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PAXPRESS

The Newspaper for Exchange Students, Host Families, and Schools

Catalina shows off her latest exchange-inspired work.

Picturing Exchange

Expressing herself through her art and a simple quote as she reflects on her time in the U.S. thus far, Catalina says, "When you can't spot the difference between dream and reality, you picture it in one frame."

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

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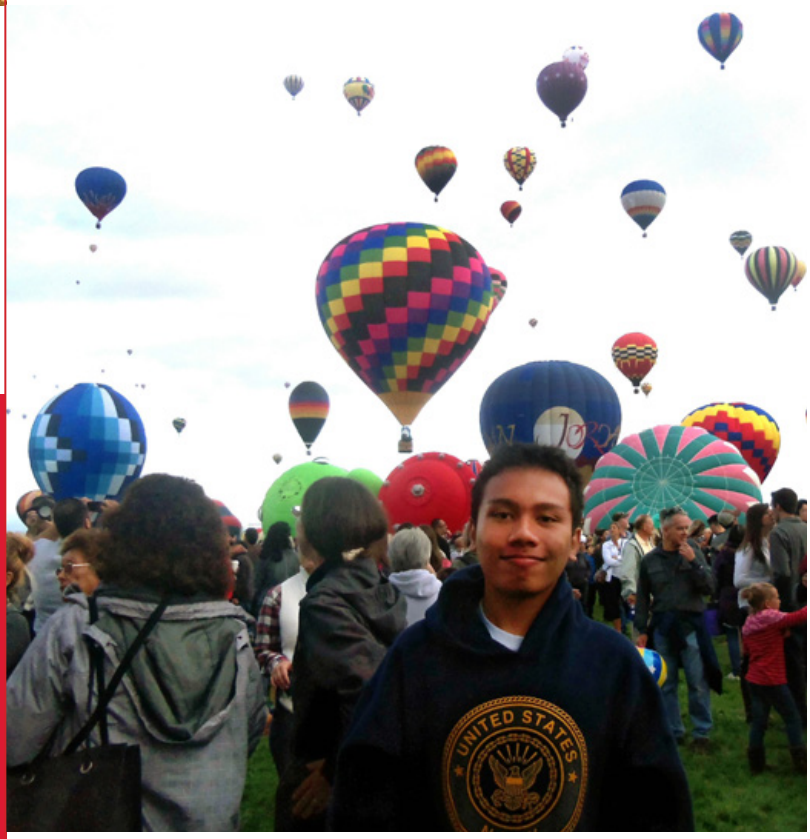
Where Dreams Take Flight

Annually, during the month of October, the City of Albuquerque hosts the largest hot air balloon event in the world, the Albuquerque International Balloon Fiesta. Balloonists from all parts of the U.S. and different countries come to fill Albuquerque's sky with their colorful and stunning balloons. Of course it wouldn't be as fun without the spectators who come from all over the world just to witness one of the most wonderful sights they could ever see in their lifetime.

It took me time to realize that I was part of the massive crowd. Every time I entered Balloon Fiesta Park, I felt a sudden rush of overflowing delight. Observing how the balloons fly was like watching how my dreams are starting to come true; they were reaching to the top, to the zenith. I am so grateful of how my life has changed so far. Truly, New Mexico is the Land of Enchantment.

—Wenzel (YES, Philippines), hosted by the Metcalf family (NM)



Wenzel is "lifted up" by the hot air balloon fiesta!

Contest Winners

Contest 1 Winner: Janni from Denmark!

It's been nearly two years since a non-FLEX or YES scholarship student has won a PAX student contest. Depicting heartfelt goodbyes in Europe, warm welcomes in the States, obligatory Maine lobsters, autumn-appropriate apple picking and corn mazes in addition to a bit of cheerleading, you'll see why PAX staff selected Janni's video as the overall winner for our "Settlin' In" theme!

—Janni (Denmark), hosted by the Roach family (ME)

"It all started as a silly childhood dream, and look at me now," says Janni on a perfect autumn-in-New-England afternoon.

