghalia arrived, school had already been in session for almost a month. Everyone, including Ghalia, was concerned that she was going to have quite a bit of catching up to her American classmates at Oak Mountain High School, named by *The Washington Post* as Alabama's fourth most challenging school.

With some convincing, she was allowed to take Algebra 2 with Trigonometry, Honors Chemistry, U.S. History, French 2, Physics, and one elective: Theater. These would allow her to continue on to the next grade back in Jordan.

In addition to this heavy workload, Ghalia took part in a very active cluster of State Department scholarship students. Just a week after her arrival, she and other students in her cluster prepared and held speeches for the Alabama Chapter of the United Nations Association. Ghalia eagerly accepted every challenge this year, and her efforts paid off. Recently, she was inducted into the National Honor Society, which honors students who have demonstrated excellence in scholarship, leadership, service, and character. We are excited to see what the future holds for Ghalia—with all of her hard work and dedication, she is sure to do great things!

—Rebecca Kinney (AL), PAX community coordinator

Ghalia's advisor proudly poses with the new NHS inductee.

Don't be Mean; Go Green!

PAX Goes GREEN winner Nabila engaged a classroom of young Americans. Using recycled materials, Nabila led the class in creating Earth Day awareness masterpieces. "It starts with baby steps to make giant changes," says Nabila. Indeed, there are few things more commendable than educating the next generation.

—Nabila (YES, Indonesia), hosted by the Reynolds family (WI)

Nabila poses with the Wisconsin class who will one day save the planet.

Back to Front Page

The Adjustment Cycle

When Being Away Feels Like Home

How many of you can say that you found that place, which feels like home, or even more—became your real home? It happened to me. From the beginning, I was enjoying my stay here, but closer to Easter I started to recall all those memories from past years: my family, friends, life back home, etc. I realized how much I missed it all. To eliminate any bad feelings, my host mom made the best present I could have imagined. She baked a Ukrainian special Easter bread called "paska." It was exactly like what I used to eat back home! In turn, I decided to make Ukrainian cabbage rolls which my whole family loved.

This year, Orthodox and Catholic churches were celebrating Easter on the same day, so Pastor Don decided to bless my Ukrainian basket in the Orthodox tradition. I can't describe how grateful I am for my amazing host family and good-hearted community. I appreciate everything they have done for me, and I will never forget that! They taught me how to love, respect, and support; they touched my heart—where they will always remain!

—Yulia (FLEX, Ukraine), hosted by the Hoople family (WI)

Yulia (with basket) enjoyed a very special Easter morning with host siblings (right to left) Amanda, Jacob, and Leanna.

Home Sweet Home

Students, you are wrapping up a once-in-a-lifetime experience. While you may be sad that this year is coming to an end, you are probably feeling excitement at the prospect of returning home and reuniting with family, friends, and things that you've missed.

At first you will likely feel delighted to be home again. This "high" can last for weeks. Once you've settled in, however, and the excitement of your return has died down, you may begin to feel "blue" or vaguely depressed. Don't worry; this is normal.

It may be difficult to pick up where you left off with your circle of friends. You've changed and grown, and to a lesser extent, so have they. It will take time to adjust to these changes and to determine just where the "new you" fits in.

Re-entry is cross cultural adjustment in reverse. Like your adjustment to the U.S., it can be a bit bumpy. You may wish to contact fellow returnees for support. But most of all, be patient and give yourself time to adjust. Soon enough you will integrate your new self into your old home environment and will regain your stride and self-confidence.

Just remember: now you have two homes, and the world will always be a bigger place for you, thanks to your exchange year with PAX!

The following is an excerpt from a letter written by a Swedish student at the end of a year spent in Arkansas. "And then you look at yourself in the mirror. While you are looking at yourself, you realize how much you have changed. You are mature, and you have proven it by managing for a year as an exchange student. You are more patient, more open minded, and you are easier to get along with, because you have learned to respect other people. You have learned not to judge anything before you see it and learned what it means to be yourself."

Before heading "home sweet home," Japheth from Ghana writes thank you letters to all those who helped him throughout his year in Virginia.

Take advantage of these last days as an ambassador of your country and of PAX!

—The PAX support and supervision team

Back to Front Page

As Seen in Social Media

Click on any image to view full post or watch video

Get Involved in International Exchange!

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**. We'll put you in touch with the regional director for your area and see if there isn't a way to either begin or deepen your relationship with PAX and international educational and cultural exchange.

PAX Press is published monthly by
PAX – Program of Academic Exchange
14 Willett Avenue, Port Chester, NY 10573
800.555.6211
www.pax.org

President
Bradley Smith

Chief Operating Officer
Michelle Lampher

Marketing Director
Nicholas Burtscher

Editor
Nancy Griffin-Bonnaire

Art Director
Pajes Sterman

Back to Front Page