Most Facebook "Likes," "Comments," and "Shares"

With her collage and account of her time in the U.S. so far, Liselotte garnered the most combined likes, comments, and shares of any entry on our Facebook page. Explaining the photo narrative (at right) from the "welcome" sign and breakfast photos clockwise, the Belgian declares, "I have the sweetest host family ever! They made a sign when they picked me up and took me out for a real American breakfast." In the photo below that, she explains, "Before classes started we had a 'link day' at school. My group had camping as a theme, so we walked around with two giant marshmallows on a stick for the whole day!" To the left of that image, Liselotte describes her coordinator-organized orientation in a nearby park (hot dogs included).

Looking at the young woman in front of her school, Liselotte offers, "My school says they are the 'world's greatest high school,' and I can say that they do their best to make you feel at home." In the photo next to that with her backpack, the Belgian is ready for her morning walk to school: "The sky here is so pretty every morning." She also shares a photo of her gym class working out and her cross country team, which gets together for a "pasta feed" before meets.

Liselotte's post fetched well over 300 interactions by the contest deadline.

In closing, Liselotte exclaims, "Thank you so much for all the chances I get!" No, thank you, Liselotte—keep up the great work!

Liselotte (Belgium), hosted by the Hall family (WA)

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Alumni News

An exchange across the pond in Germany—the Knox family is welcomed by their previous student's family.

The Ebb and Flow of Exchange

Three years ago, when Aimee and Scott Knox of Las Vegas decided to host their first PAX student, who would have thought they would find themselves in Germany for two weeks? Five PAX students later, the Knox family visited Johanna (2014/15 alum) in her native Germany and had the time of their lives getting to know a country which they never dreamed of seeing. Visits to synagogues, Holocaust memorials, castles, museums, and towns, as well as simple walks in the woods and time with Johanna and her family, provided memories to last a lifetime. Aimee and Scott also got to meet the parents of their current student, Leah!

Tolerance, understanding, and bonds of friendship become stronger, and long-standing fears recede as the ebb and flow of this exchange continues. Johanna already has her ticket to come back to Las Vegas next summer. How lucky am I to be witnessing this wonderful success story?

—Margaret Hoppe, community coordinator (NV)

Continuing to Lend a Hand!

Leaving my second home in Neenah, WI, was not pleasant since I am no longer able to contribute to that community. However, leaving Wisconsin doesn't stop me from helping those in need.

When I got back home, Indonesian YES alumni decided to hold an event called YES MENDUKUNG. After two months of preparation, the event was successfully held in my city, Surabaya, on October 17. The events were English learning, sharing with alumni, and environment education. The participants were 60 seventh graders, and we had so much fun. We played games and they learned how to introduce themselves, give directions, and identify body parts in English.

I would like to thank the American people, especially my host family. My exchange year taught me about making a change, and I am hoping this event will make a change in my home community

—Bayu (YES, Indonesia), hosted in 2014/15 by the Oestreich family (WI)

Bayu teaches an eager group of volunteers how to introduce themselves in English.

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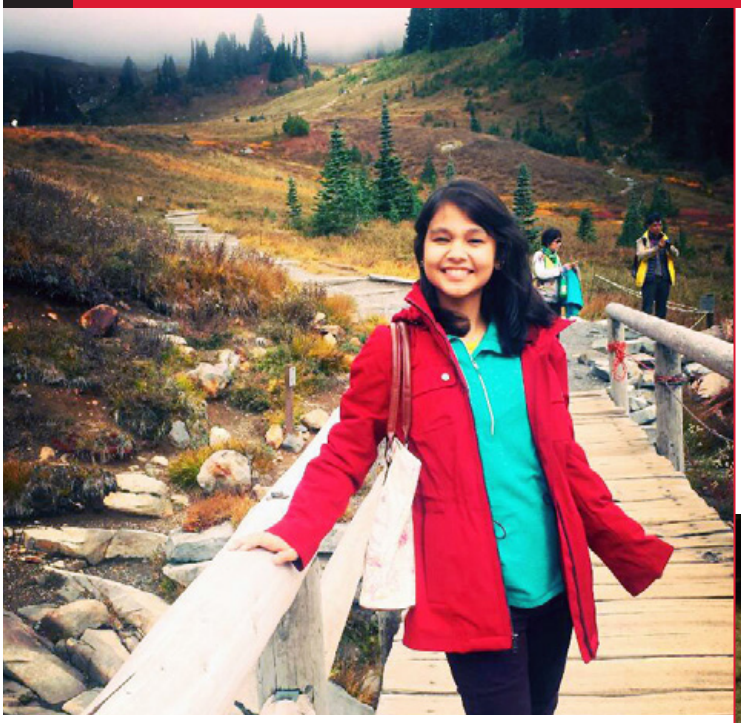

Alishba pauses from her epic hike to Mt. Rainier.

The Mountains are Calling…

The allure of nature has never failed to astonish me. Climbing steep mountains, going through the woods, listening to the water splash and birds sing had always been my dream. On September 20, 2015, this dream turned into reality when I went on my first hike to Mt. Rainier. Indeed, I felt a sense of triumph, reaching the place where I never thought I could, along with fatigue and the stress of knowing that I had to get back over the same rough trail to get home. My legs were severely sore, but today when I look back on it as an epic expedition, a wide grin appears on my face, and I believe it will continue to do so for the rest of my life.

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

A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words

Along with some big artists, I participated in a chalk drawing competition in my city called Art Fest. We had to draw any type of drawing with chalk in a big concrete square.

I drew pictures including the Taj Mahal, the Indian warrior king Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj, and India's national animal, the tiger. Many people voted for my drawing, and I won theatre tickets. People learned more about India, and I was glad to explain my drawings to them. I was so proud that I got the chance to show my country to my host community, and they learned more about it.

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

The wonders of India—in chalk!

Shukri (right) with American friends Fatima (far left) and Nada

Making Friends

Just like almost every exchange student, the moment I arrived in my American high school, I thought it would take me the whole year to make friends. Despite its hugeness, everyone knew one another already. I joined after-school activities and an internship program where I worked with kids as a volunteer, so I could make American friends.

I went with my new friends to an American restaurant, where I had my first burger. They are pleased to hear all about my country and what life is like there! Making and hanging out with friends is the best thing to do if you don't want to feel homesick. Life is so enjoyable when you have people to accompany you—no matter if they are your relatives or someone else.

—Shukri (Somaliland), hosted by the McLaughlin family (MA)

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(Left to right) Frankie, Gloria (Spain), Jessica Ham, Ana (Spain), Jon (Spain), Kelly Quinn, and the Frentzels (Bella, JoLayne, and Mike) take a Putt-Putt picture "pause-pause."

An Authentic American Discovery

Columbus Day was observed on October 12 this year. Christopher Columbus is reported to have sailed from Spain to "discover America." Since students were out of school this day, it was only fitting to have my PAX students, all from Spain, "discover something new in America." Yes, they played Putt-Putt! They had never played this miniature golf game! Host families joined in, and we had a blast on this day of discovery. Who knows what other things they will "discover" during this year in America!

—Frankie Green, community coordinator (GA)

Expectations vs. Reality

Exchange year comes with a lot of challenges, and one of those challenges is the English language and its homonyms. A funny incident happened to me about the word "shower." I was invited to a bridal shower. I thought the bridal shower involved the bride taking a shower, and ironically that day it was raining, so I thought the bride would have to take a shower in the rain!

But to my surprise, it turned out that a bridal shower is a "shower" of gifts to the bride to prepare her for the wedding!

—Saman (YES, Pakistan), hosted by the Rice family (PA)

Saman finds herself in a "shower" of sunflowers!

Exchange Opens Doors Everywhere

People often wonder why we host exchange students. Becoming a host family through PAX has opened doors we never dreamed possible. Our daughter Lila was the catalyst. She was in her second year of studying German, and with her brother leaving for college, Lila suggested we host a girl from Germany. Dana has become our second daughter and visits us at least once a year.

Next we hosted Yannic from Bonn; he was only here one semester but became great friends with Lila, who continued to take German and visited both Dana and Yannic twice. On her second visit, she toured Bonn University, and her dream was born.

Fast forward to today: Lila is living with Yannic's family and just enrolled as a student at Bonn University. Tuition in Germany is free, even for international students. Not only will Lila attend university at no charge, she has a family to live with—all because we opened our door and our hearts to an exchange student. So when someone asks why we open our home to a teenager from another country, I tell them you never know what doors you might open.

—Allison Johnson, former host mom (MI)

Dana and Lila in Simbach am Inn, Germany

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Get Involved!

Just Try

"Just try" has been Valeriya's motto since arriving in September. She instantly became a valued and involved member of our family and her senior class at Tecumseh High School.

October has been packed with local fall festivals and loads of school spirit. Whether riding a camel or carnival ride, her host sisters are always by her side. Valeriya also jumped right into homecoming activities and helped support her senior class in a spirit week victory. She donned an orange and black jersey to help the senior powder-puff team win the championship game after two weeks of practice, and she spent hours working on the senior class float for the homecoming parade alongside host dad, Sheridan. Valeriya found the pep rally and homecoming parade, in which she represented the exchange students, very exciting, as well as the football game and dance. We love seeing her smile from ear to ear as she enjoys each experience.

—Kari Mattson (MI), host mom of Valeriya (FLEX, Ukraine)

Valeriya gets into the spirit of homecoming!

A Magical Homecoming

This being my first ever majestic dance made me excited as I prepared for it shoulder to shoulder with my other senior classmates. I was overjoyed to be asked to homecoming, and my anticipation grew as the day came closer.

On the memorable day itself, I dressed myself as a handsome gentleman. We took some breathtaking pictures with my peers and ate a delicious meal at a lovely Mexican restaurant. My eyes lit up as I entered the tastefully-decorated school. My heart skipped a beat when the first dance started, and from then on until midnight, I danced and enjoyed every song played. The compliment of the day from my date was "You are an exquisite dancer." I recommend every student go and dance at their homecoming, because you only live once!

—Hamza (YES, Pakistan), hosted by the Charles family (WI)

Hamza heads to homecoming with his date Chelsea.

For the Good of the Community

Before coming as an exchange student, I had no idea what the lives of typical Americans were like. Everything was different from my expectations: families, people, and school.

I am involved in many activities, but the most important for me is volunteering. I am so surprised that people here like to share their free time for other people, absolutely voluntarily. I go to church on Sundays and help with little kids, teaching them to sing, draw, and be good people. At school I volunteer in the Key Club. We worked on a blood drive, gathering students who are ready to donate their blood, so we are able to help ill people. I am now ready to share my experiences with my friends, family, and other people back in Kyrgyzstan, to tell them that to volunteer is good for your community, if we care about our future life.

I have more and more to tell about my impressions and days that I spend here. So many things happen to me every day. I confidently can say that to be an exchange student is not a year in my life; it is a life in a year.

Seide helps out with Key Club activities.

—Seide (FLEX, Kyrgyzstan), hosted by the Baldwin family (WA)

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The harvest is good for Gorka, Carla, and Mina!

A Midwest Education

A great day was had by Mina (Norway) and Gorka and Carla (Spain) learning about the bread basket of America. I enjoyed showing the students how Midwest farmers harvest soybeans, and I took them to the elevator to see how they send the crop down the Mississippi River. They also enjoyed visiting the apple orchard and having cows eat apples right out of their hands. Everyone experienced making their own apple cider to take home to their host families. It was a great day to learn about how farmers help feed the world and have some fun along with it.

—Julie Renfro, community coordinator (IA)

This little tiger is smiling thanks to Amy's great face painting!

Nothing but Happy Roars

Along with other exchange students, Amelie (Amy) from Germany helped out at a local children's day festival. Although she had never tried face painting before, she was willing to give it a try and discovered a natural talent.

Great job, Amy!

—Deb Evans,
community coordinator (CT)

"Mummy's" the Word!

There was an International Day Festival in Lilburn, GA, which I went to with other exchange students from all over the world. For the PAX booth, each country had its own table with exchange students. We taught children how to make a craft that represented a part of our country and culture. As I am an Egyptian exchange student, I taught the children how to make mummies and told them fun facts about Egypt. The children were so amazed and excited by the mummies. I was amazed by the children, too.

I was surprised at the diversity of foreign people living in my city and how they are participating in their community and trying to show everyone their own culture. I also met a lot of Arab people, and even people from my own country.

—Jessy (YES, Egypt), hosted by the Mussatt family (GA)

Jessy guides a young girl in the mummy-making process.

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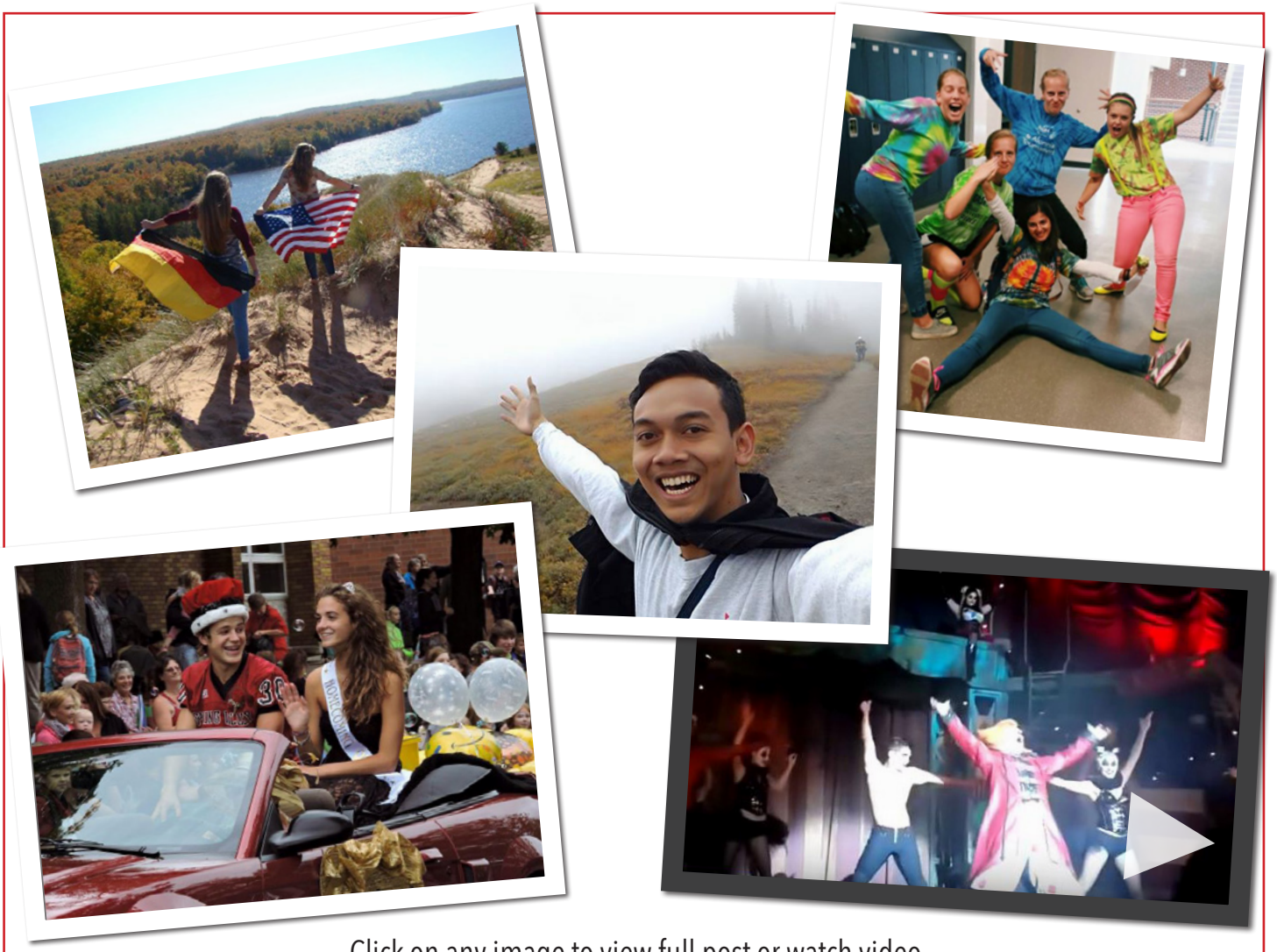
As Seen in Social Media



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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